

19

**Testimony in Support of
SB 322: An Act Concerning the Qualifications of
Department of Children & Families Employees**

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February 22, 2011

Senator Musto, Representative Urban, and distinguished Members of the Select Committee on Children:

My name is Ellen Pfarr and I am a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and a member of the Board of the National Association of Social Workers, Connecticut Chapter. I have come to speak in support of SB 322, with the changes which have been recommended by NASW.

While I am currently employed as a therapist in a small private practice based in Essex, I spent the previous 22 years of my career working for DCF funded programs and five additional years employed as a DCF Social Worker. Therefore, I feel well qualified to comment on the need for stronger academic requirements for those who are to be employed as Social Workers and Social Work Supervisors by the Department of Children and Families.

DCF Social Workers are on the front line when it comes to assessing and ensuring the safety of Connecticut's children, and preventing further harm to the children. From the time a reported case is investigated, it is up to the Social Worker assigned to the case to engage with the child to provide reassurance while gathering necessary information about the incident(s) from the child's perspective. At the same time, the worker has the task of interviewing the reporters of abuse or neglect, and any witnesses to the alleged incident(s). Perhaps just as important as reassuring the child, the worker, in most cases, must seek the cooperation of the family, as the child will likely remain in the care of the parents, or will be returned once the investigation is resolved. The worker must then present the information to her or his supervisor, and participate in a thorough assessment, which includes making life-altering decisions for the future of the child and the family, including deciding if the child may remain at home or requires out of home care.

Once a case is determined to need further oversight, whether the child remains in the home or is placed, the DCF Social Worker must continue to provide ongoing professional services to the child and to the family, continuing to assess the family's readiness to provide for the child's safety and the effects the trauma has had on the child. In most cases, this would be accomplished by the worker maintaining a non-judgmental attitude toward the family, and providing them with any services which might strengthen and

support the family going forward, and also working with the family to assist them in the process. This, then, also involves having the worker be knowledgeable about community services so that referrals and case coordination can be maintained. Throughout this process, it is the job of the Social Work Supervisor to oversee the process of the case, and to ensure that the case is being managed effectively.

The steps that I have described in managing the case of a family referred to DCF, from the referral to the Hotline, to the closure of a case, all require a set of skills and judgment that those who have completed a Masters Degree in Social Work bring to the table. They are thoroughly trained in the areas of assessment, engagement, and resource and case management. They have learned to “meet the client where she or he is,” so that they are able to maintain a non-judgmental attitude while working with the family to help provide an outcome that will cause the least harm to the child and his or her family.

In my many years working within and closely with DCF, I have repeatedly been struck by the quality of work brought to the job by DCF Social Workers who have held a Masters Degree in Social Work. I have seen them demonstrate empathy for the children and the families they serve, thorough assessments, comprehensive case management and knowledge of community resources, and most of all, professionalism.

I urge the Committee’s consideration for this bill, with the changes which have been recommended by NASW. I feel it makes sense to have the very challenging positions of DCF Social Worker and DCF Social Worker Supervisors filled by individuals who bring to the job the background, skill, and professionalism the job, and more importantly, our children, deserve.