

Testimony of Patricia Ward
House Professional Licensure Committee
August 5, 2008

Good morning members of the House Professional Licensure Committee and staff. My name is Patti Ward, and I was born on June 24th 1964 in York County Pennsylvania. I lived on a farm in Dillsburg with my family. I remember being a happy child. At age five, I was removed from the farm and placed in a home in Harrisburg with a woman everyone referred to as my 'biological mother'. No one ever really explained this to me at the time. My parents would visit me often until my 'biological mother' said they were interfering with my transition and ordered them to stay away. Many things occurred behind those closed doors. Finally, at age fifteen I was removed from the home after I revealed 'daddy's little secret'. I was placed in a group home in Mechanicsburg.

Throughout my forty-three years, I have traveled my share of wrong roads and encountered many obstacles along the way. I was not given the stable foundation that children so desperately need to enter adulthood well grounded. In order to survive and raise my child, I have received welfare, housing assistance, unemployment, food stamps, child care assistance and I have been treated by people who had no clue how to speak or interact with someone in crisis. They made me feel low and unimportant-like everything was my fault because I was a bad person. At times, I would not seek services that my family needed for fear of being judged.

Hungry to learn, I started college in 1995, and began working as a case manager for homeless women. I spoke to them in 'street' as I was raised. When I started classes for my bachelor's degree in social work, I learned about my own judgmental attitude and how I portrayed that to my clients and even worse, how much worse it made them feel

(just like it made me feel). Through my education, I learned how to speak to people in crisis, validate their feelings whether I agreed with them or not. My social work education has taught me how to identify someone in crisis and address it or bring it the attention of someone who can help. I learned how I should have been treated by service providers through my social work classes, and how I wanted to be sure I treated others.

Today, I focus not on what I've been through, frequent change and traumatic experiences, but on what I have learned from those experiences. I have learned to research, prepare, observe, grow and persevere. My life has made me stronger. I use my voice to stand up for what is right, to advocate for change as well as encourage others to do the same. I strive to understand, to make things better and to empower others to stand up for themselves. I no longer hide out of fear but rise to the challenge. I am proud of my accomplishments.

I am a single mother raising a young child even with the challenge; I have completed my BSW and am currently enrolled in the masters of social work program at Widener University. I have had to work to support myself from the time I was 18 years old. From my perspective, having a bachelor level license would help people in two very tangible ways:

- 1) Raise the quality of front-line services to ensure that vulnerable clients are empowered and assisted rather than judged or belittled. If we want social services to make a real difference, they must be delivered by professionals.
- 2) I have struggled to support my family in spite of my BSW degree. Creating a bachelor level license would make it clear that direct service front-line work can

in fact be a profession for someone, and should be recognized as a profession if we want committed individuals fulfilling those roles.

Thank you for taking the time to listen to my story. I understand the competing interest you must evaluate when making decisions. I hope that my story will stay with you as debate why it is critical that we professionalize the workforce of our social service systems.