

Testimony on House Bill 2352

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Chairman Sturla, Chairman Adolph, members of the House Professional Licensure committee, and key staff, I want to thank you all for taking the time to talk about the important issue of human services licensure. There are two key issues that I want to address with each of you today. Those points are:

- 1) The licensing of the human services workforce is critical to public protection.
- 2) Competency for this workforce should be defined by the related-nature of academic training.

If you look across our society, there are many fields that touch upon people's lives at critical times of need. Most of those professions are regulated through licensure allowing for appropriate accountability while ensuring public protection. As members of this committee know, we ensure competency and provide accountability for nail technicians, hairdressers, massage therapist, and even car salesman. Yet, there is a critical workforce for which we do not ensure basic competence or provide for public accountability. That workforce is those providing direct practice human services. Child welfare, adult protective services, residential treatment workers, rape crisis workers, these workers have no basic competency requirements and there is no avenue for public accountability.

Under **TAB 2** you will see evidence as to how the public has been harmed because we do not have licensure for the direct practice workforce. While it is hard to look at, I have included the autopsy photo from Danieal Kelly. She was the fourteen year old special needs child, who while under the care of DHS, died as a result of her mother's horrific neglect. This case perfectly highlights the need for human services licensure. The point person for Danieal at Philadelphia DHS was an individual with an art history degree. This caseworker, time and time again, neglected public concerns and acted in a way that permitted the murder of this child. He was not a licensed professional, and there was no where other than DHS for the public to take their concerns about his

unprofessional behavior. Simply put, if a massage therapist functions below a basic competency level, there is a board where those concerns can be investigated. But those individuals who are dealing with our most vulnerable citizens are not required to meet basic professional competency and there is no external accountability body to investigate allegations of misconduct.

Licensure is about public protection, to that end, looking at the body of Daniel Kelly, I cannot think of a group that requires more public protection than the clients receiving services from the workforces of child welfare, adult protection services, rape crisis, home-based prevention services, residential treatment and other front-line services.

Hopefully, you all will agree with me that as we move to ensure appropriate competency and create public accountability, creating a license for this workforce is a critical step we must take next session. It has been suggested that perhaps a certificate is more appropriate than licensure. Under **TAB 3** you will find information about the human services certificate program that is required for public child welfare workers after 18 months of employment. You will also find information about the very limited state civil service requirement to become a child welfare caseworker. Daniel Kelly's worker would have been required to hold such a certificate. The level of professionalism within public child welfare all across the commonwealth shows that the certificate approach is simplistic. A certificate program is a way to require people to obtain training, but the most critical factor is still missing. That piece is the policing of professionals in the field. Efforts to prevent licensure do not come from a position of what is in the best interest of Daniel Kelly; they come from a position of not seeing direct practice human services workers as professionals. If we hope to create a professional workforce serving our most vulnerable clients, we need to hold these workers accountable to meeting professional standards. The professional standard is licensure.

Hoping you all believe licensure is critical, the question remains which individuals are best situated to provide front-line human services. In all fairness, it depends on the personal commitment and sense of integrity for each individual. There is no magic answer for human services or any other field. However, conventional wisdom states that those most directly prepared for a job will perform that job the best. When it comes to the delivery of front-line human services, a bachelor's degree in social work is the program that is most specifically tailored to effectively train individuals to perform the work at hand. Under **TAB 4** you will find a summary of the required courses for a bachelor's degree in social work versus those for a psychology degree. The course descriptions attached to the summary sheet clearly outlines how the narrow focus of the social work program is geared toward the delivery of front-line human services. A bachelor's degree in social work (BSW) is ALL about the delivery of front line human services. A bachelor's degree in a related social science is not structured to prepare folks solely for the delivery of front line services.

There are a few important points that I would like to draw your attention. The most important factor is that a BSW degreed individual is considered a professional within the social work community (**TAB 5**) compared to those with other bachelor's degrees which are viewed as paraprofessional by their professional associations as seen in the FAQ document included from the American Counseling Association (**TAB 5**). An individual with a psychology degree cannot be a

full member of any professional association while BSWs are full members of NASW. How degrees are viewed by their own professions relates directly to the nature and purpose of those degrees. The BSW degree was designed for the delivery of front-line social work services. It plays a critical role within the social work professional ladder.

To offer a BSW degree, the program (not the university) must be accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE). Accreditation by CSWE is a complicated and lengthy process designed to ensure consistency and competency among BSW graduates. There is no accreditation process for other social science majors.

Professions follow a code of ethics. BSW students are taught and expected to adhere to the social work professions code of ethics. As they complete their 400 to 500 hours of supervised field experience working directly with clients in front line human services, BSWs are taught how to connect the theoretical with real life practice in a way that develops them into professionals. Understanding the theories taught within the disciplines of psychology, sociology, and human development combined with practical experience and focused course work, BSW students learn what it means to work effectively with people.

Under **TAB 6** you will find a list of the other states that offer bachelor level licensure, and you will see that several states have structured their license in the way that was proposed in HB 2352. HB 2352 states that a BSW graduate would be eligible for licensure upon completing his/her degree and passing a nationally administered exam. HB 2352 proposes that other degrees be permitted to be licensed only after an individual completes the degree, passes the exam and gains additional supervised experience. There is wide-spread support for the licensing of bachelor level social workers, and you will find several letters of support from some of the 29 accredited schools of social work who offer BSW degrees in the Commonwealth under **TAB 7**.

I hope that I have adequately expressed both the importance of bachelor level human services licensure as well as the reasons why BSW should have advanced standing in earning this license.

Thank you.