

Testimony of Patricia Ward, BSW; MSW Student, Widener University

House Professional Licensure Committee - House Bill 2352

October 24, 2008

Good morning members of the House Professional Licensure Committee and staff. My name is Patti Ward. I am a single mother and part-time graduate student attending Widener University where I will graduate with my Masters degree in Social Work in 2009. Since I realize that several of you attended the previous committee meeting in Pittsburgh you may remember that at age 15 I was removed from my home after I revealed 'daddy's little secret'. I was placed in group and foster homes until I reached the age of 18 when I was released into the real world. Without the stable foundation most children are provided with while preparing to enter into adulthood well grounded with, I was lost. I spent many years making bad decisions, burning bridges; going nowhere with my life; until the day my life caught up with me.

Years of attending group and individual therapy sessions opened my eyes to the wonders of the real world and of my place in it. I had no control over my upbringing but I most certainly have control over my life now. It was at this time that I decided where I wanted to go with my life. Through education I reclaimed my life and now I wanted to help other survivors of incest reclaim theirs. At age 31, in addition to working full-time I began to attend classes at Harrisburg Area Community College. Four years later I was not only working full-time and attending college part-time, I became a single mother. In order to survive, remain employed, complete college and raise my daughter I had to seek outside services; welfare, food stamps, WIC, Section 8 Housing, unemployment, child care assistance and medical access among others.

I cannot effectively articulate how destructive the influence of those who were to help me was at times. This is why I firmly believe that if we want direct service front-line work to make a real difference in the lives of our clients; those services MUST be delivered by trained, educated professionals who are recognized as such.

My life experiences have made me stronger. I use my voice to stand up for what is right, to advocate for change as well as encourage my clients 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. The values learned and the code of ethics I as a social worker follow have provided me with the skills I needed to become the capable social worker I am today. For the most part, the majority of direct service workers have a bachelor's level education.

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