

Testimony re: House Bill 2352--Licensure for social service workers—October 24, 2008

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1. Thank you for this opportunity to address you and speak in support of House Bill 2352.

As the last person to testify, I have a particularly difficult job, one is to maintain interest and attention and the other is not to repeat what has already been said. I will do my best.

2. While it is never easy to be a social worker or to be a social work educator, these are particularly difficult times. I say that not because of the worsening global economic crisis although that will surely affect the work of our profession, but rather because the demands for accountability and the concomitant responsibility I have as an educator to prepare practitioners for competent practice have never felt more overwhelming and may never have been more important. I have been a social worker for about 40 years and an educator for more than 25. Child Welfare is the area of practice to which I am committed and in which I have been involved for my entire career. It is that field of practice but also others that serve the most vulnerable citizens of Pennsylvania that I would like us to think about as we consider this legislation. In that regard, I would like to invoke a child's name "Danieal Kelly." The torturous life and death of Danieal are among the reasons we are here today. I hope that her name and the circumstances of her life and death are imprinted on our minds and in our hearts.

they must perform in the real world of social work practice. Some pass the tests; others do not. Some self-select or opt out of the major and the profession; others continue and succeed and still others do not make the grade. With universities and our profession raising the standards for admission and retention, the rigor of the social work major has increased. This is necessary because of the demands of the work. All this is to support the raising of qualifications, by requiring that certain degrees be required for providing social services.

4. Two other significant areas of learning must be identified. One is ethics and the other is diversity. In all professions, standards of conduct are important. Particularly in social work where we are serving vulnerable people and we may be the only ones in their lives, high ethical standards are important. Ethical conduct is part of academic performance in social work programs. In fact at Temple University, the Social Work Code of Ethics is part of the Student Code of Conduct. Students in social work can be sanctioned by the university for violations of the code. This reenforces the importance of key ethical principles, respect for people, fair treatment and non discrimination, confidentiality, etc. Given the ethical violations we have seen in our own field but also in others, and Danieal's case is another example, we must ensure that our clients not only are treated with knowledge and skills but they are treated ethically. It is part of the trust the public places in us and the legislation we are discussing today, is a move in the direction of assuring the public that we care about how they are treated.
5. Finally, the subject of diversity—Our graduates are tested on their ability to serve people from all walks of life, with different abilities, cultures, and lifestyles. They are asked to examine their own backgrounds and to reflect upon and address their own biases and

ways of viewing the world. As the world becomes more diverse and the families whom we serve are more troubled, the ability to work with immigrant and refugee families, the elderly and disabled and the abused child or adult require that one is trained to address diversity in all of its manifestations. Furthermore, awareness of and ability to deal with one's biases should not be taken for granted.

6. While some might think that a major reason I would speak in support of HB 2352 is because of the potential increase in social work students. For me, undergraduate programs in social work have always been small. Contrary to other undergraduate majors, they are not the "bread and butter" of a university because they are expensive programs to operate. This is largely because of the stringent accreditation standards that require not only specific content and processes, but also establish faculty-student ratios.
7. Other professions, such as nursing, already have levels of professional licensure. The differentiation of the levels of proficiency the public can expect from different levels of practitioner should be accorded to social services. Bachelor's level practitioners should not be considered as proficient as Master's level practitioners, but they can work in concert with each other to expand the delivery of services and to offer them more efficiently and effectively.
8. I speak in support of this legislation because it is time in Pennsylvania that we raise the standards for those who serve Danieal Kelly and that we recognize the specialized knowledge, values and skills necessary to serve her.
9. Thank you for the opportunity to share my ideas with you. I welcome questions or comments you might have.