

February 18, 2005

Re: HB 682 (Sponsored by Eve Franklin) re: Multi-level Licensure for Social Workers

Madam Chair & Members of the Committee,

My name is Kimberly Gardner. I received my Bachelor's Degree in Social Work in 1979 and my Master's in Social Work in 1994. I am a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and a Licensed Addictions Counselor. I am also on the Committee for Professional Review for the Montana Chapter of NASW. This committee provides professional review for compliance with the Code of Ethics for Social Workers. I value licensing and I value Social Work.

I started my first social work job working with elderly shut-ins. From there I moved to an adolescent chemical dependency program, and from there to Hospice and home health. I currently am the Administrator of a small Mental Health Center. In each of my positions, I have served mostly vulnerable and marginalized clients who would have had a great deal of difficulty advocating for themselves. The families I have worked with have little resources, either within the family or the community. For the most part, they would not have jeopardized their services by filing a complaint about their worker, or challenging a decision. The fact that they needed social work services was evident in their being overwhelmed in the complex system of care available to them. They were not adept at identifying professional social work from that provided by those who simply called themselves social workers.

This bill is very essential to the provision of Social Work for all clients at all levels. Social workers provide a complex set of services to the most vulnerable people. It is not a skill set that is easily replicated or learned. Social Workers

must complete a core set of curriculum at each level that addresses ethics, human development, identifying abuse, neglect and exploitation of vulnerable clients, and specific training in navigating the continuum of care for human services.

Those that utilize our services are often compromised in their ability to manage their life situation fully. They are vulnerable and easy prey for people who would take advantage of their life situation. As funding dollars and program limitations occur over time, these people can ill afford to be served by improperly, or under-trained workers.

You may hear that “social workers are hard to find,” or “social workers are easy to train.” Some agencies will tell you that they won’t be able to find social workers, or that they cannot afford them, or that they prefer to train their own. When I went to graduate school, there was no master’s program in MT or any neighboring state. Now there are 4 sites in MT to obtain an MSW. I would offer a prediction that this would likely happen for BSW degrees as well once the licensing regulations are in place. It will demonstrate that the state values competency and integrity at all levels of social work and I would predict a trend of an increased pool of social workers once the licensing statutes are in place.

Social Workers need to be trained by schools of Social Work, not agencies. However, I do also support the grandfathering provision in this bill. This would provide a reasonable time to support those performing these duties and honor their contributions. There are those workers in this state that have dedicated their work and time to providing these services. They should not be harmed. However, this is not a reason to continue this practice.

You may hear some concerns about how the higher levels are regulated as well. Please be assured that there are quite stringent guidelines in the required curriculum to apply for Licensure as a Clinical Social Worker. I personally found the exam very intimidating and quite thorough. An MSW degree is not an

automatic qualifier for an LCSW exam. The candidate's curriculum and studies at the university are evaluated for compliance with the standards, and each candidate must work 3000 hours under the direct supervision of a Licensed Clinical Social Worker or Psychologist to qualify for Licensure as a Clinical Social Worker.

I am also supportive of the added language for psychotherapy. The definition added is an accurate representation of the practice of Clinical Social Worker. You may hear concerns about conducting assessments using testing instruments. These instruments are as important as the therapist-to-client assessment interview, the history and the records review. No single assessment is adequate – the testing instruments are very necessary in identifying the target or focus of the therapy and in identifying the nature of the client's problem. LCSW's are clinically trained in utilizing these instruments and they are a necessary part of the job. The wording is accurate and necessary.

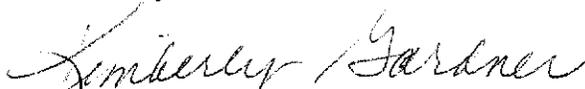
Lastly, as an employer, I am supportive of this legislation. I am the Administrator of the Alternative Youth Adventures Mental Health Center. At AYA we provide intensive level therapeutic group home care, psychotherapy services for individual, families and groups, and education services known as Day Treatment. As a facility, we are required to provide services that are best provided by Bachelor and Master's level as well as Licensed Clinical Social Workers. As our society becomes more litigious, it is becoming harder and harder to get an accurate employment background check and reference. In the last few years, the information I have been allowed to give an employer inquiring about a past AYA worker is extremely limited. At this point, I am only allowed to state if they worked at AYA and at what capacity. I cannot say whether or not the ex-AYA employee is eligible for rehire. The same is true when I call on a person's employment reference.

This bill would create a mechanism for identifying social workers that have harmed their clients and a method of filing a complaint with a regulatory agency. This gives us all some assurance that the person we are considering for employment has met the rigors of an accredited social work program and has passed a regulatory exam and has kept up with continuing education requirements. Without this legislation, there is no current method of assuring that those currently engaged in the practice of social work are going to be held accountable. We need to ensure that our most vulnerable clients are assured of services provided with integrity.

I've heard that licensing a social worker will not guarantee good work. That actually could be said of every profession and service. But, licensing will create a mechanism to identify those who step outside the standards and do something about it.

We need this legislation for the people we serve. If we do not provide this level of oversight, who will? It's the right thing – please vote to pass it.

Thank you,


Kimberly C. Gardner, LCSW, LAC

1814 Livingston Avenue

Helena, MT 59601

442-6613 or 225-4626

February 18, 2005

Dear Representative Mary Caferro,

Please support and pass HB 682 – the licensing of multi-level social workers.

I am a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor, a Nationally Certified Counselor and an Certified Equine Assisted Psychotherapist. I believe in, and have worked hard for, licensure for myself and the industry of psychotherapy.

In my career, I have worked with many social workers in all categories of education. I have found that their specific level of training in ethics, personal development, social systems and advocacy are impressive and very necessary. This is not a field that can simply be replicated by people who wish to call themselves social workers.

As is true with my licensure, licensing multi-levels would allow for a mechanism to be created to deal with improper conduct of social workers. But that is only one benefit. It would also assure that the most vulnerable clients are assured of adequate, and on-going, training to keep abreast of changes in the social climate and in the social services network of care. Also, licensure assures that the worker is adequately trained to identify a unique manifestation of social problems and difficulties that need individual or systems intervention.

There is no replacement for integrity. Please do not be swayed by pleas for exceptions related to funding problems or potential shortages of social workers. Just as the state responded to the MSW shortage, it will likely respond to promoting more social workers if there is a need. The integrity of the service requires regulation and licensure. Please do not be swayed to accept less for any reason. I believe the NASW when they say "It is a matter of public protection." I hope you agree with me.

Sincerely



M. Angela Johnson, LCPC, NCC, EAPI
P.O. Box 894
Boulder, MT 59632

February 18, 2005

Dear Representative *Art Noonan*,

I am writing in support of HB 682, "An Act Providing for Multilevel for Social Workers." I am a Licensed Clinical Social Worker in practice at a private Mental Health Center providing therapeutic clinical and living services for at-risk and seriously emotionally disturbed youth. I have previously worked in a variety of human service settings including hospital care, hospice and home health services and with adults and adolescents in mental health.

This bill provides necessary regulation of all levels of social work practice. Social Work clients rely on professional integrity, advocacy and assistance with a breadth of individual, community and social problems. It is the responsibility of our profession to regulate our members. This can be effectively and easily done by licensing all levels of social work practice. This bill will enable the licensing board to assure that all social workers meet high professional standards at each level and provides a mechanism to file a complaint if a client has been harmed.

Social Work is a unique profession requiring a specific skill set, body of knowledge, training in ethics and experience in managing systems. The protection of the vulnerable public requires it. Please pass this bill.

Sincerely,

Linda Fowler, MSW, LCSW

Linda Fowler, MSW, LCSW

612 Cannon

Helena, MT 59601

February 18, 2005

Dear Representative Mike Milburn,

I am writing to ask your support for HB 682 to license all levels of Social Work. I have both a Bachelor's and Master's degree in Social Work. My entire career of 31 years has been in the provision of social work services to at-risk youth, both in their families and within various treatment programs.

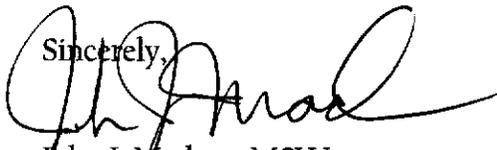
Social Work is a unique profession. We often find ourselves working with adults, youth and families that no others adequately serve, independently. We unite services in the entire continuum of care and help the client and family move to independence and better management of their lives. The social work profession provides specific services at all levels.

Integrity requires that social workers are trained properly, study specific curriculum to become proficient with various stages of human development, and are trained in ethics and systems management. Prior to being granted a degree at any level, they receive field experience and direct supervision.

Currently there is no mechanism to assure that the most vulnerable clients receive professional social work. There is no mechanism for filing a complaint, or identifying problems with an unlicensed social worker.

You may hear about the shortage of Social Workers, or the cost. If either were valid, there is still no justification for not licensing Social Workers. Surely, our most vulnerable citizens are worth this. Please support this bill – it's the right thing to do.

Sincerely,



John J. Madsen, MSW
1814 Livingston
Helena, MT 59601