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## Licensure for All Social Workers in Montana – It's a Matter of Public Protection

*"A stable and highly skilled child welfare workforce is necessary to effectively provide child welfare services that meet federal goals. [However,] large caseloads and worker turnover delay the timeliness of investigations and limit the frequency of worker visits with children, hampering agencies' attainment of some key federal safety and permanency outcomes."* U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO), 2003

### Overview

- Challenges to recruitment and retention include: low salaries; high caseloads/workloads; administrative burdens; risk of violence; limited or inadequate supervision; and insufficient training. (GAO, 2003)

### Cost

- The cost to an agency associated to the loss of a protective service worker is estimated to be \$10,000. (Graff & Hill, 1995)
- The U.S. Department of Labor estimates that the cost of turnover to an employer is one-third the salary of the employee replaced.

### Worker Turnover

- Turnover of child welfare workers is estimated to be between 30 and 40 percent annually nationwide. Rates range from a low of zero percent to a high of 600 percent. (GAO, 2003)
- The average tenure of child welfare workers is less than two years. As a result, supervisors often have only three years of experience. (GAO, 2003)
- Turnover is consistently higher in states that do not require any kind of degree for child welfare positions and consistently lower in states that require a master's degree in social work (MSW). (Russell, 1987)
- More than 80 percent of child welfare workers who stay at their jobs beyond two years have completed at least one social work degree. (Cicero-Reese, 1998)

### Qualifications

- Education, specifically holding an MSW, appears to be the best predictor of overall performance in social service work. (Booz-Allen & Hamilton, Inc., 1987)
- Child welfare staff with BSW and MSW degrees were found to be more effective in developing successful permanency plans for children who were in foster care for more than two years. (Albers, 1993).

*Anaig Clark, BSW  
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