

EXHIBIT 17  
DATE 2-18-05  
HB 682

**Support of Multi-level Licensure for Social Workers**  
**HB 682 sponsored by Eve Franklin**

Madam Chair and members of the committee my name is Cindy Otter I am a student intern for NASW MT chapter. I will graduate with an MSW from Uof M department of social work in May of this year. I am also a professional here in Helena providing social work services and treatment for emotional disturbed children, their birth families, foster families and adoptive families for over 18 years. The children I work with have been physically, emotionally, and mentally abused. They have been locked in closets, ritualistically abused, beaten, and juggled through as many as 15 homes in their young lives.

It is in my work with this vulnerable population that I have experienced several occasions in which those holding themselves out to be social workers or engaged in the practice of social work have not practiced ethically, used emotional black mail with the clients and were not held accountable by the agencies they worked for when internal complaints were filed. Consumers who experienced this level of unprofessional and unethical practice are here today to testify in support of HB682 or have written letters documenting their concerns and support. I draw your attention to one foster/adoptive parent's letter who could not be here (Sharon Rice). She sites several incidents of concern and then concludes that 'our system desperately needs a regulatory board whose function is outside the internal ranks...a board that has the authority to investigate, the autonomy to be unbiased, the power to make fair rulings and to protect and care for our children.'

I would agree that the social service system needs regulation. As a supervisor in the field I have taken corrective actions with individuals who abused their position and were under the influence while providing care for children. Although corrective action was warranted and taken; it concerned me that two of these individuals moved to other states and were employed in the social services field shortly after they were dismissed from similar positions here in Montana. Without some form of licensing these individual's practice goes unchecked and citizens are potentially subjected to further harm. Licensing social workers at all levels of practice would give vulnerable citizens a mechanism to file a complaint with a regulatory authority and hold all social workers accountable to national standards.

I ask you today to support HB 682, multi-level licensure for all social workers. To ensure all Montana's vulnerable citizens are protected when receiving social work services.

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