

Hello, my name is Tammy Denton Clark; I have a BSW and spent the last 13 years of my career in MT. When I graduated from an accredited social work program in another western state, taking the social work boards and getting a license was just part of what was expected to enter the field. When I moved to Montana, I was very surprised to learn that there was no requirement for BSW's to have a license, and also there were many who had the job-title "social worker" yet were not trained in that field. I felt that having that credential was important and the first 3 years after moving to Montana, I paid the fees to another state to keep a valid social work license, even though in Montana it was meaningless. When I married a Montanan, and knew I would raise my family here I let that license lapse but have been vocal in my opinion about the need to improve Montana's licensure laws. It is a lot more than my pride in this career I have chosen, it is the concern that I and other social workers share for the most vulnerable citizens of our state.

Over the years I have seen first hand, many who have been adversely affected by people with the title of social worker but without the training or accountability to a code ethics. I've had numerous clients that have vented their frustrations and shared with me some very negative experiences with other "social workers." It is always disturbing to hear of unethical or negligent colleagues, however in every single one of those cases, when I looked closer into the particular circumstances, the professionals involved were not actually trained SW's, but only held the title of social worker because of their employment. Across the state, I have met people in social work positions who have background in a range of disciplines. From human services, psychology, education, to communication, political science, criminal justice, and in one case, forestry. These degrees in themselves are great and needed but they do not have the same educational requirements of social work.

Just because someone might have a four year degree does not qualify him or her to be a schoolteacher, and someone with a degree in biology or chemistry doesn't have the training to be a nurse. There are specific courses and requirements for graduation in an accredited social work program. There is a national exam that certifies the basic knowledge and competency to work in the profession. There is a code of ethics from the National Association of Social Workers that provides guidelines for SW, but no way to

enforce in Montana unless they are members of NASW. There is no accountability to non-social workers who have the title but not the education.

Montana's most at risk populations, the children, the mentally ill, the handicapped, the elderly, the poor, the homeless, are counting on the expertise of skilled social workers. This bill will create a mechanism for the public to be assured that the social worker that is helping them is actually a social worker. It will provide a way for citizens to file a complaint when a social worker practices in an unethical manner. It is very disturbing to know that to cut someone's hair or apply acrylic finger nails requires a license, yet to determine whether or not a child should be removed from an abusive or neglectful parent does not.

Montana is one of only 13 states that does not license bachelor level social workers and the time has come for you to raise the bar. Please give your support for this important legislation that will assure competent, trained professionals, protect the public, and improve the good social work that is going on in Montana.

Tammy Denton Clark, Somers MT