

EXHIBIT 3 //  
2/9/07  
HB 527

February 8, 2007

Diane Rice, Chair  
Members  
House Judiciary Committee

RE: HB527

Rep. Rice and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Pamela Harada. I am from Havre and my occupation is Manager of the Havre Job Service Workforce Center. However, I am speaking as a private citizen and not on behalf of any agency. I support HB527.

Our office operates a Work Readiness Component (WoRC) program for TANF clients by contract with the Department of Public Health and Human Services and has done so since 1991. In all that time the understanding was that we were mandatory reporters of child abuse and neglect.

In May 2006 DPHHS policy and law interpretation changed. WoRC contractors and Office of Public Assistance staff were informed they were no longer mandatory reporters of child abuse and neglect. The contention was that services were provided to parents and not children so mandatory reporting did not apply and the information fell under federal confidentiality rules. So instead we had to go through two levels of prior approval – a WoRC monitor and an attorney for the division in order to get permission to even report suspected abuse/neglect.

Just as the policy was changing, one of our office's case managers in a 24-hour period had several indicators of a possible child abduction and also other neglect in a new family to the area. We gave details to the monitor, who passed on to the attorney. We were told two days later that we could NOT report the matter to Family Services, as we did not have enough proof.

Since this was potentially so serious and endangering a child, we continued expressing our concern and reasons to the department. A week after our original request, we were allowed to report and by then the family had left our area. We do not know if the child is OK and with his rightful family but it can only be our fervent prayer that he was safe then and is safe today.

We have expressed concern several times about this changed policy and the possible serious consequences to children. To my knowledge the two step approval process and the time delay has never been changed, even for emergency situations like children in an active meth abuse incident.

Rep. Musgrove has been concerned and has introduced HB527. It would make reporting of child abuse and neglect mandatory for DPHHS employees and for contractors with the department who provide services to families.

Although some would contend anyone is a voluntary reporter, we are not voluntary reporters if two staff people, not experts in child abuse and neglect, are screening to see if they will let us and others report abuse and neglect or if the prime concern is for federal regulations. Please continue to help protect Montana's children and vote for HB527.

Harada 2/8/07