

Testimony: HB 2137

February 16, 2012

House Children and Families

Presented by Sky Westerlund, LMSW

The Kansas Chapter, National Association of Social Workers (KNASW) is the professional association working on behalf of the profession and practice of social work in Kansas. Social workers have been licensed to practice at three levels of expertise since 1976. These are the baccalaureate (LBSW), the master (LMSW), and the clinical social worker (LCSW). Licensure provides public trust and professional accountability for any of the work that is done by a social worker. There are over 6000 social workers practicing in the majority of the 105 counties in Kansas. The practice of social work is inclusive across many fields of interest including adoptions, addictions, aged services, child welfare, domestic violence, corrections, hospitals and health, hospice and palliative care, mental health, community based prevention, schools, veterans and military, and more.

KNASW is opposed to the HB 2137 in its current form because it does not require a minimum standard of licensure for persons conducting child abuse and neglect investigations.

Requiring that the person performing the investigations is a licensed social worker assures the public that the individual is regulated and accountable for the work that they do with children and families.

Determining the safety and well-being of a child is among the toughest work there is. Many things must occur to obtain an accurate understanding of what is going on for the child or children and family in order to make a sound professional assessment and recommendation. It involves multiple interactions including visiting the family in their home environment. The social worker must get the child and parents to talk openly about what has happened to cause the need for a Child Protective Services investigation; the social worker must listen carefully to what is said; the social worker must use keen skills of observation; the social worker must convey warmth and authority at the same time; the social worker must assess for any immediate danger that could threaten a child; he or she must produce a well-written document for the court that is an accurate reflection of the circumstances in a Kansas family. This requires excellence from the workforce.

Excellence in the child welfare workforce, including Child Protective Services investigations, starts with the license to practice. Then, the social workers must also have continual support, mentoring, supervision, consultation and professional development opportunities while in the business of performing child welfare services. The license is the minimum. The subsequent support develops the expertise and experience that is necessary for this work.

KNASW suggests the following amendment to assure that it is a licensed social worker conducting the abuse neglect investigation:

*(h) An investigation by the department of alleged physical, mental or emotional abuse or neglect or sexual abuse reported under this code shall be conducted by a **licensed social worker** ~~person trained to conduct such a child abuse and neglect investigation~~...as required under subsection (b) of KSA 2010 Supp. 38-2230, and amendments thereto, shall be videotaped:*

*(1) By a **licensed social worker** ~~person trained and competent to conduct the interview; and...~~*