

March 20, 2015

To: Representative Ann Pugh
From: Eilis O’Herlihy, Executive Director, NASW-VT
Re: S. 9 An act relating to improving Vermont’s system
for protecting children from abuse and neglect

Thank you for everything you do for Vermont. Your particular dedication to the social work profession and the clients we serve is inspiring. I am writing on behalf of NASW-VT.

It is with our members in mind that I am writing to you concerning Senate Bill S. 9 “An act relating to improving Vermont’s system for protecting children from abuse and neglect.” There are several provisions within the current bill which are concerning to our members. Those include:

- **Concern #1: Creation of “Failure to Protect a Child” felony crime.** This new language exposes mandated reporters and parents/guardians to new criminal liability if they "should have known" about a child abuse/neglects situation and failed to report. This language is vague and broad. In addition, we are concerned that exposure to criminal prosecution could deter caregivers or guardians from seeking help and assistance – especially those who may be struggling with substance addiction, or victims of interpersonal violence.
- **Concern #2: Qualifications and expertise.** NASW-VT believes that a Masters in Social work guarantees a particular level of experience and education. The current language of the bill requires that individuals “assigned to carry out investigations have a Masters of Social Work or an equivalent degree, or relevant experience” (page 67.) We feel that this language, especially about ‘relevant experience’, is far too broad and does not serve the interests of public protection.
- **Concern #3: The use of the title of Social Worker.** As you are likely aware, the house committee on government operations has included language in the current OPR bill, H.282, requiring OPR to meet with DCF and NASW-VT prior to December 2015 to work towards limiting the title of "Social Worker" to graduates of accredited BSW, MSW or doctoral social work programs. The current language in S.9 uses the term “social worker” in terms of a job title which is likely to be changed as early as December of this year.

We look forward to continuing this conversation about this important piece of legislation.

Sincerely,

Eilis O’Herlihy, Executive Director
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