

***Testimony of the National Association of Social Workers-Wisconsin  
Chapter opposing SB 403/AB 763  
Assembly Committee on Criminal Justice and Homeland Security  
Senate Committee on Judiciary, Corrections, and Privacy  
November 2, 2005***

The National Association of Social Workers-Wisconsin chapter would like to voice its opposition to allowing the legal carrying of concealed weapons. While we recognize the basic human desire to protect oneself, the passage of this bill will represent only an increased threat to the personal safety of Wisconsin's citizens.

A routine part of social work for many practitioners is working with clients in emotionally volatile situations. These clients include runaway teens, estranged couples, children who have been abused, and correctional clients. We work with citizens involved in ugly custody battles, abusive relationships, and personal emotional disturbances. It is entirely likely that these citizens are typically law-abiding and would meet the necessary requirements to obtain a concealed carry permit. In fact, according to the Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence, at least 73% of those who used firearms to kill their current or former partner would have passed the eleven-point test specified in the 2003 legislation. Because of the type of clients and situations we confront daily in our practice, permitting citizens to carry concealed weapons could pose an additional threat to our safety. In volatile situations, our presence can make people feel nervous or threatened, and tempers may flare. In such situations, social workers are already taught to be acutely aware of our surroundings and to protect ourselves without harming the client. We know it is poor judgment, for example, to conduct business in a client's kitchen, where they have easy access to knives. We

carefully guard personal information about ourselves because angry clients have been known to try to find their social worker at home to release pent-up frustration. In times of emotional distress, even the most docile of humans may behave irrationally, and allowing them to carry concealed weapons gives them another, potentially deadly way to express their anger. Social workers join the profession to help people, and we do not want a law that lets us carry concealed weapons to protect ourselves in case we are confronted by an angry client who might be carrying one. We have enough concerns when dealing with a potentially volatile person. We don't need to add this one to the list.

The financial aspect of this bill also presents a problem for social workers. Obviously, due to the nature of our work, we would not want to allow concealed weapons inside our offices and agencies. Again, to do so would demonstrate poor judgment on our parts, as it would risk the safety of everybody present. However, to effectively eliminate the carrying of concealed weapons within our agencies, we would need to establish security measures such as metal detectors, guards to monitor the metal detectors, secure lockers for any weapons brought to the agency, and so on. Social service agencies already experience a shortage of funds for necessary programs and employees, and adding this extensive cost to the budgets of such agencies would only lead to cutting more programs and employees.

Social workers respect clients' right to privacy. However, making unavailable the list of people with concealed carry permits does not seem practical. It threatens our safety to be unaware of the potential presence of a legal concealed weapon when dealing with clients. If a person is to have the right to carry a concealed weapon for *their* safety, we should have the right to know who is carrying for *our* safety.

Wisconsin's social workers would love to see a reduction in crime in our state. It would mean fewer incidences of domestic violence, rape, assault, and homicide,

all of which are crimes that social workers deal with regularly. Attempting to reduce crime by permitting more guns to be present in our society, however, could have tragic results. Misfirings may become regular emergency room cases as people take their weapon from under lock and key and begin carrying it in closer proximity to their person. Children, in their constant quest to be just like mom or dad, will do their best to get their little hands on the gun they see their parents carrying, with potentially disastrous results. Teenagers, who are already fascinated with weapons and violence, will have easier access to these weapons.

It is a noble goal to try to reduce crime and increase the safety of Wisconsin's citizens. However, the National Association of Social Workers-Wisconsin Chapter opposes permitting the concealed carrying of weapons as a means to this end. Please help protect the members of our profession and the citizens of the state who we serve. We urge that you not support this legislation.