

**Testimony By Nasw WI Executive Director Marc Herstand Before The Social Workers Section On Wednesday November 2, 2005 Regarding The Human Services Internship Requirements For A Social Workers Training Certificate Holder**

Certified and licensed social workers provide support to some of the most vulnerable of Wisconsin's citizens, often in very volatile situations. They work with abused and neglected children where a decision on whether or not to remove a child from a home can be a life and death situation. They work with battered women at a domestic violence shelter. They work with homeless clients who are mentally ill and have alcohol and drug abuse issues. They work with runaway youth and juvenile delinquents who may have experienced physical and sexual abuse, violence on the streets and other horrors. They work with Alzheimer's patients who can sometimes be violent and with their families.

A bachelors in Social Work program, accredited by the Wisconsin Council on Social Work Education, prepares students for the rigors and challenges of social work practice. In these programs as other speakers will more clearly describe, students take professional courses that teach them basic assessment, crisis intervention, counseling and advocacy skills. Students learn consistently throughout their courses the ethical challenges and dimension of practice.

Probably the linchpin of the social work program is the field placement. The Council on Social Work Education requires a minimum of 400 hours of a social work internship, but in actuality, every single bachelors in social work program requires more than 400 hours with the average number, 476. The field placement is the more important part of the "gatekeeper" aspect of a social work program.

What do I mean by a gatekeeper aspect? Like other professional programs, one of the most important purposes of a social work program is to select out those students who are not appropriate for social work practice. Although sometimes you can tell from a practice methods course that a student is not appropriate for social work practice, the most common place to find out if a student is appropriate for social work practice is the internship. It is also a critical part of the education preparing a social worker for practice.

Therefore because of all the other deficiencies in their social work education, a social workers training certificate holder should be challenged to have at least 400 hours of a field placement to determine if they can begin to handle social work practice. In fact it could be argued that a social workers training certificate holder should be required to accrue more internship hours than the average social work student because of the major deficiencies in their preparation for social work practice.

To allow anything less than the minimum CSWE requirement for an internship is irresponsible and an abdication for the mission of the Department of Regulation & Licensing. It puts Wisconsin's most vulnerable citizens at great risk for harm.

The opponents of the 400-hour requirement have stated that their students do not have the time within their program to complete 400 hours. They claim that their students might have to complete an extra semester. . The reality is that all professionals make sacrifices to complete their professional program. These sacrifices often include an extra semester of college. They understand that in order to become a competent professional, they need to fulfill the requirements of a professional degree, regardless of the sacrifices they might have to make to achieve this goal. The request by a few academic programs to water down the internship requirement to accommodate their students directly contradicts the Department of Regulation & Licensing mission of consumer protection.

In conclusion the National Association of Social Workers, Wisconsin Chapter strongly supports the proposed 400-hour requirement for a social workers training certificate holder. This requirement is critical to meet the mission of the Department of Regulation & Licensing is to ensure competent safe practitioners for the citizens of Wisconsin.