The Washington State Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) supports title protection for Social Workers. Any individual calling themselves a Social Worker must have graduated from a bachelor's, master's, or doctorate Social Work educational program accredited by the Council on Social Work Education and approved by the Secretary based on nationally recognized standards, and/or be licensed under RCW 18.225.090 as a licensed advanced Social Worker (LASW) or licensed independent clinical Social Worker (LICSW).

**Issues**

NASW strongly recommends and supports a title protection law that will protect consumers from receiving sub-standard services from people calling themselves Social Workers who do not meet the stringent educational or professional practice requirements of social workers. Workers lacking professional educational backgrounds or licenses increase the danger to consumers of unqualified, unethical and improper practice of Social Work.

Consumers expect people who represent themselves as Social Workers to have appropriate educational and professional training, just as they can feel confident that attorneys have the appropriate legal education and training, and that doctors and nurses have appropriate medical or nursing training and degrees.

But in Washington State, anyone can call themselves a Social Worker and the public has no knowledge whether the person helping them has attended an accredited school of social work. The confusion also extends to the media, who frequently refer to anyone in a helping role as a “social worker” – irrespective of their education or training.

Social Workers utilize their professional training in a variety of settings with diverse populations. Social Workers work with older adults, the mentally ill, substance users, persons in prison, and children, adolescents and families. Social Workers practice in schools, hospitals, veteran’s programs, community agencies and public housing projects. A Social Worker is often the one on the “front lines” with Child Protective Services or Adult Protective Services, or evaluating the need for involuntary commitment with a suicidal or homicidal person.

Social work requires specialized training, professionalism, and monitoring via continuing education, professional supervision, and ethical practice requirements. Social Workers’ effectiveness, gained through education and training, is critical to our mission of social justice, empowerment, multiculturalism, and social change – often with clients who struggle with societal disadvantages.

No other educational background prepares graduates for work with high-risk clients who may need not only clinical assessment and interventions, but advocacy at the institutional, community, or policy level in order to redress social disparities and inequities that affect individual well-being. In addition, our training insures that we adhere to a specified Code of Ethics which emphasizes values of self-determination, cross-cultural competency, and human dignity, and prohibits breaches of confidentiality, impaired practice, or conflicts of interest.

Research demonstrates the effectiveness of trained professional social workers in public welfare services. In addition, research has proven that professionally educated social workers demonstrate resiliency over time, far out-performing untrained workers who tend to “burn-out” more quickly.

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Washington State Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers is a membership organization with a dual mission of enhancing the profession of social work and promoting diversity, inclusion and social justice. Contacts: Executive Director Hoyt Suppes at 206-706-7084; or www.nasw-wa.org.  
Revised 1/5/08
Many Social Work professionals (those graduated from accredited social work programs) are also licensed in Washington State. To obtain a Social Work license, Social Workers with graduate degrees must receive three years of post-graduate full-time experience and supervision from a licensed Social Worker. To maintain a current license, the licensed professional social worker must obtain 36 hours of continuing education every two years. This education and training provides unparalleled excellence in the preparation for practice with diverse and challenged communities.

Licensed social workers have title protection, but other degreed social workers do not have this guarantee of professional recognition. The 2500 professional Social Workers who are members of the Washington State Chapter of NASW all ascribe to the high standards of our professional code of ethics. The public deserves the best social work.

**Background**

Forty-four States currently have some form of title protection for social workers, to insure that the public receives consistent services in an ethical manner. The National Association of Social Workers has a code of ethics that guide social work practice, and a peer review process when ethical violations are suspected so that the consumer is protected. Accredited Schools of Social Work insure the highest educational standards in academic and field education.

Other professionals who work intimately with vulnerable populations, such as nurses, physicians, and attorneys are afforded title protection. Social Workers serve the same vulnerable populations, but currently, anyone can call themselves a social worker and not be bound by the educational and professional practice requirements of a degreed Social Worker. We opposed the State Department of Personnel practice of employing persons in Social Worker positions who are not graduates of an accredited school of Social Work or licensed by the State of Washington NASW believes these positions should be filled by degreed social workers.

Title protection is a critical step for consumer protection and Washington state risk management. The title of Social Worker is not protected either in state or private settings in Washington State. Unqualified ‘social workers’ pose a serious risk management issue for the State.

**Action: Support HB2112 and SB5950: TITLE PROTECTION FOR SOCIAL WORKERS**

NASW and its legislative partners are sponsoring AN ACT Relating to protecting consumers and agency clients by clarifying the definition of social worker, amending RCW 18.225.010 and RCW 18.225.020, and adding a new section to chapter 18.225 RCW.

HB 2112 and SB 5950 state that: “Any individual calling themselves a Social Worker must have graduated from a bachelor's, master's, or doctorate Social Work educational program accredited by the Council on Social Work Education and approved by the Secretary based on nationally recognized standards, and/or be licensed under RCW 18.225.090 as a licensed advanced Social Worker (LASW) or licensed independent clinical Social Worker (LICSW).”

**PASS HB2112/SB 5950**

**SAFEGUARD THE PUBLIC THROUGH SOCIAL WORK TITLE PROTECTION**

**DEFINE SOCIAL WORKERS IN THE LAW AS THOSE WITH DEGREES IN SOCIAL WORK**

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