

HB 7169 & SB 1666: Relating to Child Protection and Child Welfare Services

Why are BSWs and MSWs needed?

Florida's Department of Children and Families has been plagued by a series of child deaths.

- ▶ Numerous committees, Blue Ribbon panels, and task forces have studied this problem (including the Rilya Wilson panel in 2002, the Nubia Barahona report of 2011, and the recent Casey Foundation report), and all have indicated the need for better educated staff who have the knowledge, experience, skills, and ability to assess families and protect children. However, we have not yet implemented this suggestion.
- ▶ Florida has invested money in computer systems, training models, checklists, and other tools that have proven ineffective to fix or even reduce the problem. Instead, Florida should invest in professional staff that are prepared with the high level of skills and abilities demanded by child welfare positions.
- ▶ Despite perceptions that social workers make up most or all of the child welfare workforce, professionally-educated social workers currently make up only 9.5% of DCF staff and 32% of case managers at CBCs.

Why are BSWs and MSWs the best choice?

Social workers are the best educated professionals to keep children safe.

- ▶ A professional social worker is someone with a bachelor's or master's degree in social work from an accredited college or university. Social workers are highly skilled at assessments, interviewing, documentation, and critical thinking.
- ▶ The social work curriculum includes extensive knowledge in topics essential to working in child welfare, including human behavior, child development, trauma-informed care, family dynamics, safety and risk assessment, diversity and cultural competency, and family engagement.
- ▶ Before graduation, social workers are required to have internships and volunteer experience with face-to-face client contact. BSWs graduate with at least 500 hours of experience, and MSW graduates have 900 hours.
- ▶ Social workers are bound by a professional Code of Ethics, which addresses responsibilities to clients, colleagues, and the agencies where they are employed.

Florida has an extensive social work workforce that can more than meet the demand.

- ▶ The state of Florida has 14 accredited BSW programs and 10 accredited MSW programs, graduating more than 1,700 social workers annually.
- ▶ In 2011, there were more than 18,000 people in Florida with social work degrees and approximately 4,728 enrolled in Florida's social work programs.
- ▶ 9 out of the 14 social work programs are within state-funded schools. The state of Florida is already investing in producing professional social workers, yet failing to use professional social workers where they are most needed.

Vote yes on HB 7169/SB 1666—Florida's children deserve better!