

Kansas Chapter  
National Association of Social Workers  
*...advocating for the practice and profession of Social Work...*

**Testimony:**

**December 14, 2016**

**Special Committee on Organization of Public Health Boards**

**Presented by Sky Westerlund, LMSW**

The Kansas Chapter, National Association of Social Workers (KNASW) is the professional association working on behalf of the profession and practice of social work in Kansas. Social workers have been licensed at three levels of practice since 1974. Social workers serve thousands of Kansans every day.

The primary purpose of state licensure is to protect the public from harm. The second purpose is to statutorily define the legal authority and parameters of practice for the profession. From time to time, changes are made to the profession's practice act. In the forty year history of Social Work licensure, the practice act has been amended only a few times.

Currently, the more than 7000 social workers in Kansas are licensed and regulated by the Behavioral Sciences Regulatory Board (BSRB). The BSRB is both a consolidated agency and a consolidated regulatory board. The agency was consolidated in 1980. The regulatory board more than tripled in size from two professions to the current seven disciplines.

KNASW is in support of an independent regulatory board that is focused solely on the licensure and regulation of social workers. An independent decision-making board would enhance the public protection duties and legal regulation of the largest group of mental health providers in the state.

Advantages of an independent regulatory board for social workers:

**It would mirror the majority of government regulatory boards in Kansas.**

The independent regulatory boards achieve their efficiencies by addressing only their discipline.

**The public would be best protected by a regulatory board focused specifically on social work.**

The consolidated board of seven different disciplines is diffuse and loses the identity of the professions. The professions are regarded as the same, but, in reality, they are distinct with separate governing statutes.

**It would remove social work out of the multiple layers of BSRB operations.**

Currently, the BSRB can have as many as eight public meetings each month. The discussions are unique and they shape the decisions that are made by the full board. It is optimal, but not usually realistic, to attend all such meetings in order to stay fully informed on decisions affecting social work.

**Social work would no longer be grossly under-represented as it is on the BSRB board of directors.**

There are two social workers for 7422 licensees; two psychologists for 895; one master psychologist for 595; one professional counselor for 1288; one marriage and family therapist for 845; one addiction counselor for 1477; zero for 108 behavior analysts. BSRB also has more public representation than any other board in Kansas with four public members.

**Social workers know the profession and the diversity of practice.**

The breadth and depth of social work practice is vast. Concerns brought by the public are most efficiently addressed and resolved by those who have the education, knowledge, skills and ethics of the profession.

**Social workers would hold social workers to the law, standards, and ethics of the profession.**

The statutory and regulatory definitions are the primary focus of resolving complaints. But there is also the profession's standards of practice and code of ethics to take into consideration. These do not cross over or apply to the other disciplines.

**Focus the legal needs of the profession to respond to the national practice environment.**

The practice act in Kansas is more similar to the other disciplines regulated by the BSRB, but not substantially equivalent with other state's social work licensure laws. This makes it very difficult for licensed clinical social workers from other states to obtain equal licensure in Kansas. In our highly mobile society, this creates an unnecessary burden on social workers.

**Thirty eight other states have independent boards for social work.**

Our neighbors, Missouri, Oklahoma, and Colorado each have an independent regulatory board for social work. All three states referenced in the 2016 [Kansas Statewide Efficiency Review](#) by Alvaraz and Marsal, employ an independent regulatory board for social work.

**Finally, several years ago, the BSRB made a regulatory decision about social work that was not in the interest of public protection.**

An individual who had a record of five felony convictions, *including first degree murder*, was approved for licensure as a master social worker. The board vote went against the recommendations of the two social workers serving on the board at the time.

The Kansas Social Work law opens with this statement, "Since the profession of social work profoundly affects the lives of the people of this state, it is the purpose of this act to protect the public by setting standards of qualification, training and experience for those who seek to engage in the practice of social work and by promoting high standards of professional performance for those engaged in the profession of social work." (KSA 65-6301)

KNASW understands the intensely deep responsibility and privilege to practice social work. We work with some of the very most vulnerable persons who are struggling through a difficult time in their life. We have an interest to the public as well as our profession to demand excellence and the highest standards of conduct from the members of our profession. We can do this with focused regulation and oversight of social workers and the best way to accomplish this is through an independent regulatory board for social work.

We ask for your consideration and support of strong, independent regulation of social work in Kansas.

Thank you.

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