

Jenna Mehnert, MSW
Executive Director

Gwen Phillips, LCSW
President

January 17, 2012

Governor Tom Corbett
Senate Pro Tempore Scarnati
Speaker Sam Smith
State Capitol Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120-3025

Dear Governor Corbett, Senator Scarnati and Speaker Smith:

On behalf of the 40,000 degreed social workers functioning within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, it is with great concern that I must write to express disappointment that not a single degreed social worker was appointed to the recently established Child Abuse Task Force.

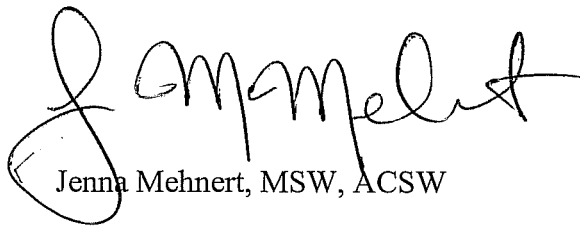
When examining best practice standards from the Child Welfare League of America or national workforce standards issued by the National Council of Accreditation, social workers play a leadership role in administering and delivering effective child protection services. Additionally, social work as a profession is one of the largest groups of mandated reporters. To put together a panel that disregards the profession that experts consider national leaders in child welfare is disheartening. I am sure not including the social work profession was accidental, but we in Pennsylvania can do better.

The lack of a degreed social worker being appointed is especially problematic given that the most significant challenge that the Commonwealth faces in effectively protecting children is an adequate and well informed workforce. We spend over 1 billion dollars a year in child welfare services, yet to be a child welfare caseworker in the Commonwealth you need only to have taken 12 social science college credits. You do not need a college degree in human services as the National Council on Accreditation recommends. We choose to invest millions of dollars in a workforce that is not qualified to effectively investigate and intervene in cases of child abuse. Moreover, 717 million dollars are invested in publically funded mental health services, however, counseling is provided to children who are victims of abuse, by individuals who lack clinical mental health degrees or licensure. Investing millions of dollars into a system that lacks the appropriate level of professionalism is simply not what I believe you as leaders have in mind.

Pennsylvania is the second largest educator of social workers within the nation with 42 nationally accredited schools of social work. However, the workforce standards in the Commonwealth do not reflect the expertise of the available workforce. As a publically funded system, it is our obligation to evaluate the soundness of our public investments in child welfare. While there are issues with how our laws frame child protection, who is implementing those policies and laws, is the most critical success factor. The decision to appoint members to a policy and practice reform panel that completely ignores the critical factor of workforce is simply disheartening for a profession that is committed to the professional service of others.

If there is a way that the social work profession can be of assistance in the critical work of developing effective, accountable and performance-based social services, please do not hesitate to contact me. I would ask that you consider appointing a degreed social worker to serve as a non-voting member of the panel or finding another way to ensure that the profession of social work is not excluded from this very important work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jenna Mehnert". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

Jenna Mehnert, MSW, ACSW