

An important bill was passed this year by the Tennessee General Assembly that specifies appropriate use of the title social worker

What Is This Legislation?

Public Chapter 469 was signed by the Governor on June 18, 2005 after being passed on the floor of the Senate and House of Representatives without opposition. This bill, to be implemented July 1, 2006, was supported by the Tennessee Chapter of NASW to provide consumer protection and specify appropriate use of the title social worker. The use of the title social worker is restricted in the legislation to persons who have received a baccalaureate or master's degree in social work from an accredited social work program, received a doctorate or Ph.D. in social work, or have a CMSW or LCSW certificate or license from the State of Tennessee.

Why Was This Legislation Needed?

As a society we have come to trust that persons using a certain title have completed specific training to prepare them for their work in assisting the public. Residents of Tennessee do not want to receive legal advice from someone calling himself a lawyer who has not completed a law degree or to receive care from someone calling herself a nurse who does not have the appropriate educational training.

When potential consumers are introduced to a social worker they expect that person is there to help them with special skills and knowledge. In the past, caring persons with good hearts providing help to their friends and neighbors were often referred to as social workers. However, throughout the years, a body of knowledge and research has developed and educational requirements have been implemented that provide specific skills and training for social work practice. Accredited social work programs face stringent requirements in their work to prepare caring professionals possessing a bachelor's, master's or doctoral degree in social work. However, the public often believes they are receiving services from trained social workers when they are receiving assistance from persons who do not have any training in social work. The media may also refer to anyone in a role of helping the public as a "social worker" without verifying their real job title. We can all remember examples of this in the area of child welfare.

Public Chapter 469

- ▶ **Meets the needs of consumers** by ensuring that positions requiring the skill and training of professional social workers are filled with fully qualified professionals.
- ▶ **Protects the public by restricting the use of the title social worker to professionals who abide** by an ethical code that emphasizes competency and integrity.
- ▶ **Provides Truth in Public Information.**
- ▶ Helps maintain the **public confidence** in professional social workers – such confidence is a critical element in successful social work with many individuals, families and communities.

This legislation does not require organizations to change the responsibilities of persons currently practicing as "social workers" without a degree. It simply requires organizations to implement job titles that reflect the professional training and expertise of their employees.

What Social Work Title Protection Did Tennessee Have Prior to the Passage of This Legislation?

- ▶ Prior to this legislation anyone could call himself or herself a social worker without regard to training or preparation. Untrained persons, including convicted child abusers for example, could call themselves social workers.
- ▶ Since the 1980s Tennessee has provided Title Protection for Certified Master's Social Workers (CMSW) and Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSW). Even individuals with these titles suffer when the terms social work and social worker are used indiscriminately.

For Additional Information

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