



BC ASSOCIATION *of*
SOCIAL WORKERS

BC Association of Social Workers
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May 14, 2021

Dear BCASW members;

Re: The Social Workers Act and Regulations - Exemptions

We are writing to you to report on our Association's ongoing campaign to strengthen professional social work in British Columbia. Specifically, we want to share our advocacy work to have exemptions removed from The Social Workers Act and Regulations.

The BCASW has a long history of working to improve The Social Workers Act; a history well-described in *Perspectives* (Spring/Summer 2019 & Fall 2019) by former presidents Phyllis Nash and Elizabeth Jones.

The Social Workers Act of 1968 led to the formation of the Board of Registration of Social Workers (BRSW) the following year. In 1995, the BC government mandated the separation of the BCASW and the BRSW leaving each to their unique functions of advocacy and professional regulation respectively. Amendments to the Act in 2008 formed the BC College of Social Workers (BCCSW) replacing the BRSW and updating the objects of the College. At no time has the Act fully protected the title "social worker" or mandated registration for all social workers with the College despite significant efforts by the Association and the College.

The Social Workers Act does not require all BC social workers to be registered with the College and therefore the Act does not fully serve the public interest. Social workers in some health authority positions and those in private practice (who choose to refer to themselves as social workers) are required to be registered with the College, leaving a significant majority of professional social workers to register voluntarily. The Act provides the framework for self-regulation of the profession with public input; however, we remain only marginally regulated.

There is limited protection of title in The Social Workers Act. The Act reserves the use of the titles "social worker", "registered social worker", and "registered clinical social worker" to those registered with the College unless the person works for a "prescribed person". The Regulations for the Act define "prescribed person", or those exempt from registration and therefore free to use the title "social worker", as people employed by any of the following: government or an agent of government; a board or commission; a municipality, regional district, or board of education; an Indian band, a tribal council, a treaty first nation, the Nisga'a Nation or a Nisga'a Village; or an agency, other than an adoption agency as defined in the Adoption Act, to whose staff is delegated any or all of a director's powers, duties or functions under the Child, Family and Community Service Act or the Adoption Act.

Our campaign aims to strengthen professional social work and protect the public interest. We want children, youth, families, and communities to have confidence in our services and to know that they are working with degreed professional social workers. The College superintends the practice of social work and provides

assurances to the public that social workers are bound by professional ethics, aware of standards of practice, and current with social work knowledge and skills. Recipients of social work services, dissatisfied with those services, may express their concern to the College who has the authority to investigate and, if necessary, refer the matter to a disciplinary committee.

When our Association became aware that the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) planned to lower educational qualifications for child welfare staff, we formed a coalition of concerned groups to advocate for social workers and for quality social work services for children, youth, and families. We were joined by the BC College of Social Workers, the BC Government Services Employees' Union, and the directors of BC's accredited schools of social work. MCFD has refused to consider rolling back the broadening of educational qualifications however, the coalition continues to advocate on this matter. The coalition has also been actively engaged in discussions with MCFD regarding changes to The Social Workers Act for more than two years.

As an Association, and as part of the broader coalition, we have met with two MCFD Ministers, discussed this matter with opposition MLAs, written briefs, met many times with senior MCFD officials, hosted online consultations, and submitted a 6,000-signature petition to MCFD. We have been active and MCFD has responded by committing to holding a broad consultation with stakeholders regarding the consequences of removing exemptions from The Social Workers Act Regulations.

Somewhat fortuitously, the Cayton Report - An Inquiry into the performance of the College of Dental Surgeons of British Columbia and the Health Professions Act (2018) – presented an opportunity for the Association to present two briefs (available on the BCASW website or by contacting the office at bcasw@bcasw.org) to the Ministry of Health. These briefs argued that the public interest is best protected by including social work, as a fully regulated profession with protected title, within a revised Health Professions Act. On August 27, 2020, the Steering Committee on Modernization of Health Professional Regulation released their final report noting that social work should be considered for inclusion in the revised Health Professions Act by the proposed oversight committee.

We expect that the legislation to revise the Health Professions Act will be introduced in the BC Legislature before the end of June or in early fall and our Association will actively support the bill.

Over the next few months, you will be notified about opportunities to learn more about this campaign and asked to support it with actions such as focussed discussions at branch meetings, letter writing, and discussions with your MLA.

Our history shows us that we have been successful when we have acted together.

In solidarity,



Michael Crawford, MSW, RSW | President
BC Association of Social Workers



Dianne Heath, MSW, RSW | Executive Director
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