



**National Council of
Women of New Zealand**

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Submission to the Social Services and Community Committee on the Social Workers Registration Legislation Bill

The National Council of Women of New Zealand, Te Kaunihera Wahine o Aotearoa (NCWNZ) is an umbrella group representing 258 organisations affiliated at either national level or to one of our 19 branches. In addition, about 390 people are individual members. Collectively our reach is over 340,000 with many of our membership organisations representing all genders. NCWNZ's vision is a gender equal New Zealand and research shows we'll be better off socially and economically if we're gender equal. Through research, discussion and action, NCWNZ in partnership with others, seeks to realise its vision of gender equality because it is a basic human right. This submission has been prepared by the NCWNZ Education Standing Committee and the Parliamentary Watch Committee after consultation with the membership of NCWNZ.

1. Executive Summary

1.1. NCWNZ members support mandatory registration of Social Workers, and the protection of the title 'Social Worker'. Many members would like the practice of Social Work to be protected as well. A number of suggestions were around the idea of a tiered system, where lesser qualified (but still qualified) social service workers could contribute under the supervision of a Social Worker.

2. Clause 5: Interpretation of a Social Worker

2.1. **NCWNZ supports the mandatory registration of Social Workers.** Our submission in 2001 on the Bill that introduced registration of Social Workers said that 'Members hold the view that registration should be a requirement for practice as a social worker. It is long overdue and necessary if social work is to be seen as a service of competency.'¹ A resolution was subsequently passed at the NCWNZ annual conference in 2012, supporting the mandatory registration of Social Workers.² Mandatory registration was also strongly supported by members in the consultation for this current Bill.

2.2. The definition of a Social Worker given in the Bill refers to restricted work that only a Social Worker may undertake. Many members asked about what these restricted tasks were, and it seems critical for a thorough understanding of the dividing line between 'Social Worker' and 'others'. We were unable to provide such a list to our members. It appears from the MSD regulatory impact statement that these 'restricted tasks' are those contained in various other legislation. This vague definition of

¹ SO1.69 NCWNZ submission on Social Workers Registration Bill, 2001.

² Resolution 16.5.3, 2012.

restricted tasks could cause difficulties in deciding whether or not a job must be done by a Social Worker or could be done by someone else.

3. **Clause 8: Protecting the title of 'Social Worker'**

- 3.1. **NCWNZ members were clear that the purpose of registration was for the protection of social work clients.** This was the standard by which they judged the provisions of protecting the title, or protecting the practice, of social workers. However, there was some disagreement about what was required to give that protection.
- 3.2. **Protecting the title of 'Social Worker' was seen as a minimum requirement.** All members agreed that the title of Social Worker should only be applied to those people who are registered. There needs to be assurance that someone calling themselves a Social Worker was knowledgeable, experienced, monitored, professional and abiding by a code of ethics.
- 3.3. **Protecting the practice of 'Social Work' produced a variety of opinions, interpretations and suggestions.** This is partly because the majority of members who responded were not Social Workers themselves, so they did not have definite interpretations of the practice of Social Work, nor were we able to provide them with the list of 'restricted tasks' mentioned in the Bill. However, there was a range of opinions given, which tried to balance the concern for sufficient protection for the clients with the need for sufficient, culturally responsive, social workers to meet community needs.
 - 3.3.1. There could be a distinction between 'Professional Social Work' and 'Social Services Work'. This suggestion, made by one branch, might help define who should be registered.
 - 3.3.2. Some social services workers, such as Victim Support, have clear boundaries, specific training and support from the organisation, and ongoing guidance. Such people may not need to be registered Social Workers, so long as they work within defined job descriptions. These people help extend the capacity of the system.
 - 3.3.3. Some people, particularly older people, have good people skills and valuable life or cultural knowledge and experience, but not the academic capability and/or financial resources to undertake a Social Work degree. Members think that there should be a place in the system to engage these people who want to help.
 - 3.3.4. Members also acknowledged that being older did not guarantee that a person was capable of social services work. Training, support and supervision were recommended.
 - 3.3.5. There were a number of suggestions for a **tiered model**, akin to the model of registered nurses/enrolled nurses/care assistants. A community worker, for example, could be someone who has a Diploma level qualification and works under the supervision of a Social Worker. A carer might be someone who has a Certificate level qualification and works under the supervision of either a Social Worker or a Nurse.
- 3.4. **A number of members had concerns that only protecting the title of Social Worker meant that an Employer could rename a role to the detriment of the worker and/or client.** They saw potential exploitation of the Social Workers, through the employer simply changing a name, and potential risk to clients, through employing someone who is not sufficiently competent for the role. Clear Job

Descriptions would be essential, and the list of restricted tasks should be general knowledge amongst social service organisations. One member gave this explanation of their concern:

Registration will not be required if

- 1. A position description or employment contract does not describe the position using the words "social worker"*
- 2. The person does not hold themselves out to be a social worker*
- 3. The person is not undertaking a role or tasks described in an enactment using the words "social worker"*

The way this legislation is written an employer can determine whether the position is a social work position or not by the use of role titles. By reviewing and re-structuring a role title from "social worker" to for example "Family Advocate" or "Case Manager" the employer defines the role as not being a social work role. We have to ask the question "where is the accountability to the client" in this situation.

4. Conclusion

- 4.1. NCWNZ supports the general purpose of this Bill to make Social Worker registration mandatory, for the protection of both Social Workers and, in particular, their clients. All members agree with protecting the title of Social Worker, and there are mixed opinions on the need to protect the practice of Social Worker, with some members definitely wanting a definition of social work practice to be included. All members insisted that anyone working in the field of social services needed some training, support and supervision, and a common suggestion was the introduction of a tiered system.



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