# Pennsylvania State Board of Social Workers, Marriage and Family Therapists and Professional Counselors Newsletter

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## **Changes to Child Protective Services** Law

By Beth Michlovitz, Legal Counsel

Act 179, which amended the Child Protective Services Law (CPSL), became effective May 2007. Prior to the enactment of Act 179, the CPSL required persons who come into contact with children in the course of their profession, employment or occupation to make a report only when they suspected, based on their medical, professional or training experience, that a "child coming before them" in their official or professional capacity was a victim of child abuse.

The current law eliminates the requirement that the child actually "come before" the individual to trigger the duty to report. Instead, the new law mandates an individual to make a report when the person has reasonable cause to suspect that a child under the care, supervision, guidance, or training of that person, or "an agency, institution, organization or other entity with which that person is affiliated," is a victim of child abuse. Therefore, the child no longer needs to come directly before the mandated reporter in order for him/her to be obligated to make a report.

It is important to note that persons required to make the report of suspected child abuse are still limited to those who come into contact with children in the course of practicing their profession, occupation or in their employment. Also, the new law does not mandate the reporting of child abuse if an alleged perpetrator discloses to a professional that he/she has abused a child unless the child victim is also under the care, supervision, guidance or training of that same person, or an agency, institution, organization, or other entity with which that person is affiliated.

The current law also provides that mandated reporters are obligated to report suspected child abuse to the Department of Public Welfare, ChildLine and Abuse Registry (800-932-0313) without regard for the relationship between the alleged abuser and the child. Previously, mandated reporting provisions only required reporting of suspected child abuse when the person

alleged to be abusing a child was a "perpetrator," which is defined under the CPSL as either a parent, a person over the age of 14 residing in the home of the child, a person responsible for the child's welfare, or a paramour of a parent or caregiver. The current law now requires reports of suspected child abuse committed by any person, not only those who fall within the definition of perpetrator.

## **Continuing Education Requirement** for All Licensees

By Beth Michlovitz, Legal Counsel

Licensed social workers and clinical social workers are required to obtain continuing education. The board's new regulations require all licensees (social workers, clinical social workers, marriage and family therapists and professional counselors) to complete 30 hours of continuing education every two years in order to renew their licenses.

The first period ran from March 1, 2007, through Feb. 28, 2009

The regulations require licensees to take continuing education in acceptable courses and programs related to the licensee's profession. For instance, a marriage and family therapist must take continuing education in courses and programs appropriate for the master's level practitioner and pertain to the practice of marriage and family therapy.

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#### **Other News:**

- **Disciplinary Actions**
- PA Becomes Smoke-Free

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Licensed professional counselors must take continuing education in courses and programs appropriate for the master's level practitioner and pertain to the practice of professional counseling.

The regulations require all licensees to obtain at least three of the 30 hours in ethical issues. Up to 20 hours of the 30 hours may be completed in home study.

The regulations include a list of pre-approved providers of continuing education courses and programs:

- Licensed Social Workers and Licensed Clinical Social Workers - Section 47.36
- Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists -Section 48.36
- Licensed Professional Counselors Section 49.36.

For a full list of board-approved continuing education programs, click here.

In addition, providers or individual licensees may seek board approval of a course or program by applying to the board at least 90 days before the date the course or program commences.

## The Right-to-Know Act and **Home Addresses**

The Bureau of Professional and Occupational Affairs is sensitive to its licensees' concerns about personal privacy. However, the Pennsylvania Right-to-Know Act mandates release of information contained in a "public record" stored by that agency if a member of the public requests it.

The bureau will take all reasonable steps to safeguard personal information contained in licensure records. We realize that many licensees use home addresses on the licensure records maintained by the bureau. However, given the uncertainty over what the Right-to-Know Act requires, neither the bureau nor the board that issues your license can guarantee the confidentiality of the address shown on your licensing record.

Therefore, if you have a personal security concern, we recommend that you consider what many our licensees have already done: use a business address or post office box number as the official address on licensure records.

Also, with the License 2000 computer system, you may indicate to the board an address for release to the public that may be different from your home address.

To further protect your privacy and identity, the bureau will only accept a request to change a licensee's address if it is submitted in writing and includes the licensee's Social Security number, license number and the old and new addresses.

### **Meet New Board Members**

**Ami Hooper-Knox** was appointed to the board by Governor Rendell. She is the director of NTP Consultants, LLC, an outpatient substance abuse treatment program, and she owns a private practice, all located in Chambersburg.

Hooper-Knox is a nationally certified counselor with a certification in addiction counseling. She is also a licensed professional counselor who has served the counselors of Pennsylvania as the secretary of the Pennsylvania Counseling Association for five years.

James K. Matta, Sr. is a senior research principal at the Pittsburgh Adolescent Alcohol Research Center, which is affiliated with Western Psychiatric Institute & Clinic. His primary responsibilities involve coordinating the psychological assessments and psychotherapy for two large intervention studies that seek to identify the effectiveness of combining psychotherapy and pharamacotherapy treatment approaches with adolescents and young adults identified with major depression and substance use disorders. Two years ago he was awarded funding by the National Institutes of Health to investigate this understudied population.

He also works part-time as a counselor in private practice. Matta graduated from Duquesne University in 2004 with a doctorate in Counselor Education and Supervision. He also has obtained two master's degrees, one at Edinboro University of Pennsylvania in clinical psychology (1986), and the other at Duquesne University in counselor education (1999).

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