

Chairman Sturla, and Chairman Adolph, members of the committee, and staff:

My name is Gina Burke. I am currently enrolled in the School of Social Work here at the University of Pittsburgh and will obtain my Bachelors degree in Social Work, in April of 2009.

While in the School of Social Work we have been taught a great deal about ethics and values. Through my first year in the BASW program we have learned different methods of intervention and applied them to all sects of social work practice, including work with individuals, families, communities, and groups. We have also been educated not only on the history of social work, but the history of social policy, as well as varying perspectives on current policies and how these policies impact the people with whom we work. During every class in the social work program we have incorporated all of the six values which are listed in the NASW Code of Ethics. These include service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence. Not only have we learned the Code of Ethics inside and out, but we have learned the importance of applying these values in our work. The NASW Code of Ethics distinguishes the field of Social Work. We learn to take this code very seriously, and how to apply it not only in our work with vulnerable populations, but with our future colleagues as well. We have learned the steps to take when we encounter ethical dilemmas, and how we can be supportive to colleagues who may be struggling with such dilemmas. We have learned that while not all social workers may hold similar personal values, we act in accordance with our professional values. Social work students have also been tested on ethical decision-making. We had to describe situations a specific example of a worker's personal and professional beliefs being opposed and had to use the process we learned about in class to "solve" the dilemma

We learn about various theoretical perspectives and how to apply these when working with different populations. For example, we learned how apply crisis theory when working with a person who had been sexually assaulted, or the victim of another type of crime. We had an assignment that included gathering information about a famous person, making an assessment, and applying the different theories and models that we learned in class to intervene with this person. I know that it will be more difficult when the person is a client; however, I know that I am very well prepared to provide services to those in need.

In another Social Work class, we learned even more about the human dignity and worth of a person, as well as diversity. We were able to analyze ourselves by writing a self-assessment paper. The self-assessment paper was an assignment where we were able to reflect and think back on our lives and realize when we were first introduced to and learned about people of different religions, racial and ethnic groups, gender differences, and different sexual orientations. Through this assignment, we had to think about these moments and how at that time we felt. We also had to discuss what we learned from the assignment. In the same class, one of my favorite assignments was when we had to interview someone we knew little or nothing about. The person we interviewed had to be a different race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, or at least ten years older or younger

than ourselves. One of the things that I enjoyed about this assignment, which is very important to the social work profession, was that we had to pick out the strengths of this person. This helps us in the future learn about our clients strengths through interview.

Not only have we learned about direct practice, we have had a community class as well. We were taught that social work is not limited to counseling, but there is opportunity to do community social work. We had to pick a community and write about the history of the community, had to attend council meetings, community meetings, do interviews, and obtain census data. We also learned the different interventions that are available when working within a community. We learned that if you are going to work with communities you must know the history of that area and also make yourself known to the residence of that neighborhood.

Throughout the past year I have learned the importance of the need for social workers to learn through service. During our junior year in the program, we have volunteered within our communities. The students must complete over 90 hours of social service work. Half of these hours were performed while we were enrolled in our Introduction to Social Work class. I volunteered at an after school program run by Community Human Services. Many of the children there were from impoverished families, and many were not native English speakers. Part of what I did was help the children with their homework and helped them increase their social skills. The remaining the hours were geared towards social policy. I completed the additional 45 hours of service learning with the United Steelworkers. There I learned about the history of the union movement in Pittsburgh, and how this union particularly, based on that history, supported certain pending policies and how important policy advocacy was to this organization.

All of the different activities that we worked so hard on inside the classroom, in addition to the service learning, and the field practicum that Adam will be discussing, has prepared us for our future careers in Social Work. While participating in these activities, you truly learn the importance of service and empowerment, a large component of generalist practice. In our social policy class, where we learned about social and economic justice, we were taught about the importance of knowing programs, such as, but certainly not limited to, TANF, Medicare, Medicaid, and the Food Stamp program. Our professor made it known that if you are going to become a social worker, you must be prepared to advocate. Also, with this class we were taken to the Capital building in Harrisburg and met with our local legislatures and were prepared about how to lobby on issues pertinent to social and economic justice.

It is these values, along with the knowledge we gain and skills that we learn, that make us professionals. I know that when I graduate I will have the proper knowledge, skills, and training to become a competent social worker. These skills will only improve when I continue my education in social work. The School of Social Work teaches not only the obligations we will have to our clients, but also the obligations we have to this profession.

Thank you.