Testimony in support of HB 2480

Submitted by Jill Cohen, LCSW on 2/3/26

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My name is Jill Cohen. I am a licensed clinical social worker in Colorado and the Director of Programs for the Office of Respondent Parents' Counsel, the state agency that provides attorneys to indigent parents in child welfare. I have worked on interdisciplinary legal teams for over 20 years.

I am here to share Colorado's experience updating our mandatory reporting statute and to explain why HB 2480 reflects best practices in legal advocacy. Colorado adopted similar language in our statute last year.

In 2022, the Colorado legislature convened a Mandatory Reporting Task Force[i] to address concerns about the effectiveness of reporting laws. A key question we examined was whether social workers and others working on legal teams should be mandatory reporters.

Our Task Force reviewed the mandatory reporting laws in all 50 states. We examined statutory exceptions and found that California, Louisiana, Oregon, Utah, and Washington, D.C., exempt certain professionals working with attorneys, such as guardians ad litem and social workers, from mandatory reporting requirements.

Our Task Force included foster parents, former foster youth, CASA, and child welfare professionals. After we heard from experts who expressed concern that mandatory reporting requirements for any legal team member undermines attorney-client privilege and threatens effective representation, our task force voted to propose new language.

Our amendment clarified that mandatory reporters who are employed by or contracted with attorneys providing legal services are exempt from reporting requirements when acting within that role. This includes social workers on interdisciplinary legal teams for children, youth and parents.

This language passed without opposition from the Colorado Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers, the Department of Human Services, foster parent organizations, or child advocacy groups. It is now law.[ii] Confidentiality within legal teams is essential to high-quality representation and doesn't decrease child safety.

I am a parent and I am a social worker. I am trained to recognize abuse and neglect, assess risk, refer to services, and respond to crisis. I am legally and ethically required to act when a child is in danger. I do not need an additional reporting mandate to do my job responsibly.

I do need to build trust with families. Trust allows me to help them participate in the legal process. That trust is only possible when confidentiality is respected.

HB 2480 recognizes how high-quality legal representation actually works. It protects professional ethics, strengthens attorney-client relationships, and promotes better outcomes for families. It does not reduce safety. Instead, it ensures that trained professionals can do their jobs effectively and give voice to children, youth and families, while still responding appropriately to real risk.

I respectfully recommend you support HB 2480.

Thank you.

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[i] The final Mandatory Reporting Task Force report is here: https://coloradocpo.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/CPO-MRTF-report.pdf

[ii] The Colorado statue is here: https://codes.findlaw.com/co/title-19-childrens-code/co-rev-st-sect-19-3-304/