**SB 629 Proposed Amendments regarding the creation of School Clinical Mental Health Providers**

*Amending the act of March 10, 1949 (P.L.30, No.14), entitled "An act relating to the public school system, including certain provisions applicable as well to private and parochial schools; amending, revising, consolidating and changing the laws relating thereto," in professional employees, further providing for definitions; and providing for school social workers and school clinical mental health providers.*

The Association of School Psychologists of Pennsylvania (ASPP) believes increased school mental health services are crucial. In response to the recent deliberation about SB 629, ASPP has concluded that we cannot support SB 629. Our position is that two certifications to provide mental health services in the schools already exist, school counselors and school psychologists, there is no need for the creation of the new School Clinical Mental Health Provider certification. School Counselors and School Psychologists have specific training to work with children and to work within the school system. There are identified providers in SB 629 that do not have any specific training to work with children and the schools, including Marriage and Family Therapists. This is of great concern to our organization that if SB 629 were to pass as written, unqualified individuals would potentially be providing services in the schools. Rather than creating an unnecessary certification, ASPP recommends increasing School Psychologist and School Counselor positions, thus reducing the student:staff ratio, and increasing mental health services in the schools. In addition, ASPP recognizes the need for a School Social Worker Certification in Pennsylvania, rather than a general School Clinical Mental Health Provider Certification. By recognizing a School Social Worker Certification, social work services would add additional mental health services in the schools, provided by **qualified** individuals.

The National Association of Social Workers provides regulations for individuals working in the schools. From NASW's website the requirements for Certified School Social Work Specialist (C-SSWS) are as follows:
Social workers who hold the C-SSWS have:
•       A current NASW membership;
•       An MSW degree from an institution accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE);
•       Documented two (2) academic years of paid, supervised, post-MSW experience as a school social worker in a school setting;
•       Provided an evaluation from an approved supervisor;
•       Provided a reference from an MSW colleague;
•       One of the following: current ACSW, DCSW, current state exam-based social work license, current state exam-based school social work license/certification, or passing score on ASWB exam; and Agreed to adhere to the NASW Code of Ethics, the NASW Standards for School Social Work Practice, and the NASW Standards for Continuing Professional Education, and are subject to the NASW adjudication process.

NASW specialty certifications and other professional credentials provide recognition to those who have met national standards for higher levels of experience and knowledge, and are not a substitute for required state licenses or certifications.

Of note is that NASW’s model includes extensive supervision within the school setting. Approximately 40 states recognize the School Social Worker Certification and their regulations are similar to those presented by NASW.

By creating a general SCMHP category, PA is opening the door to creating a whole new "wheel". Logic does not lend itself to creating a new category rather it seems logical for legislators in Harrisburg to replicate a model that is similar to other states. In ASPP’s opinion creating a SSW Certification, rather than a SCMHP certification, would seem the more efficient and safer approach for regulation design. Again, PA is lacking the School Social Worker Certification. If this certification was created, PA could model after other states' regulations that already exist and use NASW's own recommended model of regulation as well.

In summary, ASPP is in support of increased mental health services in the schools provided by qualified individuals. We oppose SB 629 due to concerns that unqualified professionals, such as Marriage and Family Therapists, would be providing mental health services in the schools. We support the creation of the School Social Worker certification rather than a School Clinical Mental Health Provider Certification. We also support increased School Counselors and School Psychologists to provide the school mental health services that they are already **qualified** and **certified** to provide.