

Protocol for Providing Social Work Services to GBLS Clients

GBLS has a mission to provide high quality services to clients. As a law office, we have strict obligations to protect our clients' interests and confidentiality unless a clear exception is determined by the Litigation Director. The following protocol sets forth the requirements for the operation of our BU Social Work Internship program. It applies to all GBLS clients who are provided social work services and applies at all times, regardless of whether the client presently has an open case at GBLS.

- 1. Seeking social work services for the client.** When a casehandler identifies a client whom they believe would benefit from social work services, the casehandler will inform the project coordinator (Sarah) of this and explain the client's identified need(s). The project coordinator will evaluate the case and underlying issues with the casehandler, and as needed, the social work supervisor, to determine whether the case is appropriate for the social work intern.
- 2. Offering social work services to the client.** If the screening process in paragraph 1, above, results in the approval of the case for social work services, the casehandler then will approach the client to offer social work services. In that discussion, the casehandler will explain to the client how confidentiality rules operate differently in the context of social work.
- 3. The client's acceptance of social work services.** If the client accepts the offer of social work services, the casehandler and the social work intern will set up an initial joint meeting with the client. At the meeting, the specific services being offered will be reviewed. The content of the Social Work Retainer (a separate and different retainer from the GBLS casehandler's retainer) must also be reviewed with and explained to the client, including the right of the client to terminate social work services at any time. If, after reviewing all of this information, the client changes her mind, then the Social Work Retainer should not be signed and social work services to this client should not proceed. If the client does not change her mind, she must sign the Social Work Retainer. If it is not possible for the client to come to GBLS, the Social Work Retainer may be discussed by phone and mailed. In limited cases in which no direct contact between the social work intern and the client is needed, it may be acceptable to proceed without the Social Work Retainer, however, this should be discussed with Sarah and Melanie.
- 4. Supervision of the social work intern.** The social work intern will be supervised at all times by the casehandler who referred the client, the project coordinator (Sarah), and the social work supervisor (Jane). Because of the complexity of the situations the intern will be working with, it is expected that s/he will maintain close and timely communication with these supervisors about the status of each case and about any concerns or questions which arise.
- 5. Termination of social work services.** The client has the right to terminate social work services at any time and, in certain circumstances, GBLS may determine that the GBLS

casehandler should advise the client to terminate social work services. In situations in which there is reason to consider advising termination of social work services, the casehandler will discuss the case with Sarah and Melanie. If social work services are terminated, then the casehandler, Sarah and/or Melanie (if Sarah is not available or if Sarah involves Melanie), the intern, and Jane will discuss and decide the content and means of closure of the social work case (such as through a closing letter).

6. Communication of confidential information. If a client has elected to terminate social work services, the casehandler may not be able to share information not previously shared with the social work intern and supervisor, including information obtained in connection with on-going work on the client's legal case. Even if the legal case is closed, the obligation of confidentiality, which applies to all GBLS staff members, not just to the attorneys, may preclude sharing information. To the extent possible within the bounds of our obligations, as a law office, to our clients, the GBLS staff member involved will communicate information that may help bring closure to the social work intern's and supervisor's case, including any concerns they may have about the client or her children.

7. If concerns about the client arise. If, at any time, a social work intern encounters a situation that raises concerns about the presence of, or potential for abuse or neglect of a child, the intern will immediately speak with the casehandler, the unit managing attorney (Melanie), the project coordinator (Sarah), and the social work supervisor (Jane). The social work intern will e-mail and leave a voice mail message for anyone of these persons who is not immediately available, providing details about the situation and concerns. In the event of an emergency during which neither Melanie nor Sarah are available, the social work intern will seek out another attorney in the Welfare Law Unit, Litigation Director Dan Manning, Deputy Director Jacqui Bowman, or Executive Director Bob Sable. The intern should also communicate her concern to her social work supervisor (Jane). Those present will evaluate the situation and involve others as appropriate. The goal at this stage would be to respond to the situation in a way that will minimize the likelihood of a report to DSS.

8. If it appears a report to DSS may need to be made. If the social work supervisor at any time determines that the child is suffering physical or emotional injury resulting from abuse which causes harm or substantial risk of harm, or from neglect by a caretaker (which are the criteria for reporting to DSS under the statute, G.L. 119 §51A), the social work supervisor (and the intern, if appropriate and feasible), will discuss the situation with Sarah, Melanie, and Dan (or Jacqui or Bob, if Dan is not available) before taking any additional steps. To the extent allowed in light of the particular circumstances and client, the discussion will involve an attempt to evaluate the risk for harm to a child and the appropriate next steps to take. Wherever appropriate, all remedial measures will be taken to address the possible abuse or neglect and underlying problems before a decision is made to file a report with DSS.

9. Casehandler communication with client about a possible report to DSS. Before a decision has been made to file a report with the DSS, the casehandler will notify the client of the social work supervisor's concerns and the possibility of a report being filed with DSS. The casehandler will notify the client that this report does not affect the casehandler's duties or representation. The casehandler will advise the client, based on the discussions held under

paragraphs 7 and/or 8, above, of steps she may be able to take to address the concerns and avoid a report.

10. If a report is to be filed. If the conclusion is reached by the social work supervisor that a report must be filed with DSS, the social work intern and/or supervisor will inform the client prior to the filing of the report. This should be done by telephone, if possible, rather than by letter, unless the casehandler informs them that the client does not wish to receive a call.

11. Representation regarding a DSS case. If a report is filed with DSS, GBLS will try to locate appropriate outside legal representation for the client, but such representation cannot be assured by GBLS.