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RALLYING 'ROUND REID — Last week's report on how Assemblyman Jerome Horton changed his constituent-driven child abuse reporting bill, AB 1949, into a measure having something to do with horse racing generated a groundswell of indignant reactions from local residents and elected officials, including a haughty response from a representative of the National Association of Social Workers, who demanded a correction of that group's reported position, which put the whole issue in its proper perspective for me.

Sandwiched among the many calls I received from people who wanted to reach out and help Debra Reid, the prime mover of the jettisoned child abuse bill, was one from Wendy Hill, director of government relations and political affairs for the NASW who wanted to make it crystal clear that her group opposed the original child abuse bill. "We rejoiced when he [Horton] changed that bill into a horse racing bill," she declared.

The fact that Hill was so pleased with Horton made me very angry for a number of reasons. To wit: Reid is black and her 9-year-old son, Jonathan, was killed in foster care due to an action or inaction of a professional social worker charged with insuring his well-being while in the care of the state. Hill is white, as is probably a majority of the social workers in her national organization, despite the fact that the overwhelming majority of children in our dysfunctional foster care system are black and brown. Reid is grieving and obsessed with correcting a flaw in that system that killed her son. Hill is po'd at Reid, is obsessed with protecting social workers' butts and is livid at the very idea that a law may be enacted to make it easier for social workers to be held responsible for their actions should they lead to the death of a child. Parents, pedophiles and gang-bangers are held responsible for the death of children, why not social workers? Why are they so special?

Hill told me the only organization that supports Reid and her parent coalition's quest to enact the original AB 1949 is the Greater Los Angeles Chapter of the Association of Black Social Workers. "But they're working as a rogue group, since the state and national associations both oppose the original legislation," Hill explained. Now, this comment angered me beyond expression. To whom did Hill think she was speaking? Did she not know that I am black and, therefore, have a knee-jerk reaction to black peoples' points of view? That I live in, work in and love Greater Los Angeles, home of my favorite black people? That the Minutemen, the abolitionists, the civil rights organizations were "rogue"

groups, and that only “rogue” groups achieve change in this society of ours, while groups like hers — the NASWs of the world — fight like hell to maintain the status quo?

The fact that these local black social workers have championed the cause to correct a situation they perceive as killing local black children is enough for me. And it’s enough for a lot of people, whom Reid plans to convene in a coming town hall meeting on the issues surrounding the original AB 1949. And it’s enough for Assemblyman-elect Curren Price, who Reid said informed her last week that the first thing he’s going to do after he’s sworn into office to replace Horton is re-introduce the original child abuse reporting bill and subject it to the full range of hearings and public debate it deserves, so that whatever killed Jonathan Reid does not claim another little black life.

I want to thank Wendy Hill for calling me to correct her organization’s position and for giving me a better understanding of what’s really going on here — the parents and the people versus the holier-than-thou professionals, an age-old story. And since she seems to read this column thoroughly, I say to Hill: Don’t ever call me again. I don’t think my blood pressure can take it.