

## COMMENT ON "DO THE RIGHT THING"

By Mary Ann Jimenez

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The author demonstrated her commitment to the profession of social work even as she ignored the rules of the institution in which she was placed. When human life and well being are at stake, as in the case of prison inmates who did not have the means to protect themselves from HIV infection during sexual contact, than a social worker is justified in rule breaking. Is this not at the heart of our profession, whose commitment to social justice, human dignity and client empowerment has distinguished it from all other professions since its inception?

When prison officials implicitly allowed sexual contact to occur between inmates, inmates should have the power to protect themselves from life-threatening disease. Social workers are not only employees or students placed in custodial institutions. Like other professionals, we have a broader commitment — to the ethics of our profession and to our own consciences. Social workers who have been activists in social and political struggles in the past have been forced to break institutional rules (the rules about needle exchange for drug users come to mind). This story was no exception to this tradition. □



*Faithfully yours  
Jane Addams*

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