

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## SSB 6550

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**As Reported By House Committee On:**  
Health Care

**Title:** An act relating to chemical dependency counselor regulation.

**Brief Description:** Certifying chemical dependency professionals.

**Sponsors:** Senate Committee on Health & Long-Term Care (originally sponsored by Senators Deccio, Wojahn, Wood and Fairley).

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

Health Care: 2/20/98, 2/24/98 [DPA].

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### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH CARE

**Majority Report:** Do pass as amended. Signed by 11 members: Representatives Dyer, Chairman; Backlund, Vice Chairman; Skinner, Vice Chairman; Cody, Ranking Minority Member; Murray, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Anderson; Conway; Parlette; Sherstad; Wood and Zellinsky.

**Staff:** John Welsh (786-7133).

**Background:** Under current law, chemical dependency counselors must be registered as counselors and are subject to the state's disciplinary process for health care practitioners under the Uniform Disciplinary Act. If they work in treatment programs certified by the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS), they are also required to meet the department's chemical dependency program requirements.

Private certification is available through two private chemical dependency counselor certification boards in the state.

**Summary of Bill as Amended:** A certification program is established for chemical dependency professionals administered by the Department of Health. Persons practicing chemical dependency counseling may represent themselves as "certified chemical dependency professionals" by meeting specified certification requirements. Applicants must pay a certification fee, pass an examination, and satisfy the education and experience requirements approved by the Secretary of Health in consultation with the

Chemical Dependency Certification Advisory Committee. The secretary is authorized to approve educational programs and alternative training.

Chemical dependency counselors treating patients in settings other than programs approved by the DSHS may not represent themselves as Chemical Dependency Professionals.

Psychologists and advanced registered nurse practitioners may also qualify for certification. The secretary may not require more than 1500 hours in meeting an experience requirement.

Chemical dependency counseling employs the core competencies of chemical dependency counseling to an alcohol or drug addicted person to develop and maintain abstinence from alcohol and other mood altering drugs.

A Chemical Dependency Advisory Committee is established of seven members to advise the secretary on the implementation of the certification program. The membership is composed of four certified chemical dependency professionals; one registered program director; one physician or mental health practitioner; and a person receiving chemical dependency counseling.

Certified chemical dependency professionals are subject to the Uniform Disciplinary Act for health professionals.

Within two years of the effective date of this law, the secretary may waive the examination requirement and certify a person who produces a valid chemical dependency certificate of qualification from the DSHS. The secretary may also waive the examination requirement for psychologists and advanced nurse practitioners with substantially equivalent education and with 1500 hours of relevant experience. The secretary may certify without examination a person credentialed in another state with substantially equivalent certification standards.

**Amended Bill Compared to Original Bill:** Counselors may not refer to themselves as "certified chemical dependency professionals" when treating patients in settings other than programs approved by the DSHS. There are certification tracks provided for psychologists and advanced nurse practitioners.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Effective Date:** The bill takes effect on July 1, 1998, except for sections 3, 9, 13, and 14, which take effect on July 1, 1999.

**Testimony For:** There is a need to identify qualified chemical dependency professionals, and establish formal education and training qualifications for counseling patients for chemical abuse and addiction.

**Testimony Against:** The educational qualifications of chemical dependency counselors are not at the master's degree level, and they should not be certified and accorded recognition. However, the amended bill is acceptable as it limits title recognition to current DSHS programs, and provides certification tracks for psychologists and advanced nurse practitioners.

**Testified:** Don Thomas, Counselor; John Horngren, Adolescent Providers; Scott Munson, Sundown M Ranch; Linda Grant, AAP; Lonnie Johns-Brown; Ken Ackerman and Ann Simonds, Washington Association of Marriage and Family Counselors; Gail McGaffick, Washington State Psychological Association; Sharon Case, Association of Advanced Practice Psychiatric Nurses; Ken Stark, Department of Social and Health Services; Laura Groshong, Washington State Coalition of Mental Health Professionals and Consumers; and Steve Lindstrom, Washington State Association of Independent Outpatient Programs.