

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2291

As Reported By House Committee On:
Health Care

Title: An act relating to the certification of mental health counselors.

Brief Description: Modifying certification of mental health counselors.

Sponsors: Representatives Dellwo, Dyer, Ballasiotes, R. Johnson, Thibaudeau, L. Johnson and Pruitt.

Brief History:

Reported by House Committee on:
Health Care, February 1, 1994, DPS.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH CARE

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 16 members: Representatives Dellwo, Chair; L. Johnson, Vice Chair; Dyer, Ranking Minority Member; Ballasiotes, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Appelwick; Backlund; Conway; Cooke; Flemming; R. Johnson; Lemmon; Lisk; Mastin; Morris; Thibaudeau and Veloria.

Staff: John Welsh (786-7133).

Background: Mental health counselors who meet the qualifications specified by law may become certified by the Department of Health as meeting particular standards of competence, and may employ in connection with their practice the title of "certified mental health counselor."

Applicants for certification as mental health counselors must possess at least a master's degree in mental health counseling or equivalent semester hours in a substantially equivalent field, and postgraduate supervised practice. They must also pass an examination and have 24 months of postgraduate professional experience in a mental health setting.

However, initial applicants for certification who possessed at least a master's degree in mental health counseling within 18 months of July 26, 1987 (the effective date of the law), qualified for the examination, notwithstanding the

supervised practice requirement. Also, no examination, education, postgraduate practice or experience was required of any applicant for a year following July 26, 1987, as a condition of certification.

Certified mental health counseling is defined as a service emphasizing a wellness model rather than an illness model.

There is no provision for continuing education.

Summary of Substitute Bill: The qualifications for certification of mental health counselors may include an equivalent behavioral science master's or doctoral degree in a related field as determined by the Secretary of Health, as well as two years of postgraduate supervised practice.

The definition of certified mental health counseling is augmented to include the assessment, diagnosis and treatment of mental and emotional disorders.

The Secretary of Health is authorized to adopt rules requiring mandatory continuing education.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The substitute bill deletes the requirement of the Secretary of Health to mandate continuing education, making it discretionary, and deletes the retroactive application of new educational requirements on existing practitioners.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: The bill generally updates the practice law for mental health counselors to eliminate obsolete grandparent clauses; clarifies the treatment modalities; and addresses continuing education.

Testimony Against: None.

Witnesses: Robert Weeks, Washington Mental Health Care Association (pro); and Dee Spice, Department of Health.