

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## HB 2715

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

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

**Brief Description:** Regulating chemical dependency counselors.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Skinner, Cody, Cooke, Wolfe, Dyer, Backlund, Ballasiotes and Costa.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

Health Care: 1/29/98, 2/3/98 [DPS].

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### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH CARE

**Majority Report:** The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 8 members: Representatives Dyer, Chairman; Backlund, Vice Chairman; Skinner, Vice Chairman; Cody, Ranking Minority Member; Anderson; Parlette; Wood and Zellinsky.

**Minority Report:** Do not pass. Signed by 3 members: Representatives Murray, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Conway and Sherstad.

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

**Background:** Currently, persons providing chemical dependency counseling services are required by law to register as counselors, and are accountable under the Uniform Disciplinary Act governing the regulated health professions. The Department of Social and Health Services requires chemical dependency counselors providing services through approved chemical dependency treatment programs to meet departmental educational and training requirements.

**Summary of Substitute Bill:** There is a legislative declaration that chemical dependency treatment is an important health care service. Assuring competency of the individual providing chemical dependency assessment, treatment planning, and counseling is essential to the public safety.

Chemical dependency counseling is defined as employing the core competencies of chemical dependency counseling to assist a person to maintain abstinence from alcohol and drugs.

After July 1, 1999, no person may for a fee represent himself or herself by use of any title or description of services as a chemical dependency professional without being certified for practice by the Department of Health. Federal employees and students are exempted from this law.

The Secretary of Health administers the certification program with authority to adopt rules, set certification fees, establish forms, and set standards for chemical dependency treatment. The secretary shall establish and is advised by a chemical dependency certification advisory committee in the implementation of this law. The secretary acts as the disciplining authority for certified chemical dependency professionals who are subject to the Uniform Disciplinary Act.

Applicants for certification must meet the educational requirements approved by the Secretary of Health, and pass an approved examination. The secretary establishes by rule the standards and procedures for approval of education programs, and sets the date and location of examinations.

The secretary shall automatically certify applicants holding certificates of qualification from the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS), waiving the examination requirement; and certify applicants with at least 4,000 hours of chemical dependency counseling or treatment experience in a treatment program certified by the DSHS upon passing the examination. The Department of Health is intended to be the sole credentialing agency. An applicant holding a credential from another state may be certified without examination if the secretary determines that the other state has substantially equivalent standards.

**Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:** Changes effective dates and makes technical amendments.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Not requested.

**Effective Date of Substitute Bill:** The bill takes effect on July 1, 1998, except for sections 3, 8, 13, and 16 which take effect on July 1, 1999.

**Testimony For:** Chemical dependency professionals provide the bulk of therapeutic counseling in this state through programs approved by the DSHS. They must currently meet educational and practice standards, and can be certified through national chemical dependency educational programs.

**Testimony Against:** Chemical dependency counselors do not possess masters degrees and therefore should not be certified.

**Testified:** Linda Grant, Association of Alcoholism and Addition Program; Pat Knox, Central Seattle Recovery Center; Bob Newton, Counselor; Ron Weaver, Department of Health; Ann Simonds, Washington Association for Marriage & Family Therapy; Laura Groshong, Washington State Society for Clinical Social Workers; Lucy Homans, Washington State Psychological Association; Harry Barth, Barth Clinic; and Don Thomas, (Counselor) and Steve Lindstrom, Washington State Association of Independent Outpatient Programs.