

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6630

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Health & Long-Term Care, February 6, 1998

Title: An act relating to counselors.

Brief Description: Clarifying continuing education requirements for counselors.

Sponsors: Senators Wood, Fairley, Strannigan, Wojahn, Rasmussen and Thibaudeau.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Health & Long-Term Care: 2/3/98, 2/6/98 [DP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH & LONG-TERM CARE

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Deccio, Chair; Wood, Vice Chair; Benton, Fairley, Franklin, Strannigan and Wojahn.

Staff: Joan K. Mell (786-7447)

Background: In this state, counselors must be registered or certified as marriage and family therapists, mental health counselors, or social workers. Certification may include continuing competence requirements by rule, but are not mandated by statute. The Department of Health considered implementation of a rule for counselors continuing education. The rule would have required certified counselors obtain 36 clock hours of continuing education during the two-year reporting period immediately preceding renewal of certification, at least six hours in professional ethics and law. This rule was never adopted. Therefore, counselors are asking for a mandatory continuing competency requirement.

The Legislature, by statute, has expressed concern regarding the appropriateness of mandated continuing education. Statute requires any legislative proposal containing a continuing education requirement be accompanied by evidence that the requirement has been proven effective for the profession addressed in the legislation.

Summary of Bill: Statutes concerning certification of counselors are amended to require 36 clock hours of continuing education during the two-year reporting period immediately preceding renewal of certification, at least six hours of which must be in professional ethics and law.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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

Testimony For: Concern about credibility of profession motivates certified counselors to seek imposition of this requirement on themselves. Education is important. Many other professions have similar requirements.

Testimony Against: The dual objective of continuing education having a positive impact on competence as well as the mandating of continuing education having a positive impact on competence are not established by studies to date.

Testified: Pat Brown, DOH; PRO: Laura Groshong, WA State Society for Clinical Social Work; Ann Simons, WA Association for Marriage and Family Therapy.