

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 5505

---

---

As of February 2, 2001

**Title:** An act relating to increasing the supply of dentists to meet the critical shortage of dental providers in this state and underserved areas.

**Brief Description:** Increasing the supply of dentists to meet the critical shortage of dental providers in this state and underserved areas.

**Sponsors:** Senators Thibaudeau, Deccio, Franklin, Costa and Kohl-Welles.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Health & Long-Term Care: 2/5/01.

---

### SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH & LONG-TERM CARE

**Staff:** Rhoda Donkin (786-7198)

**Background:** Studies have shown that access to oral health care for low-income families is restricted in this state by a shortage of dentists. Currently, 25 percent of all the state's dentists care for over 80 percent of low-income children. There are 24 openings for dentists in federally qualified community health centers which provide health services in the most underserved areas of the state.

Trends show the overall number of dentists may decline. Over a third of the state's currently licensed dentists are over age 55, and a recent study showed that in Yakima, 45 percent reported they would be retiring in the next five years.

There is concern that as dentists retire, there won't be enough new licensees to replace them. Currently, Washington only accepts licensed dentists coming in from 16 other states around the country, 10 fewer states than were accepted five years ago. Dentists entering from a state like California or New York, must be relicensed through an exam.

**Summary of Bill:** Any licensed dentist who is currently practicing may be granted a license in this state if the other state's licensing standards are substantially equivalent to those of this state and the applicant is a graduate of an approved dental school.

Any licensed dentist may be granted a license without examination in this state if the applicant has graduated from an approved dental school, and agrees to practice in a critical needs area as defined by the Secretary of the Department of Health. After three years of practice in a critical needs area, the applicant is granted a license to practice anywhere in the state. The applicant must file specific information with the state documenting his or her knowledge of Washington State law pertaining to dentistry.

Any dentist holding a valid license and currently engaged in practice in the military may be granted a license without examination if the secretary determines the applicant has graduated from an approved dental school.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Requested on January 31, 2001.

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