

FINAL BILL REPORT

ESSB 5877

C 251 L 01
Synopsis as Enacted

Brief Description: Providing licensing standards for mental health counselors, marriage and family therapists, and social workers.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Health & Long-Term Care (originally sponsored by Senators Thibaudeau, Winsley, Costa and Kohl-Welles).

Senate Committee on Health & Long-Term Care

House Committee on Health Care

House Committee on Appropriations

Background: Under current provisions of state law, a person who refers to him or herself as a counselor must be registered with the Department of Health. Registration brings the counselor under the Uniform Disciplinary Act, which regulates the practice. Registration does not require education, training or experience.

Certain counselors meeting specified education, training and experience requirements may be certified. Certified counselors are covered by the Uniform Disciplinary Act. Certification also provides title protection for the term "state certified."

Social workers, marriage and family therapists, and mental health counselors each have national associations with model licensing acts. These national models protect a specified title and scope of practice. This state does not have state licensing for these counselors.

In January of 2001, the Department of Health issued a sunrise review report on a bill similar to this legislation. The department made three recommendations: the legislation proposed should not be enacted because the requisite harm to the public was not demonstrated; further investigation is required to ensure there are no reimbursement problems; and finally, privileged communication requirements for all counselors "make sense."

Summary: Mental health counselors, marriage and family therapists, and social workers may be licensed if they meet certain education, experience, and training requirements. They must pass an exam and pay a fee.

The titles "licensed advanced social worker," "licensed independent clinical social worker," "licensed mental health counselor," or "licensed marriage and family therapist" are protected.

The Department of Health regulates the practice.

Certified counselors are eliminated.

Votes on Final Passage:

Senate 35 14
House 95 0 (House amended)
Senate 33 15 (Senate concurred)

Effective: July 22, 2001