

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## 2SHB 2912

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As Reported By Senate Committee On:  
Human Services & Corrections, February 23, 2006

**Title:** An act relating to home visits by mental health professionals.

**Brief Description:** Requiring that mental health professionals do private home visits in pairs and providing for other safety and violence prevention measures.

**Sponsors:** House Committee on Appropriations (originally sponsored by Representatives Green, Appleton, Woods, Cody, Moeller, Haigh, Conway, Lantz, Hudgins, Roberts, McCoy, Kenney, Morrell, P. Sullivan, Hasegawa, Kilmer, Simpson and Ormsby).

**Brief History:** Passed House: 2/13/06, 76-22.

**Committee Activity:** Human Services & Corrections: 2/23/06 [DPA-WM].

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & CORRECTIONS

**Majority Report:** Do pass as amended and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Hargrove, Chair; Regala, Vice Chair; Stevens, Ranking Minority Member; Brandland, Carrell, McAuliffe and Thibaudeau.

**Staff:** Indu Thomas (786-7536)

**Background:** The mental health professionals who perform the initial evaluations and detentions pursuant to the involuntary commitment statutes and provide crisis outreach services for individuals with mental disorders in Washington State are known as designated mental health professionals. Designated mental health professionals (DMHPs) occasionally evaluate people for involuntary detention or do crisis outreach services in the home of individuals with mental disorders.

**Summary of Amended Bill:** Designated mental health professionals or other mental health crisis outreach workers who visit clients in their homes will be accompanied by another worker, except under certain circumstances. Employers of mental health workers who engage in home visits will ensure that they are equipped with a device which will permit communication. Mental health workers dispatched on a crisis outreach visit will have access to existing case files on the client they are visiting. All community mental health workers who work directly with clients will be provided with training on safety and violence reduction.

**Amended Bill Compared to Original Bill:** The amendment describes situations in which exceptions can be made to the general rule of requiring two mental health workers on home visits. Employers will confirm that DMHPs do home visits with an effective communication device.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Committee/Commission/Task Force Created:** No.

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

**Testimony For:** The death of Marty Smith, an experienced mental health worker who was murdered by a client on a home visit, is an extreme example of a more pervasive problem, workplace violence against community mental health workers. People grappling with mental illness are not inherently more dangerous than the public overall. Designated mental health professionals and other community mental health workers interact with clients when they are in crisis. Increasing caseloads hurt clients and compromise the quality of services that are available to those same clients. The complexity of client conditions has increased. This also puts community mental health workers at greater risk. In particular, clients who have been using methamphetamine display superhuman strength. Increasing numbers of community mental health workers have reported feeling unsafe on the job. Community mental health workers are concerned about inadequate training and back-up. Workers need training in violence prevention, cell phones so that they can contact law enforcement when necessary, and information regarding the clients that they are called upon to assess.

**Testimony Against:** None.

**Testimony Other:** Funding for increasing this type of service must be provided to the regional support networks or it will be diverted from other direct services. There are a number of RSNs who already use discretion in determining when to request law enforcement assists or a back-up worker on home visits.

**Who Testified:** PRO: Jonathan Rosenblum, Yolanda Smith, Hannah Antkol, and David Lindseth SEIU1199.

OTHER: Jean Wessman, Association of Counties.