
**Health Care & Wellness
Committee**

HB 2015

Brief Description: Licensing genetic counselors.

Sponsors: Representatives Schual-Berke, McIntire, Cody, Morrell and Kenney.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Establishes genetic counselors as a new health profession to be licensed by the Department of Health.

Hearing Date: 2/13/07

Staff: Chris Blake (786-7392).

Background:

Genetic tests are medical tests that identify changes in chromosomes, genes, or proteins. These tests include newborn screenings performed immediately after the birth of a child; diagnostic testing to identify or rule out a genetic condition as the cause of a patient's signs and symptoms; predictive testing which detects gene mutations that may lead to a medical condition at a later time; carrier testing for people with a family history of a genetic disorder; prenatal testing conducted during a pregnancy to determine the risk that an infant will have a genetic disorder; and preimplantation testing conducted in association with in-vitro fertilization.

Genetic consultations are a type of health service that provides information and support to individuals who have a genetic disorder or may be at risk for one. A genetic consultation may include a discussion of genetic risks or it may determine the presence or absence of a genetic condition. The consultation process occurs between a genetic professional and an individual or a family. Genetic professionals include physicians who specialize in genetics, genetic counselors, and nurses, psychologists, and other counselors who are trained in genetics and provide consultations.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

In January 2006, the Department of Health (Department) issued a sunrise review that found that the licensing of genetic counselors did not meet the sunrise criteria. Specifically, the Department did not find any harm that would be changed by licensing genetic counselors and that private certification organizations offered adequate assurances of competency.

Summary of Bill:

Genetic counselors are created as a new profession to be regulated by the Secretary of Health (Secretary). To practice genetic counseling one must hold a license issued by the Secretary. "Genetic counseling" means a communication process that involves estimating the likelihood of the occurrence or recurrence of a birth defect or any potentially inherited or genetically influenced condition. In addition, genetic counseling includes helping people appreciate the medical and psychological implications of a disorder and facilitate decision-making regarding testing or medical interventions. Genetic counseling includes selecting methods of diagnosis and recommending or ordering genetic tests pursuant to a collaborative agreement with a physician or osteopathic physician.

An applicant for a license to practice genetic counseling must demonstrate that he or she has (1) graduated from a master's or doctorate program in genetic counseling or medical genetics, (2) completed any clinical experience requirements established by the Secretary, and (3) passed an examination approved by the Secretary. The Secretary may grant a license without examination to an applicant who holds a license in another state with substantially equivalent licensing standards or to an applicant who has practiced genetic counseling in Washington for five of the six years prior to July 1, 2008.

Exemptions from licensing requirements are established for health care providers who hold a credential that includes the functions of a genetic counselor; individuals enrolled in an educational program; individuals practicing under the supervision of a genetic counselor while gathering logbook cases to meet licensing requirements; individuals employed by the federal government; and individuals licensed in another state with only occasional practice in Washington.

The Advisory Committee on Genetic Counseling (Committee) is established. The Secretary shall appoint the five members of the Committee which include three genetic counselors, one health care provider with genetic expertise, and one public member. The Committee is responsible for providing advice and recommendations to the Department involving developments in the practice of genetic counseling, the establishment of case disposition guidelines, the review of reports of unprofessional conduct, and the establishment of continuing competency programs.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 12, 2007.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect August 1, 2008.