

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5220

As of January 27, 2009

Title: An act relating to protecting consumers by assuring persons using the title of social worker have graduated with a degree in social work from an educational program accredited by the council on social work education.

Brief Description: Regarding the designation of "social worker."

Sponsors: Senators Franklin, Stevens, Hargrove, Regala and Murray.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Human Services & Corrections: 1/27/09.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & CORRECTIONS

Staff: Jennifer Strus (786-7316)

Background: Classifications of Social Workers Licensed by the Department of Health. "Licensed advanced social workers" and "licensed independent clinical social workers" are licensed by the Department of Health (DOH) to provide mental health-related counseling, often in an independent practice setting. Persons who are licensed through DOH as licensed advanced social workers and licensed independent clinical social workers must meet certain requirements, including graduation from an approved master's or doctoral level social work program.

Classifications of Social Workers through the State's Department of Personnel (DOP). State agencies in Washington employ persons who are classified by DOP as "social workers." Rather than provide direct mental health-related counseling services to clients, social workers in state agencies may refer clients to professionals in various fields, including counseling, who provide the service directly. Minimum qualifications of an entry level social worker under DOP's classification system is: (1) a master's degree in social services, human services, behavioral sciences, or an allied field; or (2) a bachelor's degree in social services, human services, behavioral sciences, or an allied field and one year of social service experience.

Summary of Bill: A person may not represent him or herself as a "social worker" unless the person is licensed under RCW 18.225.090 as an advanced social worker or an independent

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social worker, or the person has graduated with a bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree from a social work educational program accredited by the Council on Social Work.

Unless the person meets the definition of "social worker" above, no person employed by a public or private agency may use the title of social worker or a form of the title to describe or designate a volunteer or employed position. No public or private agency may use the title in contracts for services, reference materials, manuals or other documents unless the volunteer or employee meets the definition of "social worker."

Any person employed in Washington may use the title "social worker" even if the person does not meet the above definition if, at the time this bill becomes effective, the person was using that title during the time he or she is continually employed in the same position and under the same job description.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: The list of services provided by social workers and clinical social workers is extensive. The importance of social work education cannot be underestimated to ethically help the many people who use social work services. The understanding of people and their needs can only be obtained through the kind of education provided in accredited schools of social work. A true social worker is one who has graduated from a bachelors, Masters, or doctoral program accredited by the Council on Social Work Education. Currently, in private agencies and state government, there are significant numbers of people holding the title of social worker who have not been trained in social work. But the public see their title as social worker and assume that they are trained representatives of the social work profession, which they are not. It is a deception to the consumer to call them social workers. In public agencies, new hires should not be called social workers unless they meet the requirements of the bill. The bill is placed in Title 28B because of its relation to how a degree is represented. Enforcement of the bill, if it remains in Title 28B, would be under the Consumer Protection Act.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Franklin, prime sponsor; Laura Groshong, Washington State Society for Clinical Social Work; Hoyt Suppes, National Association of Social Workers (NASW), Washington Chapter; Bob Cooper, NASW.