

FINAL BILL REPORT

ESSB 5020

C 89 L 11
Synopsis as Enacted

Brief Description: 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.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Human Services & Corrections (originally sponsored by Senators Murray, Regala, Kohl-Welles, Prentice and Chase).

Senate Committee on Human Services & Corrections
House Committee on Health Care & Wellness

Background: Classifications of Social Workers Licensed by the Department of Health (DOH). Licensed advanced social workers and licensed independent clinical social workers are licensed by 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 only direct mental health-related counseling services to clients, social workers in state agencies may also 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 are: (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: A person may only use the designation of social worker if the person is licensed by DOH as a social worker, or has graduated with at least a bachelor's degree from a social work educational program accredited by the Council on Social Work Education.

The provisions of this act do not apply to:

- persons employed in Washington on the effective date of the act with the job title of social worker, so long as the person remains employed with the same agency;
- persons employed by the state of Washington with the job title of social worker, so long as the person remains employed with the state;

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.

- individuals employed by the government of the United States while engaged in the performance of duties prescribed by the laws of the United States; or
- persons providing services as an educational staff associate who are certified by the Washington Professional Educator Standards Board.

References to the term social worker throughout the RCW are modified to reference the educational requirements for a qualified social worker depending on the setting or persons being served as follows:

- a person must have a master's or other advanced degree in social work to use the designation of social worker when: providing services to those with mental illness, and supervising court-ordered contact between a child who has been sexually abused by a parent and the offending parent;
- a person must have a bachelor's degree in social work to use the designation of social worker when providing rehabilitative services in nursing homes;
- a person must have a bachelor's degree in social work or meet the federal qualifications for a social worker in order to use the designation of social worker when providing services to those in home health or hospice care; and
- job titles previously designated as social worker but for which there is no educational requirement in social work have been removed and are replaced with the term department employee.

For purposes of mandatory reporting of abuse, the term social worker includes anyone who has a bachelor's degree in social work or who is engaged in a professional capacity working with vulnerable adults during the regular course of his or her employment.

Engaging in the improper practice of social work is an unfair trade practice and unfair method of competition under the Consumer Protection Act.

Votes on Final Passage:

Senate	44	5
House	76	20

Effective: January 1, 2012.