

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 5513

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As of February 10, 2011

**Title:** An act relating to child protective services workers.

**Brief Description:** Requiring that child protective service workers be licensed as social workers and bonded.

**Sponsors:** Senators Roach, Prentice, Hargrove, Stevens and Shin.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Human Services & Corrections: 2/08/11.

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & CORRECTIONS

**Staff:** Jennifer Strus (786-7316)

**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 under chapter 18.225 RCW 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.

There are many types of surety bonds each with a different obligation and bond form. For example, there are license bonds which guarantee the principal will comply with applicable codes and regulations established by a government entity. Washington currently requires these kinds of bonds for contractors, pest inspectors, plumbers, auctioneers etcetera.

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A public official bond guarantees that elected or appointed officials will faithfully perform their duties. The bond amount as well as duties are usually specified by statute or ordinance. For example, Washington requires that court stenographers, members of the Gambling Commission, and members of the Dairy Commission have a surety bond.

A probate bond guarantees an honest accounting and faithful performance of duties by fiduciaries/trustees. These bonds are required by courts or statutes and are set up and administered as estates of deceased persons, incompetent persons, and minors.

Other judicial bonds may be required by a court in cases where someone is seeking legal benefit or relief. Types of court bonds include appeal, injunction, attachment and release of lien bonds.

**Summary of Bill:** A child protective services worker who is directly engaged in the following activities must be a licensed social worker in good standing under RCW 18.225 and bonded:

- investigating reports of alleged abuse or neglect;
- assessing risk of abuse or neglect to children; or
- providing services to children or referring children to services to remedy conditions that endanger the health, safety and welfare of children.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**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: Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee did a study a few years ago about social worker qualifications and education levels. Most social workers and supervisors do not have advanced degrees. Perhaps with more education, social workers and supervisors would do a better job. Washington already licenses a lot of professions, mostly for consumer safety. No real place for CPS consumers to go if they have a complaint. To keep licenses current, many professionals must have continuing education credits and this bill would raise the standards of who is involved in CPS cases. There are a number of errors made in court by social workers and if we increase their qualifications then can do a better job for the citizens and children in Washington.

CON: This bill would cripple the efforts of the Children's Administration to protect children. It would have the effect of eliminating many trained and experienced social workers. The bill would immediately exclude a number of people from this work and would exclude numerous people who have degrees in psychology, criminal justice, sociology from being social workers. Master of Social Work programs focus very little on child welfare issues. Graduate programs are expensive and there is no allowance for the state to pay part of the cost. Being licensed would cost each social worker about \$5,000 in addition to the extensive

training requirements that would delay their ability to continue working. It is hard enough to recruit CPS social workers and this bill would make it even more difficult.

**Persons Testifying:** PRO: Senator Roach, prime sponsor.

CON: Regina Patterson, Washington Federation of State Employees.