

SENATE BILL REPORT

EHB 2108

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Health Care, February 27, 2014

Title: An act relating to hearing instrument fitter/dispensers.

Brief Description: Concerning hearing instrument fitter/dispensers.

Sponsors: Representatives Ross, Moeller and Johnson.

Brief History: Passed House: 2/18/14, 86-12.

Committee Activity: Health Care: 2/25/14, 2/27/14 [DPA, w/oRec].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH CARE

Majority Report: Do pass as amended.

Signed by Senators Becker, Chair; Dammeier, Vice Chair; Pedersen, Ranking Member; Angel, Bailey, Cleveland and Keiser.

Minority Report: That it be referred without recommendation.

Signed by Senator Parlette.

Staff: Mich'l Needham (786-7442)

Background: A hearing instrument fitter/dispenser is authorized to sell, lease, or rent hearing instruments; modify hearing instruments; administer non-diagnostic tests; and use other procedures essential to these functions. The practice of fitting and dispensing hearing instruments includes the following:

- recommending specific hearing instrument systems, specific hearing instruments, or specific hearing instrument characteristics;
- taking impressions for ear molds;
- using non-diagnostic procedures and equipment to verify the appropriateness of the hearing instrument fitting; and
- performing hearing instrument orientation.

To be licensed as a hearing instrument fitter/dispenser, a person must:

- complete a two-year degree program in hearing instrument fitter/dispenser education approved by the Board of Hearing and Speech (Board) and pass an examination;

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- hold a current license from another jurisdiction whose standards are substantially equivalent to Washington's; or
- hold a current license from another jurisdiction; demonstrate that the person has actively practiced in the other jurisdiction for at least 48 of the past 60 months; achieve active certification from the International Hearing Society or the National Board for Certification in Hearing Instrument Sciences; and pass an examination.

Summary of Bill (Recommended Amendments): Hearing instrument fitters/dispensers are re-named hearing aid specialists.

An alternate path to certification is created for hearing aid specialists. A person may be certified as a hearing aid specialist if the person satisfactorily completes the following:

- a two-year or four-year degree in a field of study approved by the Board;
- a nine-month certificate program offered by a Board-approved hearing aid specialist program;
- a practical examination approved by the Board, which must be given at least quarterly and may be proctored by industry experts hired by the Board; and
- the hearing aid specialist examination.

The Department of Health, with the Board and representatives from the community and technical colleges, must review the opportunity to establish an interim work-based learning permit, or similar apprenticeship opportunity, to provide an additional licensing pathway for hearing aid specialist applicants.

The group must consider the opportunity to provide a work-based learning permit, the criteria for supervisors, the recommended duration of a work-based learning permit or apprenticeship, recommendations for the work-based learning permit and opportunities to partner with private business and/or higher education institutions, recommendations for the learning pathways or academic components that should be required and specific training elements, and other recommendations for the direct supervision.

The group must submit recommendations to the health committees of the Legislature by December 1, 2014.

EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY HEALTH CARE COMMITTEE (Recommended Amendments):

- Eliminates all references to the work-based learning permit and the pathways for the work-based learning permit.
- Requires the Department of Health, with the Board and representatives from the community and technical colleges, to study the work-based learning permit or similar apprenticeship opportunity, and provide recommendations to the Legislature by December 1, 2014.
- Retains the change in terminology to hearing aid specialist.
- Retains the nine-month certificate option and includes a link to a two-year or four-year degree in a field of study approved by the Board from an accredited institution, linked to the practical exam approved by the Board.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Section 4 (nine-month certificate) takes effect July 1, 2015.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Engrossed House Bill: PRO: We made considerable changes to the bill on the House floor that reflect active participation from stakeholders. Washington is the only state that requires a two-year specific degree to be a hearing aid specialist. This will help make more people eligible to provide hearing aids to be prepared for the silver tsunami, or growth in the aging population that will need hearing aids. When the Legislature first put the two-year degree requirement in place, we anticipated 60 graduates per year. We have only two schools offering programs and have only 15–20 graduates per year. We need to add to the supply so we can fill our needs to offer the services. This bill offers an option for those that have a four-year degree to allow them to use the nine-month certificate rather than go back to school for two more years. We have an amendment to clarify the nine-month certificate is supposed to be tied to a degree program. It also offers two worksite options with the industry or with higher education agreements that allow permit holders to get work-based learning and meet specific training requirements. There is a growing industry need to add more licensed providers. Costco has been adding providers at a rapid rate.

CON: We appreciate the floor amendments that added the Board into approval of the program but we have concerns about the work-based sites. There may be quality of care concerns with the interim permit holders. We have concerns with the pathway linked with industry without a clear educational component. The nine-month certification should meet the needs without the worksite pathway. We do not believe there is a shortage of hearing aid specialists. The technical college is producing future professionals and the school in Portland anticipates 21 graduates in 2014. There are 400 audiologists that could dispense and fit hearing aids as well. We think this needs more work and discussion over the interim. The technology is getting more complex, not less.

OTHER: We had many concerns with the original bill that there was a lack of oversight by the Board, but that has been corrected. We have one remaining issue with the nine-month certificate that it be tied to the degree programs.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Representative Ross, prime sponsor; Lisa Thatcher, WA Hearing Society; Sandy Hubbard, Miracle-Ear; Paul Sass, Costco; Ron Langrell, President, Bates Technical College.

CON: John Johnson, Audiologist, WA Assn. of Higher Education; Melissa Johnson, WA Speech-Language-Hearing Assn.; Nancy Bowen-Hicks, Alison Vega, WA State Academy of Audiology; Michael Mallahan, WA Audiology Alliance.

OTHER: Kristi Weeks, Dept. of Health.