

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## ESHB 1355

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As of March 22, 2019

**Title:** An act relating to establishing staffing standards and ratios for counselors in community and technical colleges.

**Brief Description:** Concerning staffing standards and ratios for counselors in community and technical colleges.

**Sponsors:** House Committee on College & Workforce Development (originally sponsored by Representatives Ortiz-Self, Orwall, Ryu, Sells, Macri, Entenman, Stonier, Valdez, Frame, Gregerson, Tarleton, Doglio, Dolan, Appleton, Bergquist, Slatter, Goodman, Pollet and Santos).

**Brief History:** Passed House: 3/06/19, 72-24.

**Committee Activity:** Higher Education & Workforce Development: 3/19/19.

### Brief Summary of Bill

- Creates a joint legislative task force to examine issues related to minimum standards and staffing ratios of counselors in the community and technical college system.

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## SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

**Staff:** Alicia Kinne-Clawson (786-7407)

**Background:** Community and technical colleges (CTCs) employ a wide range of counselors which may include admissions and enrollment counselors, academic advisors, career advisors and counselors, financial aid counselors, and mental health professionals. Broadly defined, these student affairs professionals provide a wide range of supports to students and the academic environment including assistance with enrollment, academic advising, access to career and professional development opportunities, mentoring, assistance with financial aid packaging, and mental health counseling.

Depending on the roles and responsibilities of each type of counselor, various professional associations have provided recommendations on staff to student ratios. For example, the

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National Academic Advising Association finds the average student to academic advisor case load at public community and technical colleges is 441 and the recommended case load is 250. According to the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, the recommended minimum staffing range for mental health counselors is 1 FTE for every 1000 to 1500 students. In practice, the ratio of public community and technical college students per mental health counselor tends to be more than twice the recommended ratio.

**Summary of Bill:** A task force is created to examine issues related to counselors in the CTC system. The task force must examine issues related to minimum standards and staffing ratios, as well as best practices for counseling, how colleges will meet the mental health needs of students and staff, and whether legislation is needed to address the issues.

Members of the task force include:

- two legislators from each of the largest caucuses of the Senate and two legislators from each of the largest caucuses of the House of Representatives;
- four counselors, with at least two being members of the exclusive bargaining representatives that represent counselors;
- one student;
- one member representing the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC);
- two presidents from two CTCs, or designees; and
- one vice president of student services and one vice president of instruction.

The task force is staffed by the SBCTC and must make findings and recommendations by November 1, 2020. The findings must include data of each CTC's student-to-counselor ratio.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members:** Yes.

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

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:** PRO: We have identified a huge gap in our service delivery system to students. When students leave our K-12 system they may have social emotional issues or the start of mental illness and do not have any resources to support them. Our four-year institutions do have some resources for students but the community and technical colleges do not. We think it makes sense to bring all the stakeholders into one place to help identify how to get these services and crisis intervention to students. For institutions that do have resources, the wait times can be multiple weeks or months. We think these counselors can be people who are doing academic advising while also providing short term counseling and referrals for crisis intervention. Counselors are a specialized field that would require a credential of at least a masters degree in counseling. We see this as in addition to the navigators and coaches already on our campuses. Counselors play a critical role in supporting students and they navigate their way through the college system. We think the task force in this bill will help identify standards for counselors as well as best practices in supporting students in community and technical colleges.

**Persons Testifying:** PRO: Representative Lillian Ortiz-Self, Prime Sponsor; Simone Boe, Washington Education Association; Bernal Baca, AFT Washington; Monica Nucciarone, citizen; Joe Holliday, State Board for Community and Technical Colleges.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** No one.