

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6641

As of February 6, 2020

Title: An act relating to increasing the availability of certified sex offender treatment providers.

Brief Description: Increasing the availability of certified sex offender treatment providers.

Sponsors: Senators O'Ban, Conway and Wilson, C.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Human Services, Reentry & Rehabilitation: 2/05/20.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the Department of Health (DOH) to certify sexual offender treatment providers who receive supervision from qualified supervisors who do not themselves have to be certified sexual offender treatment providers.
- Requires the DOH to certify sexual offender treatment providers with out of state qualifications if they meet a lifetime experience threshold or meet other requirements.
- Reestablishes the Sexual Offender Treatment Provider Advisory Committee to advise the DOH and recommend regulatory and policy reform.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES, REENTRY & REHABILITATION

Staff: Kevin Black (786-7747)

Background: DOH certifies sex offender treatment providers (SOTPs), who are registered health professionals certified to examine and treat sex offenders and sexually violent predators (SVPs). Only a certified SOTP or certified affiliate SOTP who is training under a certified SOTP and has completed at least 50 percent of their training hours may:

- conduct evaluations under the Special Sexual Offender Sentencing Alternative (SOSA) or the Special Sexual Offender Disposition Alternative (SSODA);
- perform treatment of Level III adult and juvenile sex offenders; or
- perform treatment of conditionally released SVPs.

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.

An SOTP Advisory Committee was created in law in 1990 to develop SOTP certification standards and to provide ongoing advice to DOH in matters relating to SOTP certification. The statute establishing the SOTP Advisory Committee was repealed in 2009.

The SSOSA and SSODA are sentencing or disposition alternatives available to defendants who are willing to affirmatively admit guilt, who have no prior convictions of a sex offense, and who undergo an examination by a certified SOTP to determine if they are amenable to treatment. If accepted into a SSOSA, an adult must serve up to one year in custody and undergo up to five years of sex offender treatment. If accepted into a SSODA, a juvenile must serve up to 30 days of confinement and complete up to two years of sex offender treatment. Other eligibility requirements apply.

An SVP is a person who has been convicted of or charged with a sexually violent offense who suffers from a mental abnormality or personality disorder that makes the person likely to engage in predatory acts of sexual violence if not confined to a secure facility. When it appears a person may meet the criteria of an SVP, a prosecuting agency may file a petition to confine the person civilly based on the SVP allegation. An SVP must be confined in the least restrictive alternative setting that will protect their needs and the needs of the community, which may include community placement.

Summary of Bill: DOH must certify an affiliate SOTP if they have completed prescribed education and examination requirements and provide proof of supervision by a qualified supervisor, who does not need to be a certified SOTP.

A certified affiliate SOTP may perform advanced sex offender evaluation and treatment tasks if they have completed the required hours of supervision under a qualified supervisor who does not need to be a certified SOTP.

A qualified supervisor is a person who meets the requirements for certification as a certified SOTP whether or not the person is currently certified, or a person who meets a lifetime experience threshold of having provided at least 2000 hours of direct sex offender specific treatment and assessment services and continues to maintain professional involvement in the field.

The SOTP Advisory Committee is reestablished as a permanent body with members appointed by DOH to include:

- one superior court judge;
- three certified SOTPs with a minimum of five years experience treating sex offenders;
- one mental health practitioner with experience treating victims of sexual assault;
- one defense attorney with experience representing persons charged with sex offenses;
- one representative of the Washington Association of Prosecuting Attorneys;
- the Secretary of the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) or their designee; and
- the Secretary of the Department of Corrections (DOC) or their designee.

The Advisory Committee must provide advice to DOH concerning:

- SOTP certification procedures;
- maintaining a healthy workforce of SOTPs;
- reform of regulatory practices of DOH, DSHS, or DOC; and
- recommendations for statutory reform.

DOH must establish educational programs and alternate training requirements for certified SOTPs that allow credit for experience gained through work in institutional settings in Washington State or another state or territory of the United States. Applicants to become a certified SOTP who have a comparable certification in another jurisdiction must be certified by DOH if:

- they hold, or held in good standing within the past three years, a credential which the SOTP Advisory Committee deems to be substantially equivalent to an SOTP certification in Washington; or
- they meet a lifetime experience threshold of at least 2000 hours of direct sex offender specific treatment and assessment services and continue to maintain professional involvement in the field.

An applicant to become a certified SOTP or certified affiliate SOTP must not in all cases be required to submit complete documentation of their training if they sign an attestation form under penalty of perjury that they have met the training requirements and would be able to substantiate that claim.

A qualified supervisor may sign an attestation form under penalty of perjury indicated that they have met education, training, or experience requirements and would be capable of substantiating these claims without DOH requiring complete documentation in all cases.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 29, 2020.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: Pierce and King County have been challenged with more than their fair share of releases from the Special Commitment Center (SCC) because there are so many therapists who are former employees of the SCC and Western State Hospital. The people go there on release because that is where the treatment is. We need to expand the availability of treatment around the state so that these people can return to their counties of origin. We also need more treatment in general. We are pleased to see this bill come forward. There is a lack of opportunity for SOTPs to get the required supervision hours to obtain certification to provide sex offender treatment in the community. This is a good bill and we have suggestions that will make it even stronger. This bill recognizes the barriers to certification which have historically stopped DOC professionals from obtaining certification. This will improve the recruitment and retention of qualified individuals by the state. The new community providers will be of high quality because at DOC we invest significant resources in developing the skills and ability of our employees. This bill will increase the number of providers in underserved counties because DOC facilities are located

in those areas. The elimination of the SOTP Advisory Committee led to poor decision-making at DOH related to certification. We have some recommended tweaks. We are in support of expanding the existing base of people who provide this type of treatment so that people can move into the community when it is time. I have extensive experience but I am not able to be certified as an SOTP because of the rigid certification requirements. The SOTP Advisory Committee will be very helpful.

OTHER: We have some questions in the bill about attestation and what qualified supervisors are. The bill is good in that it increases the number of SOTPs and increases incentives for staff to remain on McNeil Island to get accreditation. We want to increase the quantity of SOTPs without reducing quantity.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Melena Thompson, Department of Corrections; Corey McNally, Department of Corrections; Michael O’Connell, Washington Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers; Holly Coryell, citizen; Sean Murphy, Department of Social and Health Services Behavioral Health Administration; Brandon Duncan, Department of Corrections.

OTHER: Devon Gibbs, King County Department of Public Defense.

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