

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1468

As Reported by House Committee On:
College & Workforce Development

Title: An act relating to increasing student access to mental health counseling and services at community and technical colleges.

Brief Description: Increasing student access to mental health counseling and services at community and technical colleges.

Sponsors: Representatives Slatter, Ortiz-Self, Ryu, Leavitt, Simmons, Senn, Johnson, J., Berry, Valdez, Santos, Boehnke, Berg, Peterson, Goodman, Fey, Ormsby, Ramel, Pollet, Davis, Thai, Bronoske, Chopp, Hackney and Riccelli.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

College & Workforce Development: 2/8/21, 2/11/21 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Establishes a pilot program to provide grants to community and technical colleges to increase student access to mental health counseling and services.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON COLLEGE & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 8 members: Representatives Slatter, Chair; Entenman, Vice Chair; Leavitt, Vice Chair; Chambers, Ranking Minority Member; Hansen, Paul, Pollet and Sells.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 2 members: Representatives Chandler and Kraft.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 3 members: Representatives Jacobsen, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Hoff and Sutherland.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Staff: Megan Mulvihill (786-7304).

Background:

In 2019 Engrossed Substitute House Bill 1355 established the Community and Technical Colleges Counselors Task Force (Task Force). The Task Force was required to address how community and technical colleges (CTCs) will meet the mental health needs of students and to examine three issues: minimum standards required for counselors, staffing ratios, and best practices. The Task Force's subcommittee on best practices recommended a list of eight strategies to improve student access to mental health services. Those strategies are:

- improve equity, diversity, and inclusion in counseling services;
- meet mental health needs of students through an all-campus effort;
- engage students to help increase mental health awareness;
- increase visibility of counseling services on campus;
- increase or expand external partnerships with community service providers;
- adopt the use of telebehavioral health;
- develop an assessment of counseling services to inform improvements and ensure counseling services are meeting student needs; and
- implement counseling approaches, grounded in theory, that have evidence of being effective.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) must establish a pilot program to increase student access to mental health counseling and services. The SBCTC must provide grants to eight CTCs, half located outside the Puget Sound area, to implement one or more strategies to increase access to mental health counseling and services. The CTCs wishing to participate in the pilot program must apply. Applicants must: (1) show a commitment to further developing partnerships by engaging with external community providers; and (2) identify opportunities to expand on-campus mental health counseling and services. Applicants must also demonstrate plans to implement one or more of the eight strategies identified by the Task Force.

Applicants will be selected by the SBCTC, in consultation with a selection committee consisting of one CTC president, one CTC vice president for student services or student instruction, two CTC faculty counselors, and one CTC student. In addition, the selection committee may consult with representatives of the Department of Health and Forefront Suicide Prevention at the University of Washington.

Those colleges selected to participate in the pilot program that use grant funding to hire additional mental health counselors must hire counselors with graduate-level training.

Those CTCs selected to participate in the pilot program must submit a joint report to the Legislature by November 1, 2023, that includes the following:

- information on which CTCs were selected for the pilot program, how much grant funding each received, and what strategies were implemented;
- demographic data of students accessing mental health counseling and services;
- whether the mental health counseling and services provided met the demand of students in terms of type and availability;
- whether mental health needs are served by community providers or on-campus services;
- information and data on the effectiveness of each strategy used to increase student access to mental health counseling and services; and
- lessons learned and recommendations for improving student access to mental health counseling and services at the CTCs and with community providers.

The pilot program expires July 1, 2025.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill adds a definition for the Puget Sound area, defined as Snohomish, King, Pierce, and Thurston counties. In addition, the colleges that use the grant funding from the pilot program to hire new counselors must hire counselors with graduate-level training. Applicants who wish to participate in the pilot program are required to show a commitment to further developing partnerships with external community providers and must identify opportunities to expand on-campus mental health counseling and services.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available. New fiscal note requested on February 11, 2021.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) There is a mental health crisis and an increase in students reaching out for help. This is not new to the pandemic, and the pandemic did not create the crisis. However, factors like social isolation, loss, grief, and financial issues raises the demand for mental health services. Stress levels are high. Mental health counselors can help students by putting a name to their symptoms and feelings. This helps give students a sense of control. Students need more access to counselors and more multiculturally competent counselors.

The SBCTC is happy to administer the pilot program. The creation of a pilot program to implement the best strategies of the Task Force is aligned with the SBCTC's goals. The

pilot program will help show the way for all of the community and technical colleges.

There are reservations regarding the selection criteria. Requiring applicants to have external partnerships risks giving additional resources to the most resourced schools rather than those in most need. There are some colleges with no counselors. Often community providers are overburdened and refer students back to the college. A recommendation is to have the pilot program fund the colleges with the lowest counseling ratios. This would allow colleges to increase staffing and to expand partnerships. In addition, completely outsourcing mental health services to community partners could be problematic. Students deserve to have counselors embedded in the college community who understand student issues. Overall, increased student access is supported and the pilot program is a step in the right direction. Impact most historically marginalized students.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Slatter, prime sponsor; Joe Holliday, State Board for Community and Technical Colleges; Rebekah Woods, Columbia Basin College; Heidi Matlack, Yakima Valley College; Nicole Wilson, Highline College; and Seth Dawson, Washington Association for Substance Abuse and Violence Prevention.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.