
SENATE BILL 5271

State of Washington

67th Legislature

2021 Regular Session

By Senators Wagoner, Pedersen, and Dhingra

Read first time 01/19/21. Referred to Committee on Law & Justice.

1 AN ACT Relating to amending the necessary elements of proof of
2 injury during the state of emergency declared due to the COVID-19
3 pandemic; amending RCW 7.70.040; and creating a new section.

4 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

5 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** (1) The legislature finds that the
6 COVID-19 pandemic, a public health crisis, has placed an oversized
7 burden on Washington's health care providers and health care
8 facilities, as they care for communities and families.

9 (2) The legislature further finds that during the pandemic, the
10 law should accurately reflect the realities of the challenging
11 practice conditions. It is fair and appropriate to give special
12 consideration to the challenges arising during the pandemic, such as
13 evolving and sometimes conflicting direction from health officials
14 regarding treatment for COVID-19 infected patients, supply chain
15 shortages of personal protective equipment and testing supplies, and
16 a proclamation on nonurgent procedures resulting in delayed or missed
17 health screenings and diagnoses.

18 (3) The legislature intends, during the period of the declared
19 state of emergency due to the COVID-19 pandemic, to amend the current
20 standard of care law governing health care providers to give special
21 consideration to additional relevant factors.

1 **Sec. 2.** RCW 7.70.040 and 2011 c 336 s 251 are each amended to
2 read as follows:

3 (1) The following shall be necessary elements of proof that
4 injury resulted from the failure of the health care provider to
5 follow the accepted standard of care:

6 ~~((1))~~ (a) The health care provider failed to exercise that
7 degree of care, skill, and learning expected of a reasonably prudent
8 health care provider at that time in the profession or class to which
9 he or she belongs, in the state of Washington, acting in the same or
10 similar circumstances;

11 ~~((2))~~ (b) Such failure was a proximate cause of the injury
12 complained of.

13 (2)(a) The following shall be necessary elements of proof that
14 injury resulted from the failure of a health care provider to follow
15 the accepted standard of care in acting or failing to act following
16 the proclamation of a state of emergency in all counties in the state
17 of Washington by the governor in response to the COVID-19 pandemic on
18 February 29, 2020, and until the state of emergency is terminated:

19 (i) The health care provider failed to exercise that degree of
20 care, skill, and learning expected of a reasonably prudent health
21 care provider at that time in the profession or class to which he or
22 she belongs, in the state of Washington, acting in the same or
23 similar circumstances, taking into account whether the act or
24 omission:

25 (A) Was in good faith based upon guidance, direction, or
26 recommendations, including in interim or preliminary form, published
27 by the federal government, the state of Washington or departments,
28 divisions, agencies, or agents thereof, or local governments in the
29 state of Washington or departments, divisions, agencies, or agents
30 thereof, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and applicable to such
31 health care provider; or

32 (B) Was due to a lack of resources including, but not limited to,
33 available facility capacity, staff, and supplies, directly
34 attributable to the COVID-19 pandemic;

35 (ii) Such failure was a proximate cause of the injury complained
36 of.

37 (b) The provisions in (a) of this subsection apply only if
38 relevant to the determination of whether the health care provider
39 followed the standard of care, as determined by the court.

1 (c) If any health care provider presents evidence described in
2 (a) of this subsection, the injured patient or the patient's
3 representative is permitted to present rebuttal evidence, so long as
4 such evidence is otherwise admissible.

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