

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## SSB 5189

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**As Reported by House Committee On:**  
Health Care & Wellness

**Title:** An act relating to establishing behavioral health support specialists.

**Brief Description:** Establishing behavioral health support specialists.

**Sponsors:** Senate Committee on Health & Long Term Care (originally sponsored by Senators Trudeau, Wagoner, Conway, Dhingra and Wilson, C.).

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

Health Care & Wellness: 3/10/23, 3/15/23 [DP].

**Brief Summary of Substitute Bill**

- Establishes the profession of behavioral health support specialist.
- Requires the Health Care Authority to ensure that behavioral health support specialist services are covered by the state Medicaid program by January 1, 2025.
- Requires carriers to provide access to behavioral health support specialists in accordance with network adequacy standards established by the Office of the Insurance Commissioner by July 1, 2025.

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### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH CARE & WELLNESS

**Majority Report:** Do pass. Signed by 15 members: Representatives Riccelli, Chair; Bateman, Vice Chair; Schmick, Ranking Minority Member; Hutchins, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Barnard, Bronoske, Davis, Harris, Macri, Mosbrucker, Orwall, Simmons, Stonier, Thai and Tharinger.

**Staff:** Ingrid Lewis (786-7293).

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*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.*

## **Background:**

### Professional Licensure.

The Department of Health (DOH) licenses and certifies health care professionals. Licensure or certification may entail the adoption of rules, verification of educational attainment and completion of supervised training, completion of a background check and verification of good character requirements, administration of a knowledge or practical skills examination, and collection of license or certification fees. The Uniform Disciplinary Act provides laws governing the conduct and discipline of license and certification holders, with the DOH acting as the disciplinary authority.

### Behavioral Health Support Specialist Training Programs.

There are two certificate programs in Washington that offer training to become a behavioral health support specialist. Programs prepare behavioral health support specialists to provide low-intensity interventions to individuals with mild to moderate mental health or substance use disorders while under the supervision of a qualified health care professional.

### Washington State Apprenticeship and Training Council.

The Washington State Apprenticeship and Training Council is an entity appointed by the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries to approve apprenticeship programs and establish apprenticeship program standards.

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## **Summary of Bill:**

"Behavioral health support specialist" is defined as a person certified to deliver brief, evidence-based interventions under the supervision of a state credentialed provider who can assess, diagnose, and treat mental and behavioral health conditions within their scope of practice. A behavioral health support specialist is not permitted to make diagnoses within their scope of practice but are able to track and monitor treatment response and outcomes using measurement-based care.

The Department of Health, in collaboration with the University of Washington Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences and in consultation with stakeholders, must develop rules for the certification of behavioral health support specialists by January 1, 2025. Certification rules must include appropriate standards for approval of behavioral health support specialist educational programs. The educational program may be integrated into a bachelor's degree program or structured as a postbaccalaureate continuing education program or registered apprenticeship approved by the Washington State Apprenticeship and Training Council, provided that the apprenticeship is in combination with an approved bachelor's degree or postbaccalaureate certificate. The program must include a supervised clinical practicum with demonstrated clinical skills in core competencies.

An applicant for certification must have a bachelor's degree, complete an approved

behavioral health support specialist educational program, and pass an exam. Following initial certification, a behavioral health support specialist must complete 20 hours of continuing education every two years.

Behavioral health support specialists are subject to professional discipline under the Uniform Disciplinary Act.

The Health Care Authority must ensure that behavioral health support specialist services are covered by the state Medicaid program by January 1, 2025. By July 1, 2025, every carrier must provide access to behavioral support specialists in a manner sufficient to meet network adequacy standards established by the Office of the Insurance Commissioner.

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**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Effective Date:** The bill contains multiple effective dates. Please see the bill.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:**

(In support) The University of Washington, with philanthropic funding from the Ballmer Group, has been in the process of creating a curriculum to prepare a behavioral health support specialist to deliver brief, evidence-based, psychosocial interventions for depression, anxiety, and other common behavioral health conditions. The curriculum will be delivered by partner institutions and registered apprenticeships. This approach to training may help improve diversity in the workforce and provide an alternative approach to graduate learning. Providers will be prepared to practice with a limited scope and ongoing supervision and will be delivering much needed access to psychological treatment. These individuals will work in a variety of settings such as integrated care services and specialty care.

It is important that a provider be able to bill for their services and capture revenue to support the work of the behavioral support specialist.

(Opposed) The term "behavioral health" should not be used to capture terms like mental health and substance abuse. In addition, the term "co-occurring disorder" is a blanket term that does not use clear and concise language to define what those are. This bill will be used in ways that could be outside of its intended scope.

The University of Washington should not be the only institution participating in the development of the curriculum.

**Persons Testifying:** (In support) Senator Yasmin Trudeau, prime sponsor; Bill O'Connell

and Anna Ratzliff, University of Washington; and Kevin Criswell.

(Opposed) Eric Pratt.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** None.