

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5189

As of January 19, 2023

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

Brief Description: Establishing behavioral health support specialists.

Sponsors: Senators Trudeau, Wagoner, Conway, Dhingra and Wilson, C..

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Health & Long Term Care: 1/19/23.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the Department of Health to develop rules for the certification of behavioral health support specialists, a new type of behavioral health professional certification available to individuals with a bachelor's degree who meet other requirements.
- Requires the Health Care Authority to ensure that services by this new profession type are covered under the Medicaid program.
- Requires the Office of the Insurance Commissioner to integrate this new profession type into network access standards.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH & LONG TERM CARE

Staff: Kevin Black (786-7747)

Background: Professional Licensure at the Department of Health. The Department of Health (DOH) licenses and certifies health care professionals in a variety of fields. 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

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Act provides laws governing the conduct and discipline of license and certification holders, with DOH acting as the disciplinary authority.

Behavioral Health Support Specialists. Behavioral Health Support Specialist (BHSS) is a training curriculum developed at the University of Washington (UW) with funding from the Balmer Group to provide education and training in core competencies related to behavioral health targeted at students at a bachelor's degree level. The BHSS curriculum is inspired by the Improving Access to Psychological Therapies Program established in 2008 by the National Health Service in England, an ambitious and well-reviewed program providing access to talk therapy treatment for adult anxiety disorders and depression for almost 2 million individuals per year. BHSS certificate programs currently exist at UW and Eastern Washington University.

Summary of Bill: DOH must develop rules for the certification of BHSSs by January 1, 2025, in partnership with the UW Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Health and in consultation with other stakeholders. A BHSS is defined as a person certified to deliver brief, evidence-based behavioral health interventions under the supervision of a Washington State credentialed provider with the ability to assess, diagnose, and treat mental and behavioral health conditions as part of their scope of practice. A BHSS may not make diagnoses, but will track and monitor treatment response using measurement-based care.

The certification rules must be consistent with the UW BHSS clinical training program guidelines, and must require all applicants to:

- be at least 18 years of age;
- graduate from a bachelor's degree program;
- complete an accredited BHSS program, which may be integrated into a bachelor's degree program or structured as a continuing education program;
- complete a supervised clinical practicum with demonstrated clinical skills in core competencies;
- complete a background check and satisfy other requirements under the Uniform Disciplinary Act; and
- pass an approved jurisprudential exam.

Following initial certification, the BHSS must complete 20 hours of continuing education every two years.

The Health Care Authority must take any necessary steps to ensure that by January 1, 2025, the services of BHSSs are covered under the state Medicaid program.

By July 1, 2025, the Office of the Insurance Commissioner must integrate BHSS into its network access standards.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 9, 2023.

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

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