

FINAL BILL REPORT

SSB 5189

C 270 L 23
Synopsis as Enacted

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.).

Senate Committee on Health & Long Term Care
Senate Committee on Ways & Means
House Committee on Health Care & Wellness
House Committee on Appropriations

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 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.

Washington State Apprenticeship and Training Council. The Washington State Apprenticeship and Training Council is an entity appointed by the Washington State

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Department of Labor and Industries to approve apprenticeship programs and establish apprenticeship program standards. When approving apprenticeships, the Council considers factors such as whether graduating apprentices will move toward a living wage and the availability of a career ladder for graduating apprentices. An apprenticeship agreement is a written agreement between an apprentice and a program sponsor or apprenticeship committee containing terms and conditions of employment and for the training of the apprentice.

Summary: DOH must develop rules for the certification of BHSSs by January 1, 2025, in collaboration 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 post-baccalaureate continuing education program or registered apprenticeship approved by the Washington State Apprenticeship and Training Council;
- 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, every carrier must provide access to the services provided by BHSSs in a manner sufficient to meet network access standards established by the Office of the Insurance Commissioner.

Votes on Final Passage:

Senate	47	0	
House	98	0	(House amended)
Senate	46	0	(Senate concurred)

Effective: July 23, 2023
October 1, 2023 (Section 14)