

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5513

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Higher Education & Workforce Development, February 1, 2023

Title: An act relating to mental health counseling at community and technical colleges.

Brief Description: Concerning mental health counseling at community and technical colleges.

Sponsors: Senators Liias, Randall, Boehnke, Hasegawa, Hunt, Lovelett, Nguyen, Nobles, Saldaña, Valdez and Wilson, C..

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Higher Education & Workforce Development: 1/25/23, 2/01/23 [DP-WM].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Modifies the process to select colleges for participation in the mental health counseling and services pilot program and extends the length of the pilot.
- Creates a new telehealth pilot program for colleges not participating in the mental health counseling and services pilot program.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Majority Report: Do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Randall, Chair; Nobles, Vice Chair; Holy, Ranking Member; Hawkins and Liias.

Staff: Alicia Kinne-Clawson (786-7407)

Background: In 2019 the Legislature created a task force to examine issues related to

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counselors in the Community and Technical College (CTC) system. The task force examined issues related to minimum standards and staffing ratios, as well as best practices for counseling.

In 2021, the Legislature directed the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) to implement a pilot program to increase student access to mental health counseling and services. In collaboration with a selection committee, SBCTC provided grants to CTCs to implement one or more of eight strategies to increase access to mental health counseling and services.

Summary of Bill: The mental health counseling and services pilot program is extended to July 1, 2026. The SBCTC is no longer required to use a selection committee to select community colleges to participate in the pilot program. Geographic requirements for selection of pilot programs are eliminated.

In addition to the counseling services pilot program and subject to appropriations, the SBCTC shall contract with a telehealth provider to address mental and behavioral health care for colleges not selected to participate in the pilot program. Such telehealth services must not supplant existing services available on campus.

A report on the outcomes of the telehealth pilot is due by December 15, 2025.

Appropriation: The bill contains a section or sections to limit implementation to the availability of amounts appropriated for that specific purpose.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: There was a tremendous unmet need for mental health services on campuses before the global pandemic, and that need is still not being met. This bill is a must to ensure students have support. This bill expands the existing mental health counseling and services pilot to more campuses. There are four colleges in the existing pilot. They have experienced early wins in expanding counseling access for students but the need continues to exist at Washington's 30 other colleges. This bill eliminates geographic requirements and ensures there is a telehealth option for campuses that do not offer on the ground counselors. This bill is about retention, equity, access, success, opportunity, and responsibility to care for Washington's most vulnerable students. Many students juggle families, jobs, and lives on top of their educations, leaving little time for self-care or seeking services outside of their community. The expansion of this program will help students access the services they need without further taxing their schedule and taking time from their education.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Marko Lias, Prime Sponsor; Jenny Mao, North Seattle College; Christine McMullin, SBCTC; William Daley, Communities for Our Colleges; Jacob Katz, SBCTC; Gabby Fitz, Communities for Our Colleges.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.