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**SENATE BILL 5481**

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**State of Washington 69th Legislature 2025 Regular Session**

**By** Senators J. Wilson, Chapman, Hasegawa, and Krishnadasan

AN ACT Relating to providing access to behavioral health services to children using licensed clinicians colocated within the school; adding a new section to chapter 71.24 RCW; and creating a new section.

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

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  Throughout Washington state, there is a growing need for behavioral health services for children and youth, a crisis made worse by limited service capacity, especially in rural areas. This need is acute in less populated regions where many students come from families of limited means and a high proportion of children's health insurance is delivered through the state medicaid program. Providing behavioral health services in schools is an innovative practice and an efficient method to reach children in need who are often unable to access services due to time, distance, and transportation barriers. Providing services in schools helps establish a more comprehensive integrated framework for support with school staff, reduces the stigma of having behavioral health services in school rather than in a clinical setting, and dramatically increases the attendance rate for medicaid-based services. Many children who do not receive behavioral health services in schools do not get these services. Barriers to engaging children in a timely and accessible manner create missed opportunities which are costly for families and increase risks of rapid decompensation that can affect whole communities. We must do our part to remove barriers to treatment to ensure that the health and wellness of each child, in each of our schools, is supported, prioritized, and comprehended.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 71.24 RCW to read as follows:

A managed care organization shall provide reimbursement for medically necessary behavioral health services provided within a school by a licensed or certified behavioral health agency to a student within that school who is enrolled in the medicaid program, regardless of whether the behavioral health agency is within the network of the managed care organization, unless the managed care organization provides equivalent services colocated within the school which are available to the child using in-network providers.

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