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**SENATE BILL 6637**

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**State of Washington 66th Legislature 2020 Regular Session**

**By** Senators Salomon, Kuderer, Hunt, Lovelett, Wellman, and Wilson, C.

AN ACT Relating to creating a license for the operation of a wilderness therapy program; and adding a new section to chapter 43.70 RCW.

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

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 43.70 RCW to read as follows:

(1) The department shall create a business license for wilderness therapy programs catering to troubled youth who experience emotional and behavioral problems. The requirements for the program must include behavioral health treatment for youth with mental health or substance use disorders which is delivered by licensed professionals, including professionals practicing as agency affiliated counselors.

(2) For the purpose of this section, a wilderness therapy program is a form of residential treatment provided in a nontraditional setting that employs supportive peer groups, skill building, and experiential learning challenges alongside more traditional therapy techniques. A wilderness therapy program must build self-confidence and deliver important lessons while providing medically necessary behavioral health therapy. A wilderness therapy program must help youth to develop social connections and help to move them in the direction of repair to fractured family units. A wilderness therapy program uses wilderness as a healing source for adolescents who may not be reached by traditional therapeutic techniques.

(3) By December 31, 2021, the department shall establish rules for licensed wilderness therapy programs. In developing these rules, the department must reference and study the regulations for licensed wilderness therapy programs being utilized in states that have mature wilderness therapy programs including, but not limited to, the states of Utah, Idaho, Minnesota, and Alaska. The research that informs the rule-making process must emphasize wilderness therapy models that are grounded in evidence demonstrating their effectiveness to the extent possible. The rule making must consider youth safety, cultural competency, and strategies that maximize the potential for family reintegration. The department may solicit stakeholder feedback as part of this research. The rule making shall consider program design that facilitates coverage of treatment by licensed wilderness therapy programs by insurance providers to help defray the cost to families of a youth's participation in a licensed wilderness therapy program.

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