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**SENATE BILL 5056**

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**State of Washington 67th Legislature 2021 Regular Session**

**By** Senators Salomon, Hunt, Cleveland, and Das

AN ACT Relating to wilderness therapy programs; and adding a new section to chapter 71.24 RCW.

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

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

(1) The department shall create a business license for wilderness therapy programs catering to persons who experience emotional and behavioral problems. The requirements for the program must include provision of behavioral health treatment delivered by licensed professionals, which may include professionals practicing as agency affiliated counselors.

(2) For the purpose of this section, a wilderness therapy program is a form of behavioral health 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 participants 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, 2022, the department shall establish rules for licensed wilderness therapy programs. In developing these rules, the department shall examine the regulations for licensed wilderness therapy programs being utilized in states with mature wilderness therapy programs such as Utah, Idaho, Minnesota, and Alaska. This research must emphasize wilderness therapy models that are grounded in evidence demonstrating their effectiveness to the extent possible. The department must consider safety, cultural competency, and, in the case of youth participants, strategies that maximize the potential for family reintegration. The department may solicit stakeholder feedback. The department shall consider program design that facilitates coverage of treatment by licensed wilderness therapy programs by insurance providers to help defray the cost of participation in a licensed wilderness therapy program.

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