

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1532

As Passed Legislature

Title: An act relating to the certification of mental health counselors.

Brief Description: Modifying certification of mental health counselors.

Sponsors: Representatives Dyer, Dellwo, Ballasiotes, Cody, Cooke and Thibaudeau.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Health Care: 2/21/95 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 3/7/95, 93-0.

Passed Legislature.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH CARE

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 11 members: Representatives Dyer, Chairman; Backlund, Vice Chairman; Hymes, Vice Chairman; Cody, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Casada; Conway; Crouse; Kessler; Morris; Sherstad and Skinner.

Staff: John Welsh (786-7133).

Background: Mental health counselors who meet the qualifications specified by law may apply for certification by the Department of Health, and may employ in connection with their practice the title of "certified mental health counselor."

Applicants must possess at least a master's degree in mental health counseling or equivalent semester hours in a substantially equivalent field, as well as postgraduate supervised practice. They must also pass an examination and have 24 months of postgraduate professional experience in a mental health setting.

However, initial applicants for certification who possessed at least a master's degree in mental health counseling within 18 months of July 26, 1987 (the effective date of the law), qualified for the examination, notwithstanding the supervised practice requirement. Also, no examination, education, postgraduate practice or experience was required of any applicant for a year following July 26, 1987, as a condition of certification. These initial qualification provisions are now obsolete.

Certified mental health counseling is defined as a service emphasizing a wellness model rather than an illness model.

There is no requirement for continuing education.

Summary of Bill: The qualifications for certification of mental health counselors include an equivalent behavioral science master's or doctoral degree in a related field as determined by the Secretary of Health, as well as two years of postgraduate supervised practice.

The definition of certified mental health counseling is augmented to include the assessment, diagnosis and treatment of mental and emotional disorders.

The Secretary of Health is authorized to adopt rules requiring mandatory continuing education.

Obsolete provisions are repealed.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not Requested.

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

Testimony For: The mental health certification practice needs to be updated to reflect current practice.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Michael Doctor and Bob Weeks, Washington Mental Health Counselors Association (pro).