

SENATE BILL REPORT

SSB 6550

As Passed Senate, February 10, 1998

Title: An act relating to chemical dependency counselor regulation.

Brief Description: Certifying chemical dependency professionals.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Health & Long-Term Care (originally sponsored by Senators Deccio, Wojahn, Wood and Fairley).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Health & Long-Term Care: 1/23/98, 1/30/98 [DPS].
Passed Senate, 2/10/98, 46-1.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH & LONG-TERM CARE

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6550 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Deccio, Chair; Wood, Vice Chair; Benton, Fairley, Franklin and Wojahn.

Staff: Joan K. Mell (786-7447)

Background: Under current law, chemical dependency counselors can be registered as counselors in Washington State. They are therefore subject to the state's disciplinary process for health care practitioners under the Uniform Disciplinary Act. If they work in treatment programs certified by the Department of Social and Health Services, they are also required to meet the state's chemical dependency program requirements.

Private certification is available through two private chemical dependency counselor certification boards in the state.

Chemical dependency counselors cannot be registered, certified or licensed as chemical dependency counselors. They seek certification to consolidate regulation at the state level and obtain recognition in their area of expertise. This matter was referred to the Sunrise program with the Department of Health rendering recommendations in 1995. The recommendation was certification should not be enacted.—

Summary of Bill: Persons practicing chemical dependency counseling can identify themselves as certified chemical dependency professionals if they meet certain certification requirements. Chemical dependency counseling means employing the core competencies of chemical dependency counseling to assist or attempt to assist an alcohol or drug addicted person to develop and maintain abstinence from alcohol and other mood altering drugs.

Certification can be obtained if an applicant pays a fee, passes an examination, and meets education and experience requirements established by a Chemical Dependency Certification Advisory Committee.

The Chemical Dependency Certification Advisory Committee is comprised of seven persons. Four committee persons must be certified chemical dependency professionals; one must be a registered chemical dependency treatment program director; one must be a licensed physician certified in addiction medicine or a certified mental health practitioner; and one must be a member of the public who has received chemical dependency counseling.

Certified chemical dependency professionals must disclose their credentials to patients and disclose the meaning of certification. Certified chemical dependency professionals are governed by the Uniform Disciplinary Act.

Individuals can become certified without taking an examination, within two years of the effective date of this act, if the person has a valid chemical dependency counselor's certificate of qualification from the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS). Also, within two years of the effective date of this act, applicants who pass the examination, but do not meet the education requirements can become certified if they have 4,000 clock hours of chemical dependency counseling experience in a chemical dependency treatment program certified by DSHS.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 16, 1998.

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

Testimony For: Chemical dependency counselors perform a unique service and have specialized training on the issue of drug and alcohol addiction. Other professionals misdiagnose drug and alcohol addictions as mental illness, thus delaying appropriate and proper treatment. The health, safety and welfare of the public is served by clearly identifying and designating chemical dependency counselors as a discrete profession with educational and experience requirements.

Testimony Against: Chemical dependency counselors do not have bachelor or other advanced degree credentials that are necessary to provide appropriate care and treatment. Statistics show that over 50 percent of persons with drug and alcohol addiction problems have an underlying mental illness. The mental illness professionals with more advanced training are the appropriate entities to discern what kind of provider is appropriate.

Testified: PRO: Lonnie Johns-Brown, NASW; Linda Grant; Scott Munsen; Bob Newton; Pat Knox, Ph.D.; Lucy Homans, WA State Psychological Association; Don Thomas, Chemical Dependency Counselor; Ann Simons, WA Association for Marriage and Family; Steve Lindstrom, Association of Independent Outpatient Programs; Richard Leitch, WA State Society for Clinical Social Work; CON: Tim Liddle, Chemical Dependency Prof. of WA State.

House Amendment(s): A new section is added. Certified chemical dependency professionals can only use their title in conjunction with their work in department recognized programs.

The statute does not require the professional disclose information to the patient, such as the professional's credentials or patient's rights.

The statutory provisions regarding renewal and lapses of certification are taken out.

Applicants who have higher levels of relevant education may be certified with fewer hours of experience. Advanced registered nurse practitioners and licensed counselors may not be required to have more than 1,500 hours of experience in chemical dependency counseling, and for a two-year period from the time the bill takes effect, they may not have to take the examination.