

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5831

As of February 23, 1999

Title: An act relating to creating a new division of substance abuse and mental health within the department of social and health services.

Brief Description: Creating a new division of substance abuse and mental health within the department of social and health services.

Sponsors: Senators Hargrove and Costa.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Human Services & Corrections: 2/25/99.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & CORRECTIONS

Staff: Fara Daun (786-7459)

Background: The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) has established the divisions of Alcohol and Substance Abuse (DASA) and Mental Health (MHD) to provide services and prevention programs for persons with disorders involving substance abuse and mental health. Providers who treat clients with both mental health and chemical dependency disorders must maintain duplicate records for each division, provide a separate entrance for chemical dependency treatment, and overcome system requirements that are in conflict. Although the department provides waivers of some barriers on a case-by-case basis, there is concern that a comprehensive solution is needed.

Concern exists that persons with co-occurring substance abuse and mental health disorders are ineligible for services, or are unable to access services for which they are eligible due to the current system structure. This may occur because both divisions prioritize services based on need but may not address the exacerbating effects of multiple disorders. In some cases, the presence of one disorder disqualifies the person from treatment for the other. Funding inequities also create service gaps through which persons who meet eligibility requirements can fall. Further, providers who perform diagnostic assessment, treatment, and case management may not have sufficient cross-training to recognize treatment needs outside of their specialty, even where these needs may complicate treatment in their primary field. Some service providers have stated that they currently choose not to become certified with both divisions due to the systemic conflicts.

Summary of Bill: The Divisions of Mental Health and Alcohol and Substance Abuse are combined into a new Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health that assumes the duties of both divisions and their respective programs. The discrete program of chemical dependency is eliminated.

The new division provides a unified system of diagnosis, treatment, prevention, and crisis response for persons with substance abuse disorders, mental health disorders, and co-occurring substance abuse and mental health disorders.

The director must establish minimum training and education requirements for chemical dependency and mental health professionals employed by or under contract with the department. Individuals who have completed the training must have sufficient capacity to recognize a person's need for chemical dependency treatment, mental health treatment, or treatment for disorders involving both substance abuse and mental health.

The director must establish a system of simultaneous assessment and treatment of persons with co-occurring disorders involving substance abuse and mental health.

Title 71 RCW is renamed Substance Abuse and Mental Health with a new chapter containing general provisions and consolidated and harmonized definitions. The statutory chapter detailing chemical dependency programs is moved into this title.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 11, 1999.

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