

FINAL BILL REPORT

SSB 5608

PARTIAL VETO

C 302 L 09

Synopsis as Enacted

Brief Description: Concerning genetic counselors.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Health & Long-Term Care (originally sponsored by Senators Franklin, Pflug, Fairley, Regala, Marr and Kohl-Welles).

Senate Committee on Health & Long-Term Care
House Committee on Health Care & Wellness

Background: Genetic counselors provide information on medical genetics and counsel individuals and families on genetic disorders. Genetic counselors work with other health care professionals to inform and support people who have an inherited risk for genetic disorders, people diagnosed with genetic diseases, and the families of children born with birth defects. Washington does not currently credential genetic counselors.

The Washington State House of Representatives considered a proposal to license genetic counselors as a new health profession during the 2005 legislative session. The Legislature referred the bill to the Department of Health (the department) to conduct a Sunrise Review. After conducting public hearings, independent research, and requesting information from other states, the department reported its findings in a report to the 2006 Legislature.

The department report recommended that the profession not be regulated. In making its findings, the department had to consider specific standards. The department found that unregulated practice did not clearly harm or endanger the public. Those who wish to engage the services of a qualified genetic counselor are able to do so, and the public can be effectively protected by other means. The department report noted concerns that genetic counselors may be engaging in the practice of medicine without a license, and that the licensure fees which would have to be assessed would be prohibitive. At the time of the report in 2006 there were approximately 50 genetic counselors in Washington State.

Summary: The Secretary of the department is authorized to establish all licensing and examination requirements for the practice of genetic counseling. Genetic counseling is defined as including estimating the likelihood of a birth defect; helping individuals, families and health care providers understand available options; and ordering testing. The department is required to issue a license to applicants who meet specific education requirements,

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complete required clinical experience, and complete an approved examination. Those who do not meet these requirements cannot be licensed as a genetic counselor and cannot represent themselves as a licensed genetic counselor or a genetic counselor.

Genetic counselors are added to the list of health professionals subject to the Uniform Disciplinary Act.

Votes on Final Passage:

Senate	38	7	
House	66	32	(House amended)
Senate	41	8	(Senate concurred)

Effective: August 1, 2010

Partial Veto Summary: Reference to the formation of an advisory committee on genetic counseling is eliminated. The department is not required to seek the advice of the advisory committee regarding rules administration, genetic counseling practice, unprofessional conduct, consumer complaints, and continuing competency.