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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

Prefiled 01/04/21. Read first time 01/11/21. Referred to Committee on Health & Long Term Care.

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

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

4 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** A new section is added to chapter 71.24  
5 RCW to read as follows:

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

12 (2) For the purpose of this section, a wilderness therapy program  
13 is a form of behavioral health treatment provided in a nontraditional  
14 setting that employs supportive peer groups, skill building, and  
15 experiential learning challenges alongside more traditional therapy  
16 techniques. A wilderness therapy program must build self-confidence  
17 and deliver important lessons while providing medically necessary  
18 behavioral health therapy. A wilderness therapy program must help  
19 participants develop social connections and help to move them in the  
20 direction of repair to fractured family units. A wilderness therapy

1 program uses wilderness as a healing source for adolescents who may  
2 not be reached by traditional therapeutic techniques.

3 (3) By December 31, 2022, the department shall establish rules  
4 for licensed wilderness therapy programs. In developing these rules,  
5 the department shall examine the regulations for licensed wilderness  
6 therapy programs being utilized in states with mature wilderness  
7 therapy programs such as Utah, Idaho, Minnesota, and Alaska. This  
8 research must emphasize wilderness therapy models that are grounded  
9 in evidence demonstrating their effectiveness to the extent possible.  
10 The department must consider safety, cultural competency, and, in the  
11 case of youth participants, strategies that maximize the potential  
12 for family reintegration. The department may solicit stakeholder  
13 feedback. The department shall consider program design that  
14 facilitates coverage of treatment by licensed wilderness therapy  
15 programs by insurance providers to help defray the cost of  
16 participation in a licensed wilderness therapy program.

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