

SENATE BILL REPORT

HB 1213

As of March 14, 2013

Title: An act relating to social worker licensing.

Brief Description: Concerning social worker licensing.

Sponsors: Representatives Orwall, Pettigrew, Kagi, Morrell and Ryu.

Brief History: Passed House: 2/18/13, 96-0.

Committee Activity: Human Services & Corrections: 3/14/13.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & CORRECTIONS

Staff: Shani Bauer (786-7468)

Background: The Department of Health (Department) licenses two types of social workers: independent clinical social workers and advanced social workers. Advanced social workers apply social work theory and methods including emotional assessment, supervised psychotherapy, case management, consultation, advocacy, counseling, or community organization. Independent clinical social workers diagnose and treat emotional and mental disorders based on knowledge of human development, cause and treatment of psychopathology, psychotherapy treatment, and social work practice. In order to obtain licensure in either category, a social worker must graduate from a master's or doctorate-level program in social work education, pass an examination, complete a specified number of hours of supervised experience, and complete continuing education requirements.

In addition to fully licensed professionals, the Department licenses associate-level social workers, marriage and family therapists, and mental health counselors. These individuals must graduate from an educational program in their field and declare that they are working toward a full license. Associates must work under the supervision of an approved supervisor. The associate license may be renewed up to four times before the associate is expected to have attained full licensure status.

Beginning January 1, 2014, the following professionals licensed under Title 18 RCW must complete a training program in suicide assessment, treatment, and management at least once every six years:

- advisers and counselors;
- chemical dependency professionals;

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- marriage and family therapists;
- occupational therapy practitioners;
- psychologists; and
- advanced social workers and independent clinical social workers.

Summary of Bill: Legislative findings are made that advanced social workers and independent clinical social workers both represent the highest level of practice within the social work profession.

The categories of health professions that may supervise an advanced social worker when performing psychotherapy is expanded to also include psychiatrists, psychologists, psychiatric advanced registered nurse practitioners, psychiatric nurses, and other mental health professionals as established in rule by the Secretary of Health (Secretary). The requirement that applicants for an independent clinical social worker license complete 4000 hours of supervised experience over a three-year period is extended to allow the hours to be completed over a period of not less than three years.

Applications for a license as a social worker, marriage and family therapist, or mental health counselor must be considered under the applicable regulations in effect at the time that a completed application is submitted to the Department. Subsequently adopted regulations may not be the basis for denying an application. The number of times that an associate level license for social workers, marriage and family therapists, or mental health counselors may be renewed is increased from four times to six. The renewal of an associate-level license is contingent upon the applicant completing 18 hours of continuing education in the prior year.

From 2014 until 2020, the Secretary must annually report to the appropriate committees of the Legislature regarding the number of associate licenses that have been renewed either four, five, or six times. Associate-level social workers are added to the list of professionals who must complete suicide assessment, treatment, and management training requirements.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: This bill came out of the recommendations of a workgroup and includes both language-clarification changes and policy-level changes. Associate social workers are finding that they need more time in order to complete the experience requirements or to obtain employment. The addition of suicide prevention training is also an important change. This is a cleanup bill for the most part and cleans up some ambiguity. Many associate level social workers are part-time employed after leaving school and not able to get their supervised experience in four years. A primary interest is making sure that the two professions are separate but equal and it is clear that both are in the top tier of their professions.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Representative Orwall, prime sponsor; Laura Groshong, WA State Society for Clinical Social Work; Bob Cooper, Ann Allen, National Assn. of Social Workers.