

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1355

As Reported by House Committee On:
College & Workforce Development

Title: An act relating to establishing staffing standards and ratios for counselors in community and technical colleges.

Brief Description: Establishing staffing standards and ratios for counselors in community and technical colleges.

Sponsors: Representatives Ortiz-Self, Orwall, Ryu, Sells, Macri, Entenman, Stonier, Valdez, Frame, Gregerson, Tarleton, Doglio, Dolan, Appleton, Bergquist, Slatter, Goodman, Pollet and Santos.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

College & Workforce Development: 1/29/19, 2/20/19 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Creates a joint legislative task force to examine issues related to minimum standards and staffing ratios of counselors in the community and technical college system.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON COLLEGE & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 14 members: Representatives Hansen, Chair; Leavitt, Vice Chair; Van Werven, Ranking Minority Member; Gildon, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Graham, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Bergquist, Mead, Paul, Pollet, Ramos, Rude, Sells, Slatter and Sutherland.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 1 member: Representative Kraft.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 1 member: Representative Young.

Staff: Trudes Tango (786-7384).

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Background:

Counselors in the community and technical college (CTC) system are considered "academic employees" and "faculty appointments" for purposes of tenure and collective bargaining. There is no statutory definition of "counselor" for purposes of CTC employees, and there are no statutorily prescribed minimum requirements for a person to be employed as a counselor at a CTC.

There are approximately 117 faculty counselors in the CTC system. In addition, some colleges have employees under titles such as "advisors" and "education planners." As of fall 2018, there were approximately 225,000 students enrolled in the CTCs.

School counselors employed in Washington's K-12 system must meet minimum requirements and have a valid school counselor certification as required by the Professional Educator Standards Board. Generally, K-12 school counselors must have a master's degree in counseling and complete an approved certification program.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

A joint legislative task force is created to examine issues related to counselors in the CTC system. The task force must examine issues related to minimum standards and staffing ratios, as well as best practices for counseling, how colleges will meet the mental health needs of students and staff, and whether legislation is needed to address the issues.

Members of the task force are as follows:

- two legislators from each of the largest caucuses of the Senate and two legislators from each of the largest caucuses of the House of Representatives;
- four counselors, with at least two being members of the exclusive bargaining representatives that represent counselors;
- one student;
- one member representing the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges;
- two presidents from two CTCs, or the presidents' designees; and
- one vice president of student services and one vice president of instruction.

The task force is staffed by Senate Committee Services and the Office of Program Research. The task force must make findings and recommendations by November 1, 2020. The findings must include data of each CTC's student-to-counselor ratio.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The original bill required staffing ratios of no less than one full-time counselor to 900 students and established specific minimum standards for counselors employed at the CTCs.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) The CTCs do not have the same resources as schools in the K-12 system to provide a sufficient number of counselors for students. Trained mental health counselors need to be part of the system for student success, and counselors are part of what will help Guided Pathways succeed. There is no consistent ratio of counselors across the CTC system. This bill recognizes a standard of care that meets core competencies.

(Opposed) None.

(Other) Having statutory minimum standards and putting staffing ratios in statute would be unusual. In addition to counselors, some CTCs have educational planners and advisors. Each college looks at its mix of students and determines how best to provide services for those students. Unlike in the K-12 system, student enrollments at CTCs fluctuate, and colleges must be able to look at their specific needs at particular times.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Ortiz-Self, prime sponsor; Earl Martin, Washington Community and Technical College Counselors Association; Tina Gansut; Chris Buono; Edwardo Alcantar; Carla Naccarato-Sinclair, Washington Education Association; Devon Klein, Washington Education Association and American Federation of Teachers; and Marney Lombard, Forefront Suicide Prevention.

(Other) John Boesenberg, State Board for Community and Technical Colleges; and Tim Stokes, South Puget Sound Community College.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.