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**Health Care & Wellness Committee**

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**SB 5054**

**Brief Description:** Increasing the behavioral health workforce by establishing a reciprocity program to increase the portability of behavioral health licenses and certifications.

**Sponsors:** Senators O'Ban, Brown, Conway, Wilson, L., Zeiger, Short, Van De Wege and Wagoner.

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Directs the Department of Health to establish a reciprocity program for applicants from other states who seek a credential in Washington as a chemical dependency professional, mental health counselor, social worker, or marriage and family therapist.

**Hearing Date:** 3/26/19

**Staff:** Chris Blake (786-7392).

**Background:**

The Department of Health (Department) certifies chemical dependency professionals and licenses mental health counselors, advanced social workers, independent clinical social workers, and marriage and family therapists.

To become certified as a chemical dependency counselor, an applicant must meet specific education, examination, and experience standards. The education standards require the applicant to have at least an associate's degree in human services or have completed a specified number of college credits. The experience standard requires the completion of:

- 2,500 hours of chemical dependency counseling for applicants with an associate degree;
- 2,000 hours of chemical dependency counseling for applicants with a baccalaureate degree; or
- 1,500 hours of chemical dependency counseling for applicants with a masters or doctoral degree.

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*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.*

To become licensed as a mental health counselor, social worker, or marriage and family therapist, an applicant must meet specific education, examination, and experience standards. The education standards require the applicant to have at least a master's degree in the relevant field of study. The experience standards require the completion of:

- 3,200 hours of supervised experience for applicants for an advanced social worker license;
- 4,000 hours of supervised experience for applicants for an independent clinical social worker license;
- Either 36 months of full-time supervised counseling or 3,000 hours of supervised postgraduate mental health counseling for applicants for a mental counselor license; and
- Two calendar years of supervised counseling for applicants for a marriage and family therapist license.

Applicants who hold a credential in another state may be credentialed in Washington as a chemical dependency professional, mental health counselor, social worker, or marriage and family therapist if the Department determines that the other state's credentialing standards are substantially equivalent to Washington's standards.

### **Summary of Bill:**

The Department of Health (Department) must establish a reciprocity program for applicants from other states who seek a credential in Washington as a chemical dependency professional, mental health counselor, social worker, or marriage and family therapist. Under the reciprocity program, the Department shall issue a probationary credential to an applicant who:

- Holds, or has held within the previous 12 months, a credential in good standing from another state or territory that has a scope of practice that is equal to or greater than the scope of practice for the credential being applied for; and
- Has no disciplinary record or disqualifying criminal history.

Following the issuance of the probationary license, the Department must identify any areas in which the training and education standards of the other state are less than those of Washington. Upon consideration of the applicant's experience and capabilities, the Department may require the applicant to complete additional training or education to maintain the probationary credential and transition to a full credential. The Department may place a reasonable time limit on the a probationary license.

For chemical dependency professionals, mental health counselors, social workers, and marriage and family therapists, the Department must maintain a list of credentials from other states that it has determined have: (1) an equivalent or greater scope of practice than the corresponding Washington credential, and (2) equivalent or greater training and education requirements than the corresponding Washington credential.

The Department must consider options for the adoption of interstate compacts supporting license portability for mental health counselors, social workers, and marriage and family therapists. The Department must report its recommendations to the Governor and the Legislature by November 1, 2020.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

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