
SUBSTITUTE SENATE BILL 6205

State of Washington

66th Legislature

2020 Regular Session

By Senate Health & Long Term Care (originally sponsored by Senators Cleveland, Conway, Randall, Keiser, Mullet, Frockt, Billig, Saldaña, Dhingra, Van De Wege, Hunt, Kuderer, Lovelett, Stanford, and Wilson, C.)

READ FIRST TIME 02/05/20.

1 AN ACT Relating to preventing harassment, abuse, and
2 discrimination experienced by long-term care workers; adding a new
3 chapter to Title 49 RCW; creating a new section; and prescribing
4 penalties.

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

6 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** (1) The legislature finds that, as the
7 citizens of Washington state age and their life expectancy increases,
8 demand for long-term care is also on the rise. Like many Americans,
9 Washingtonians prefer to stay in their own homes and communities as
10 they age, fueling an increased demand for home-based long-term
11 services and supports. Nationally, the direct care workforce is
12 expected to increase by more than one million jobs, making this one
13 of the fastest growing occupations in the country.

14 (2) As the state of Washington is a national leader in supporting
15 individuals to receive services in their own homes where self-
16 direction, autonomy, choice, and dignity is valued. The average needs
17 and acuity levels of people served in their homes has increased and
18 become more diverse. The prevalence of individuals with complex
19 behaviors due to their disabilities is a growing issue experienced by
20 individuals who need assistance with personal care tasks in their own
21 homes and to be able to fully integrate in community living.

1 (3) The lack of workplace safety, including incidents of verbal
2 and physical aggression, as well as sexual harassment, is an
3 occupational hazard for many long-term care workers, including those
4 who work in the homes of the person to whom they provide care. The
5 risk may be outside the control of the individual receiving care due
6 to the conduct of others in the home. The risk may be due to symptoms
7 or conditions that can manifest with individuals communicating their
8 needs in ways that an individual caring for the person may experience
9 or interpret as harassment, abuse, or violence. In any event,
10 caregivers should not have to experience discrimination, abusive
11 conduct, and challenging behaviors without assistance or redress.

12 (4) Workers who have adverse experiences at work can manifest
13 negative physical and mental health outcomes. These workers often
14 leave the field of direct caregiving, resulting in fewer available
15 caregivers in the workforce, increased turnover, and lower quality of
16 care received by individuals in their own homes.

17 (5) Adequate preparation of caregivers helps both the caregiver
18 and person receiving care. Caregivers should be equipped with
19 information, including relevant care plans and behavioral support
20 interventions, existing problem-solving tools, and strategies to
21 improve safe care delivery.

22 (6) The legislature further finds that caregivers are the
23 backbone of long-term services and supports in Washington. Therefore,
24 the intent of this act is to reduce the instances of harassment,
25 discrimination, and abuse experienced by caregivers, and ensure that
26 they feel safe while providing care while also prioritizing the
27 continuity of care for individuals who rely on their assistance. This
28 will improve the quality of care provided to Washingtonians and build
29 a strong workforce to meet future care needs in the state.

30 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** The definitions in this section apply
31 throughout this chapter unless the context clearly requires
32 otherwise.

33 (1) "Abusive conduct" means conduct in a work setting that
34 qualifies as workplace aggression, workplace violence, aggravated
35 workplace violence, physical sexual aggression, rape, attempted rape,
36 sexual contact, sexual harassment, workplace verbal aggression, or
37 inappropriate sexual behavior. For service recipients, behavior that
38 meets the definition of subsection (3) of this section is not

1 considered abusive conduct for the purposes of this chapter if
2 expressly exempted from the applicable definition.

3 (2) "Aggravated workplace violence," "aggravated violence," or
4 "aggravated violent act" means assault or physically threatening
5 behavior involving the use of a lethal weapon or a common object used
6 as a lethal weapon, regardless of whether the use of a lethal weapon
7 resulted in injury.

8 (3) "Challenging behavior" means behavior by a service recipient
9 that is specifically caused by or related to a disability that might
10 be experienced by a long-term care worker as offensive or presenting
11 a safety risk.

12 (4) "Covered employer" means:

13 (a) A consumer directed employer as defined in RCW 74.39A.009;
14 and

15 (b) A home care agency as defined in RCW 70.127.010.

16 (5) "Department" means the department of labor and industries.

17 (6) "Disability" has the same meaning as in RCW 49.60.040.

18 (7) "Discrimination" means employment discrimination prohibited
19 by chapter 49.60 RCW, including discriminatory harassment. It shall
20 not constitute discrimination for a recipient of personal care
21 services as defined in RCW 74.39A.009 to refuse to hire or terminate
22 an employment relationship with an employee based on gender
23 preferences.

24 (8) "Discriminatory harassment" is unwelcome conduct that is
25 based on a protected class listed in RCW 49.60.030(1) where the
26 conduct is enough to create a work environment that a reasonable
27 person would consider intimidating, hostile, or abusive.
28 "Discriminatory harassment" includes sexual harassment. For service
29 recipients, behavior that meets the definition of subsection (3) of
30 this section is not considered discriminatory harassment for purposes
31 of this chapter.

32 (9) "Employee" means a long-term care worker as defined in RCW
33 74.39A.009 that is employed by a covered employer.

34 (10) "Inappropriate sexual behavior" means nonphysical acts of a
35 sexual nature that a reasonable person would consider offensive or
36 intimidating, such as sexual comments, unwanted requests for dates or
37 sexual favors, or leaving sexually explicit material in view. An act
38 may be considered inappropriate sexual behavior independent of
39 whether the act is severe or pervasive enough to be considered sexual
40 harassment. For service recipients, behavior that meets the

1 definition of subsection (3) of this section is not considered
2 inappropriate sexual behavior for purposes of this chapter.

3 (11) "Long-term care workers" means all persons who provide paid,
4 hands-on personal care services for the elderly or persons with
5 disabilities, including individual providers of home care services,
6 direct care workers employed by home care agencies or a consumer
7 directed employer, and providers of home care services to persons
8 with developmental disabilities under Title 71A RCW.

9 (12) "Physical sexual aggression" means any type of sexual
10 contact or behavior, other than rape or attempted rape, that occurs
11 without the explicit consent of the recipient. For service
12 recipients, behavior that meets the definition of subsection (3) of
13 this section is not considered physical sexual aggression for the
14 purposes of this chapter.

15 (13) "Rape" or "attempted rape" have the same meanings as in RCW
16 9A.44.040, 9A.44.050, and 9A.44.060.

17 (14) "Sexual contact" has the same meaning as in RCW 9A.44.010.
18 For service recipients, behavior that meets the definition of
19 subsection (3) of this section is not considered sexual contact for
20 the purposes of this chapter.

21 (15) "Sexual harassment" has the same meaning as in RCW
22 28A.640.020. For service recipients, behavior that meets the
23 definition of subsection (3) of this section is not considered sexual
24 harassment for purposes of this chapter.

25 (16) "Trauma-informed care" means a strength-based service
26 delivery approach that:

27 (a) Is grounded in the understanding of and responsiveness to the
28 impact of trauma;

29 (b) Emphasizes physical, psychological, and emotional safety for
30 both providers and survivors; and

31 (c) Creates opportunities for survivors to rebuild a sense of
32 control and empowerment.

33 (17) "Workplace physical aggression" means an occurrence of
34 physically threatening behavior in a work setting, including threats
35 of physical harm, or an occurrence of slapping, biting, or
36 intentionally bumping. For service recipients, behavior that meets
37 the definition of subsection (3) of this section is not considered
38 workplace physical aggression for purposes of this chapter.

39 (18) "Workplace verbal aggression" means acts of nonphysical
40 hostility or threats of violence in the work setting. "Workplace

1 verbal aggression" includes verbal aggression such as insulting or
2 belittling an individual. For service recipients, behavior that meets
3 the definition of subsection (3) of this section is not considered
4 workplace verbal aggression for purposes of this chapter.

5 (19) "Workplace violence," "violence," or "violent act" means the
6 occurrence of physical assault, such as hitting or kicking, including
7 using a nonlethal weapon. For service recipients, behavior that meets
8 the definition of subsection (3) of this section is not considered
9 workplace violence for purposes of this chapter.

10 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 3.** (1) Beginning July 1, 2021, each covered
11 employer must adopt and maintain a comprehensive written policy
12 concerning how the covered employer shall address instances of
13 discrimination, abusive conduct, and challenging behavior and work to
14 resolve issues impacting the provision of personal care. The covered
15 employer must:

16 (a) Disseminate the comprehensive written policy to each employee
17 at the beginning of employment, annually, and on the issuance of any
18 substantive update to the comprehensive written policy;

19 (b) Post the comprehensive written policy in prominent locations
20 at its place of business and in a prominent location on its web site,
21 such as an online payroll portal, if applicable. The covered employer
22 must provide employees with a copy of the current policy within
23 thirty days of the employee's date of hire, and at least once a year
24 thereafter;

25 (c) Make the policy available in plain English and in each of the
26 three languages spoken most by long-term care workers in the state;

27 (d) Review and update the adopted policy annually; and

28 (e) Ensure that all employees are aware of the current policy and
29 the changes from the previous policy.

30 (2) At a minimum, the comprehensive written policy must include:

31 (a) A definition of discrimination, harassment, abusive conduct,
32 and challenging behavior;

33 (b) A description of the types of discrimination and abusive
34 conduct covered by the policy, with examples relevant to the long-
35 term care workforce;

36 (c) The identification of multiple persons to whom an employee
37 may report discrimination, abusive conduct, and challenging behavior;

38 (d) Stated permission and a process for allowing workers to leave
39 situations where they feel their safety is at immediate risk. This

1 process must include a requirement to notify the employer and
2 applicable third parties such as department of social and health
3 services case managers, emergency services, or service recipient
4 decision makers as soon as possible. The process must not authorize
5 abandonment as defined in RCW 74.34.020 unless the worker has called
6 the phone number provided by the employer for emergency assistance
7 and has a reasonable fear of imminent bodily harm;

8 (e) A stated prohibition against retaliation for actions related
9 to disclosing, challenging, reporting, testifying, or assisting in an
10 investigation regarding allegations of discrimination, abusive
11 conduct, or challenging behavior, and a description of how the
12 employer will protect employees against retaliation;

13 (f) A list of resources about discrimination and harassment for
14 long-term care workers to utilize. At a minimum, the resources must
15 include contact information of the equal employment opportunity
16 commission, the Washington state human rights commission, and local
17 advocacy groups focused on preventing harassment and discrimination
18 and providing support for survivors; and

19 (g) Any additional components recommended by the work group
20 established in section 7 of this act for the purpose of preventing
21 discrimination and abusive conduct and responding to challenging
22 behavior.

23 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 4.** (1) Beginning July 1, 2021, each covered
24 employer shall implement a plan to prevent and protect employees from
25 abusive conduct, to assist employees working in environments with
26 challenging behavior, and work to resolve issues impacting the
27 provision of personal care. This plan should be reviewed and updated
28 as necessary and at least once every three years. The plan shall be
29 developed and monitored by a workplace safety committee. The members
30 of the workplace safety committee shall consist of individuals that
31 are employee-elected, employer-selected, and include at least one
32 service recipient representative. The number of employee-elected
33 members shall equal or exceed the number of employer-selected
34 members. A labor management committee established by a collective
35 bargaining agreement that receives formal input from representatives
36 of service recipients who wish to participate in the committee's
37 deliberations shall be sufficient to fulfill the requirement for a
38 workplace safety committee in this chapter.

1 (2) The plan developed under subsection (1) of this section, at a
2 minimum, must include:

3 (a) Processes for intervening and providing assistance to an
4 employee directly affected by challenging behavior including
5 accessing technical assistance or similar resources, if available, to
6 assist employees when challenging behavior occurs;

7 (b) Processes that covered employers may follow to engage
8 appropriate members of the care team, such as case managers or health
9 professionals when allegations of discrimination, abusive conduct, or
10 challenging behaviors occur;

11 (c) The development of processes for reporting, intervening, and
12 providing assistance to an employee directly affected by abusive
13 conduct; and

14 (d) Processes covered employers may follow to engage the service
15 recipient in problem resolution with the goal of ending abusive or
16 discriminatory conduct while working to address issues impacting the
17 provision of personal care.

18 (3) Each covered employer and workplace safety committee must
19 annually review the frequency of incidents of discrimination and
20 abusive conduct in the home care setting, including identification of
21 the causes for, and consequences of, abusive conduct and any emerging
22 issues that contribute to abusive conduct. The covered employer must
23 adjust the plan developed under subsection (1) of this section as
24 necessary based on this annual review.

25 (4) In developing the plan required by subsection (1) of this
26 section, the covered employer shall consider any guidelines on
27 violence in the workplace or in health care settings issued by the
28 department of health, the department of social and health services,
29 the department of labor and industries, the federal occupational
30 safety and health administration, and the work group created in
31 section 7 of this act.

32 (5) Nothing in this chapter requires an individual recipient of
33 services to develop or implement the plan required by this section.

34 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 5.** (1)(a) Covered employers must inform an
35 employee of instances of discrimination and abusive conduct occurring
36 in or around the service recipient's home care setting prior to
37 assigning the employee to that service recipient, and throughout the
38 duration of service, if those instances are:

39 (i) Documented by the covered employer; or

1 (ii) Documented by the department of social and health services
2 and communicated to the covered employer.

3 (b) Covered employers must inform an employee, prior to assigning
4 the employee to a service recipient, of a service recipient's
5 challenging behavior that is documented:

6 (i) In the service recipient's care plan;

7 (ii) By the covered employer; or

8 (iii) By the department of social and health services and
9 communicated to the covered employer.

10 (2) Communication of the information in subsection (1) of this
11 section must be tailored to respect the privacy of service recipients
12 in accordance with the federal health insurance portability and
13 accountability act of 1996.

14 (3) A covered employer may not terminate an employee, reduce the
15 pay of an employee, or not offer future assignments to an employee
16 for requesting reassignment due to alleged discrimination, abusive
17 conduct, or challenging behavior.

18 (4) Nothing in this section prevents a covered employer from:

19 (a) Disciplining or terminating an employee if an allegation or
20 request for reassignment was reasonably determined to be false or not
21 made in good faith;

22 (b) Terminating an employee due to lack of suitable work; or

23 (c) Disciplining or terminating an employee for lawful reasons
24 unrelated to their request for reassignment.

25 (5) Nothing in this section requires an individual recipient of
26 services to provide information required by this section to an
27 employee. Nothing in this chapter shall limit the rights of a
28 recipient of services under chapter 74.39A RCW to select, dismiss,
29 assign hours, and supervise the work of individual providers as in
30 RCW 74.39A.500(1)(b).

31 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 6.** (1) Covered employers are required to keep
32 a record of any reported incidents of discrimination or abusive
33 conduct experienced by an employee during the provision of paid
34 personal care services. The records must be kept for at least five
35 years following the reported act and must be made available for
36 inspection by the department or its agents upon request. If the
37 covered employer makes its records available to the exclusive
38 bargaining representative representing the employer's employees, the
39 exclusive bargaining representative may assess whether the employer

1 is meeting the data collection requirements in this section. The
2 department must take into consideration the exclusive bargaining
3 representative's assessment when determining whether an employer is
4 in compliance with this section.

5 (2) The retained records must include:

6 (a) The covered employer's name and address;

7 (b) The date, time, and location of where the act occurred;

8 (c) The reporting method;

9 (d) The name of the person who experienced the act;

10 (e) A description of the person committing the act as:

11 (i) A service recipient;

12 (ii) Another resident of the home care setting;

13 (iii) A visitor to the home care setting;

14 (iv) Another employee;

15 (v) A manager or supervisor; or

16 (vi) Other;

17 (f) A description of the type of act as one or more of the
18 following:

19 (i) Discrimination, including discriminatory harassment;

20 (ii) Sexual harassment, inappropriate sexual behavior, or sexual
21 contact;

22 (iii) Physical sexual aggression;

23 (iv) Rape or attempted rape;

24 (v) Workplace verbal aggression;

25 (vi) Workplace violence;

26 (vii) Workplace physical aggression; or

27 (viii) Aggravated workplace violence;

28 (g) A description of the actions taken by the employee and the
29 covered employer in response to the act; and

30 (h) A description of how the incident was resolved.

31 (3) Nothing in this section requires an individual recipient of
32 services to keep, collect, or provide any data required by this
33 section to the department.

34 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 7.** (1) The department of social and health
35 services must convene a stakeholder work group to recommend policy
36 changes and best practices for training employers, long-term care
37 workers, and service recipients to keep home care settings free from
38 discrimination and abusive conduct while maintaining the ability for

1 individuals who need services to access needed services while
2 maintaining the ability to provide services.

3 (2) To the extent practicable, the following groups should be
4 represented in the work group, each group may have one
5 representative, unless otherwise specified:

6 (a) The department of social and health services;

7 (b) The department of labor and industries;

8 (c) The Washington state human rights commission;

9 (d) Two representatives of covered employers, one of which is
10 chosen by the association which represents home care agencies which
11 contract with area agencies on aging for medicaid home care services,
12 and one of which is representative of the consumer-directed employer;

13 (e) Two representatives from labor organizations representing
14 employees;

15 (f) Two long-term care workers that work for a covered employer;

16 (g) Organizations with at least five years of experience
17 providing training to at least ten thousand long-term care workers;

18 (h) Two representatives of disability advocacy organizations, at
19 least one of whom represents individuals with developmental
20 disabilities;

21 (i) Three service recipients, at least one of whom lives with a
22 developmental disability and one of whom is over age sixty-five;

23 (j) A family member or guardian of a service recipient;

24 (k) Area agencies on aging; and

25 (l) No more than three subject matter experts determined to be
26 necessary by the work group.

27 (3) In developing the report required by subsection (4) of this
28 section, the work group may consider:

29 (a) Using new employee orientation to emphasize the prevention of
30 discrimination and abusive conduct;

31 (b) The extent to which current training content could be
32 modified to cover content within existing hours of required training
33 such as basic, modified basic, and/or continuing education;

34 (c) Requiring training about discrimination and abusive conduct
35 for all employees;

36 (d) Interactive teaching strategies that engage across multiple
37 literacy levels;

38 (e) Factors that are predictive of discrimination and abusive
39 conduct;

40 (f) The violence escalation cycle;

1 (g) De-escalation techniques to minimize abusive conduct or
2 challenging behavior;

3 (h) Strategies to prevent physical harm with hands-on practice or
4 role play;

5 (i) How incorporating information on trauma-informed care could
6 improve the effectiveness of training and ensuring continuity of
7 care;

8 (j) Best practices for documenting and reporting incidents;

9 (k) The debriefing process for affected employees following
10 violent acts;

11 (l) Resources available to employees for coping with the effects
12 of violence;

13 (m) Best practices for training service recipients on preventing
14 discrimination and abusive conduct in the home care setting;

15 (n) Best practices for training direct supervisors on preventing
16 and responding to reports of discrimination and abusive conduct in
17 the home care setting;

18 (o) Other policy changes that will reduce discrimination and
19 abusive conduct in the workplace and best prepare employees to work
20 in environments where challenging behavior occurs; and

21 (p) Other best practices from trainings developed in other states
22 or for other industries to prevent discrimination and abusive conduct
23 in home care settings or the workplace.

24 (4) By December 1, 2021, the work group must submit to the
25 legislature a report with recommendations for training long-term care
26 workers, agency supervisors, and service recipients in order to
27 prevent discrimination and abusive conduct in the workplace. The
28 report may inform the prevention plans required in section 4 of this
29 act.

30 NEW SECTION.

Sec. 8.

(1) The department may conduct
31 investigations to ensure compliance when information is obtained that
32 a covered employer may be committing a violation under this chapter
33 or in response to complaints from employees or employee
34 representatives for the following requirements of this chapter:

35 (a) A written policy as required by section 3 of this act that
36 includes the minimum elements under section 3(2) of this act and is
37 updated annually;

38 (b) The written policy is provided to employees in accordance
39 with section 3(1) (a) through (c) and (e) of this act;

1 (c) A current plan as required by section 4 of this act that
2 includes the minimum elements under section 4(2) of this act;

3 (d) The prior notice requirement under section 5(1) of this act;

4 (e) The recordkeeping and retention requirements under section 6
5 of this act; and

6 (f) The retaliation prohibition under section 5(3) of this act
7 upon receipt of a complaint by an employee who believes that he or
8 she was subject to retaliation.

9 (2) The department may prioritize investigations as needed to
10 allow for timely resolution.

11 (3) Nothing in this chapter limits the department's ability to
12 investigate under any other authority.

13 (4) Nothing in this chapter limits a worker's right to pursue
14 private legal action.

15 (5) Nothing in this chapter authorizes the department to
16 investigate individual allegations of harassment, abuse, or
17 discrimination made by employees against recipients of care or other
18 individuals.

19 (6) The department of social and health services and its agents
20 shall not be liable for the acts or omissions of a covered employer
21 that are in violation of this chapter.

22 (7) Covered employers shall not be liable for the acts or
23 omissions of the department of social and health services or agents
24 thereof that are in violation of this chapter.

25 (8) Failure of a covered employer to comply with the requirements
26 under subsection (1)(a) through (e) of this section shall subject the
27 covered employer to citation under chapter 49.17 RCW. Claims of
28 retaliation under subsection (1)(f) of this section are subject to
29 the provisions of RCW 49.17.160.

30 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 9.** If any provision of this act or its
31 application to any person or circumstance is held invalid, the
32 remainder of the act or the application of the provision to other
33 persons or circumstances is not affected.

34 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 10.** Sections 1 through 6 and 8 of this act
35 constitute a new chapter in Title 49 RCW.

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