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**SUBSTITUTE SENATE BILL 5278**

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**State of Washington 68th Legislature 2023 Regular Session**

**By** Senate Health & Long Term Care (originally sponsored by Senators L. Wilson, Fortunato, Lovick, Muzzall, Robinson, Shewmake, Torres, Warnick, and C. Wilson)

AN ACT Relating to implementing audit recommendations to reduce barriers to home care aide certification; amending RCW 18.88B.031; creating new sections; and providing an expiration date.

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

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1) Long-term care supports people who need help meeting their health or personal care needs due to age or disabling conditions. Maintaining an adequate workforce of long-term care workers is critical to the system.

(2) Current law requires that home care aides complete required training and pass a test to become certified. A 2022 performance audit found that many home care aide applicants faced barriers in scheduling the test, challenges getting to the test site, and often delays of months between completing training and taking the test. Barriers and inefficiencies in this process were cited as a primary reason for many applicants dropping out prior to becoming certified.

(3) The legislature finds that improvements in this process and the reduction of barriers are necessary to ensure an adequate home care workforce.

**Sec.**  RCW 18.88B.031 and 2012 c 164 s 304 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) Except as provided in RCW 18.88B.041 and subject to the other requirements of this chapter, to be certified as a home care aide, a long-term care worker must successfully complete the training required under RCW 74.39A.074(1) and a certification examination. Any long-term care worker failing to make the required grade for the examination may not be certified as a home care aide.

(2) The department, in consultation with consumer and worker representatives, shall ((~~develop~~)) either prepare, grade, and administer, or determine the nature of and supervise the grading and administration of, a home care aide certification examination to evaluate whether an applicant possesses the skills and knowledge necessary to practice competently. ((~~Except as provided by RCW 18.88B.041(1)(a)(ii), only those who have completed the training requirements in RCW 74.39A.074(1) shall be eligible to sit for this examination.~~))

(3) The examination or series of examinations shall include both a skills demonstration and a written or oral knowledge test. ((~~The examination papers, all grading of the papers, and records related to the grading of skills demonstration shall be preserved for a period of not less than one year. The department shall establish rules governing the number of times and under what circumstances individuals who have failed the examination may sit for the examination, including whether any intermediate remedial steps should be required.~~)) The skills demonstration, the knowledge test, or both, may be administered throughout training, on the last day of training, or after a student's formal training.

(4) All examinations shall be conducted by fair and wholly impartial methods. The certification examination ((~~shall be administered and evaluated by the department or by a contractor to the department that is neither an employer of long-term care workers or a private contractor providing training services under this chapter.~~)) may not be conducted by an employer of long-term care workers unless the employer is an approved community instructor and has met the department standards for administering the examination.

(5) The department shall adopt rules to implement this section.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1) The department of health, in consultation with the department of social and health services and other relevant participants, shall:

(a) Devise a system that reduces delays between training and testing for home care aides that includes the following:

(i) Developing and implementing a plan to integrate testing into training that allows applicants to test at the same location where they train;

(ii) Allowing applicants to schedule tests during training to facilitate testing shortly after completing training;

(iii) Allowing remote testing within home care aide training programs immediately or shortly after completion of the program; and

(iv) Determining the benefits and costs of having home care aide training programs authorize applicants to test instead of the department of health;

(b) Examine existing challenges related to a lack of testing sites and develop a plan, including an estimation of costs, to expand testing sites, which shall include the following considerations:

(i) Applicant travel time and availability of testing for comparable professions;

(ii) How many test sites are needed, where these sites should be located, and the best way to establish appropriate partnerships that can lead to new test sites;

(iii) How often test sites should be available to applicants; and

(iv) Whether there are areas of the state where a stipend for travel expenses would be beneficial and appropriate protocols for travel stipends;

(c) Establish performance measures and data collection criteria to monitor the overall length of time between training and testing and the number of available test sites;

(d) Establish accountability mechanisms for the overall training to testing process; and

(e) Establish performance-based contracts for vendors who administer the tests that include the following:

(i) All key performance measures expected, including a definition of what sufficient access to test sites entails; and

(ii) Detailed vendor costs.

(2) The department of health, in consultation with the department of social and health services and other relevant participants, shall submit to the governor and the appropriate committees of the legislature a preliminary report no later than June 30, 2024, and a final report no later than December 31, 2024, that includes a summary of the work conducted in accordance with the requirements specified in subsection (1) of this section and any recommendations for improvement.

(3) This section expires July 30, 2026.

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