

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5513

As of February 21, 2023

Title: An act relating to mental health counseling at community and technical colleges.

Brief Description: Concerning mental health counseling at community and technical colleges.

Sponsors: Senators Liias, Randall, Boehnke, Hasegawa, Hunt, Lovelett, Nguyen, Nobles, Saldaña, Valdez and Wilson, C..

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Higher Education & Workforce Development: 1/25/23, 2/01/23 [DP-WM].

Ways & Means: 2/21/23.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Modifies the process to select colleges for participation in the mental health counseling and services pilot program and extends the length of the pilot.
- Creates a new telehealth pilot program for colleges not participating in the mental health counseling and services pilot program.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Majority Report: Do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Randall, Chair; Nobles, Vice Chair; Holy, Ranking Member; Hawkins and Liias.

Staff: Alicia Kinne-Clawson (786-7407)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

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

Staff: Michele Alishahi (786-7433)

Background: In 2019 the Legislature created a task force to examine issues related to counselors in the Community and Technical College (CTC) system. The task force examined issues related to minimum standards and staffing ratios, as well as best practices for counseling.

In 2021, the Legislature directed the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) to implement a pilot program to increase student access to mental health counseling and services. In collaboration with a selection committee, SBCTC provided grants to CTCs to implement one or more of eight strategies to increase access to mental health counseling and services.

Summary of Bill: The mental health counseling and services pilot program is extended to July 1, 2026. The SBCTC is no longer required to use a selection committee to select community colleges to participate in the pilot program. Geographic requirements for selection of pilot programs are eliminated.

In addition to the counseling services pilot program and subject to appropriations, the SBCTC shall contract with a telehealth provider to address mental and behavioral health care for colleges not selected to participate in the pilot program. Such telehealth services must not supplant existing services available on campus.

A report on the outcomes of the telehealth pilot is due by December 15, 2025.

Appropriation: The bill contains a section or sections to limit implementation to the availability of amounts appropriated for that specific purpose.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Higher Education & Workforce Development):

PRO: There was a tremendous unmet need for mental health services on campuses before the global pandemic, and that need is still not being met. This bill is a must to ensure students have support. This bill expands the existing mental health counseling and services pilot to more campuses. There are four colleges in the existing pilot. They have experienced early wins in expanding counseling access for students but the need continues to exist at Washington's 30 other colleges. This bill eliminates geographic requirements and ensures there is a telehealth option for campuses that do not offer on the ground counselors. This bill is about retention, equity, access, success, opportunity, and responsibility to care for Washington's most vulnerable students. Many students juggle families, jobs, and lives on

top of their educations, leaving little time for self-care or seeking services outside of their community. The expansion of this program will help students access the services they need without further taxing their schedule and taking time from their education.

Persons Testifying (Higher Education & Workforce Development): PRO: Senator Marko Liias, Prime Sponsor; Jenny Mao, North Seattle College; Christine McMullin, SBCTC; William Daley, Communities for Our Colleges; Jacob Katz, SBCTC; Gabby Fitz, Communities for Our Colleges.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Higher Education & Workforce Development): No one.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Ways & Means): PRO: Washington really needs resources to address the systemic crisis of suicide. All pilot colleges have been able to support the needs of more students, particularly within their diverse student populations. Expanding this program will better meet the mental health needs of students and further decrease the student to counselor ratio across schools.

OTHER: There are concerns about contracting out mental health services. The public fund should not be diverted to profit making companies. Counselors who work in the campus community provide better resources and have become adept to providing care to students' unique needs.

Persons Testifying (Ways & Means): PRO: William Daley, Communities for Our Colleges; Christine McMullin, SBCTC.

OTHER: Karen Strickland, American Federation of Teachers (AFT).

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Ways & Means): No one.