

FINAL BILL REPORT

SSB 5185

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Synopsis as Enacted

Brief Description: Establishing a pilot program that creates a pathway to physician licensure for international medical graduates.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Health & Long-Term Care (originally sponsored by Senators Saldaña, Cortes, Cleveland, Wellman, Stanford, Nguyen, Chapman, Orwall, Dhingra, Valdez, Riccelli, Bateman, Hasegawa and Nobles).

Senate Committee on Health & Long-Term Care
House Committee on Health Care & Wellness

Background: Physician Licensure Eligibility Requirements for Foreign Graduates. Applicants for licensure as a physician who are graduates of schools of medicine located outside the United States or Canada are required to furnish proof that they:

- have completed a resident course of professional instruction equivalent to that in the United States;
- meet all the requirements which must be met by graduates of the United States and Canadian schools of medicine except that they need not have graduated from a school of medicine approved by the Washington Medical Commission (WMC);
- have satisfactorily passed the examination conducted by the Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates or have met the alternative requirements set forth in commission rules; and
- have the ability to read, write, speak, understand, and be understood in the English language.

Applicants are exempt from furnishing proof of meeting the postgraduate medical training requirement, which must be met by graduates of United States and Canadian schools of medicine, if they are able to demonstrate that they:

- were admitted as a permanent immigrant to the United States as a person of exceptional ability under the rules of the United States Department of Labor; or
- have been issued a permanent immigrant visa and received multiple sclerosis certified specialist status from the consortium of multiple sclerosis centers and successfully

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completed at least 24 months of training in multiple sclerosis at an educational institution in the United States with an accredited residency program in neurology or rehabilitation.

An applicant may obtain an exceptional qualification waiver, waiving requirements determined by WMC in rule, if they possess an acceptable body of work related to research, medical excellence, or employment, and have the recommendation of other national or international experts in the same specialty or field.

WMC may issue limited licenses to international medical graduates (IMGs) upon nomination by the chief medical officer of any hospital, appropriate medical practice, the Department of Children, Youth, and Families, the Department of Social and Health Services, the Department of Corrections, or a county or city health department. An IMG applying for a limited license must:

- be a state resident for at least one year;
- provide proof of certification by the Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates;
- pass the United States Medical Licensing Examination; and
- submit to a WMC background check as generally required of applicants.

An IMG practicing with a limited license may only practice within the nominating facility or organization, under the control of a licensed supervising physician of the same or substantially similar clinical specialty.

Clinical Experience License. The WMC issues International Medical Graduates Clinical Experience Licenses (CELs) that provide a pathway for qualified IMGs to gain supervised clinical experience in Washington. A CEL allows an IMG to practice medicine under an approved practice agreement while preparing for residency or other advanced training opportunities. A CEL is valid for two years and may be renewed up to three times. This allows an IMG to practice under a CEL for a maximum of eight years.

Summary: Physician Licensure Eligibility Requirements for Foreign Graduates. The provisions exempting internationally educated applicants for physician licensure who are permanent immigrants of exceptional ability or hold a permanent immigrant visa and are specialists in multiple sclerosis from furnishing proof of meeting the same postgraduate medical training requirement as graduates of United States and Canadian schools of medicine, are removed.

WMC may adopt rules to establish a primary care license for applicants who have successfully completed the Clinical Experience Graduate Pilot Program.

Clinical Experience Graduate Pilot Program. WMC is directed to establish and administer a pilot program that creates a pathway to full unrestricted medical licensure to provide primary care.

An applicant to the pilot program must:

- hold a CEL issued on or before July 1, 2026;
- complete two years of continuous supervised clinical practice under a CEL;
- not have any active disciplinary action or significant disciplinary history;
- obtain satisfactory clinical assessment evaluations from the supervising physician in all categories in a clinical assessment evaluation; and
- obtain an attestation from the supervising physician or written endorsement from the medical director of the practice site if different than the supervising physician.

An applicant qualifies for full unrestricted medical licensure to provide primary care upon completing:

- four years total of supervised clinical practice—comprising the two years required for program entry plus an additional two years of practice under the pilot program;
- requirements of the CEL program;
- step 3 of the United States Medical Licensing Examination; and
- passing a clinical competency assessment approved by WMC.

Eligible practice sites for the pilot program include hospitals, federally qualified health centers, government entities, certain private practice or physicians groups, and, with WMC approval, mental and behavioral health facilities.

WMC must provide an annual report on the pilot program to the Legislature until 2035. The report must include:

- data about practice patterns of program participants;
- relevant disciplinary actions taken against program participants; and
- recommendations for how the pilot program could be expanded to include graduates of medical schools in the United States.

The pilot program expires June 30, 2035.

Votes on Final Passage:

Senate	39	9	
House	89	4	(House amended)
Senate	41	8	(Senate concurred)

Effective: June 11, 2026