

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 5244

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As Passed Senate, February 25, 2025

**Title:** An act relating to providing an exemption for women, infants, and children program staff to perform hematological screening tests.

**Brief Description:** Providing an exemption for women, infants, and children program staff to perform hematological screening tests.

**Sponsors:** Senators Riccelli, Bateman, Nobles, Saldaña and Wilson, C.; by request of Department of Health.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Health & Long-Term Care: 1/23/25, 1/24/25 [DP].

**Floor Activity:** Passed Senate: 2/25/25, 49-0.

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Exempts a program staff member, who is working at a Women, Infants, and Children Nutrition Program clinic and administering hematological screening tests and evaluations, from being required to register or certify as a medical assistant.

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH & LONG-TERM CARE

**Majority Report:** Do pass.

Signed by Senators Cleveland, Chair; Orwall, Vice Chair; Muzzall, Ranking Member; Bateman, Chapman, Christian, Harris, Holy, Riccelli, Robinson and Slatter.

**Staff:** Julie Tran (786-7283)

**Background:** Medical Assistants. The Department of Health (DOH) issues certifications and registrations for several different types of medical assistants such as certified medical

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assistants, registered medical assistants, medical assistant-hemodialysis technicians, medical assistant-phlebotomists, medical assistant-EMTs, and forensic phlebotomists.

Washington State Women, Infants, and Children Nutrition Program. The Washington State Women, Infants, and Children Nutrition Program (WIC) has over 200 clinics across the state and WIC provides services to low-income pregnant people, new and breast and chest feeding parents, infants, and children up to age five. Those services include: nutrition education; breast and chest feeding support; healthy foods; and health screenings and referrals.

Federal regulations requires individuals participating in the WIC program to be screened for iron deficiency anemia. The hemoglobin screening can be done using a finger-, heel-, or toe-stick blood test. This screening helps identify individuals at risk for iron deficiency anemia, which can have significant health risks for infants and pregnant people. According to DOH, approximately 35 percent of Washington State WIC participants—which is about 45,000 participants—do not have equal access to the required screenings for anemia.

Currently, staff must be registered as medical assistants and have a healthcare practitioner oversight to perform the screening test. Some WIC clinics cannot conduct the screening test because they do not have a healthcare practitioner available to oversee the test.

**Summary of Bill:** An exemption is provided for a WIC staff member who is administering hematological screening tests and evaluations via heel-, toe-, or finger-stick sampling from being required to register or certify as a medical assistant.

**Appropriation:** None.

**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:** PRO: This bill would remove a significant workforce barrier for WIC clinics as it can be challenging to find a workforce with the licensing requirements to conduct the tests and evaluations needed. This bill would also bring the state into alignment with both federal program requirements and the practice allows staff to provide safe and effective screenings. There are lot of health impacts of anemia for both pregnant women and children. WIC provides relevant nutrition counseling and foods that will help boost iron levels, which shortens the time the developing child is exposed to low iron levels and reduces the severity of the long-term impacts for the families. This will help the clinics continue to support community health and nutrition. There is an amendment request to expand the exemption to include other programs and organizations to be able to perform infectious disease tests using a finger-stick sampling.

**Persons Testifying:** PRO: Senator Marcus Riccelli, Prime Sponsor; Apoorva Mallya, Hepatitis Education Project; Brittany Tybo, Washington State Department of Health; Lindsay Irion, Public Health - Seattle & King County; Nicole Flateboe, Nutrition First; Jaime Bodden, Washington State Association of Local Public Health Officials.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** No one.