SENATE BILL REPORT
SB 5369

As of January 29, 2025

Title: An act relating to enhancing youth mental health and well-being through advanced training and expansion of the workforce in schools.

Brief Description: Enhancing youth mental health and well-being through advanced training and expansion of the workforce in schools.

Sponsors: Senators Orwall, Hasegawa, Krishnadasan, Liias, Nobles, Valdez and Wilson, C..

Brief History:
Committee Activity: Early Learning & K-12 Education: 1/29/25.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Amends the statutory definition of school social worker.
- Grants authority for educational service districts to coordinate with local mental health agencies and universities to arrange for in-school placements of licensed social worker associates and masters of social work candidates.
- Adds social worker allocations for high poverty schools in the amount of 0.060 per school type to the prototypical school model.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

Staff: Elena Becker (786-7493)

Background: Educational Service Districts. Educational Service Districts (ESDs) are regional agencies intended to provide cooperative services to local school districts, the Washington Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Youth, and the Washington State School for the Blind; and assist the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the State Board of Education. There are nine ESDs, each serving a different geographic region of the

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.

state.

School Social Workers. "School social worker" is defined in current law as a professional in the fields of social work and education who holds a valid school social worker certification as established by the Professional Educator Standards Board (PESB). The statutory definition also lists services that school social workers may perform.

A first-time applicant for the educational staff associate (ESA) certificate for school social workers must:

- hold a master's degree in social work;
- submit fingerprints for a background check; and
- show verification of a PESB-approved ESA course or any state's approved program leading to school social worker certification or three years of out-of-state experience in the school social worker role.

An individual who does not hold a full certificate may apply for a conditional ESA certificate, which is valid for two years or less. An applicant for a conditional ESA certificate for school social workers must:

- hold a bachelor's degree;
- be enrolled in a master's degree program for social work or social welfare; and
- submit fingerprints for a background check.

Social Worker Associates. The Department of Health licenses social worker associates. State law provides that social worker associates must have graduated from an accredited master's or doctoral degree program in social work, work under the supervision of an approved supervisor, and disclose to each client or patient that they are a social worker associate.

Prototypical School Model. The state's public school funding model allocates funding to school districts based on assumed levels of staff and other resources necessary to support a prototypical school serving an assumed number of students at defined elementary, middle, and high school levels.

The structure of the formula, which appears in statute, provides allocations for classroom teachers at an assumed class size, plus other building-level staff. The minimum allocation for social workers in current law is 0.311 in elementary school, 0.088 in middle school, and 0.127 in high school.

Summary of Bill: Amending the Definition of School Social Workers. The statutory definition of school social worker is revised to list certain services that may be performed by school social workers including behavioral consultation, professional case management, implementing individualized education programs, developing school discipline policies, and supporting implementation of social-emotional learning.

Placing Social Workers in Schools. Educational service districts are authorized to coordinate with:

- local mental health agencies and school districts to arrange for in-school placements of social worker associates and coordinate the required clinical supervision for those associates;
- local school districts and accredited university programs to support masters of social work candidates to obtain in-school placements and conditional educational staff associate certificates; and
- local school districts, accredited university programs, and behavioral health agencies to support postmasters of social work professionals in obtaining an in-school placement. The positions must be coordinated between the educational service district and behavioral health agencies.

Increasing Social Worker Allocations in the Prototypical Model. The prototypical school model is revised to increase social worker allocations by 0.060 per school type in high-poverty schools. High-poverty schools are those in which the three-year rolling average of students who qualify for free or reduced-price meals is 50 percent or more of the school's enrollment, or schools that met the free or reduced-price meal criteria in the year immediately preceding their participation in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Community Eligibility Provision.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 21, 2025.

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: There is a mental health crisis and youth advocates want more mental health services at their schools. The rates of suicide and suicide attempts have increased by 600 percent over the last ten years and 30 percent of our students miss substantial amounts of school.

Washington has one school social worker for every 3798 students. The recommended ratio is one social worker for every 250 students. Students often have to wait significant lengths of time to access services. The lack of mental health services in schools leads to absenteeism, crisis, and students falling through the cracks. It is challenging for teachers, who aren't trained in mental health care, to see students struggle and know that the staff who do have appropriate training are stretched thin. It is important to use every tool we have available to address this crisis, including community-based supports.

Most of the complex challenges students face involve social and community elements. School social workers can take a systemic approach and thread the needle between family,

community, and school. Social work is rooted in ethics, justice, and liberatory practices and school social workers bring that praxis into schools.

CON: There should be no legislation related to medical care in schools until there is clarity around whether parents have access to their student's medical and mental health records. Teaching people that they need to focus on their problems has caused them to become more anxious.

OTHER: All educational staff associate positions have value and need to be increased. The school environment is not the best place for novice social workers to practice their skills for the first time. This bill could allow community mental health providers to bypass ESA training and could create confusion about the different roles between certificated school social workers and nonschool-based care.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Tina Orwall, Prime Sponsor; Erica Limon-Trefielo, Communities in Schools of Washington; Jennifer Stuber, UW SMART Center; Misha Cherniske, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI); Ashley Christenson; Nikki York; Evian Adams; Omar Mohamed, Elevate With Purpose Initiative; Kenia Soriano Hernandez; Anna Nepomuceno, NAMI Washington; Nandika Devarajan, Redmond High School and NAMI WA Youth.

CON: Gabriel Jacobs.

OTHER: Zackary Turner, PESB; Shannon Harris, Washington Association of School Social Worker; Kristina Miller, Washington Association of School Social Workers; Jenny Morgan, Washington School Counselor Association; Amy Cannava, Washington State Association of School Psychologists.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: PRO: Ray Thomas; Jim Young; Margaret Graham; Betty Brooking; Martha Cetina; Nancy Olson; Marla Murdock; Janet Hedgepath; Ginger Alonzo; Frances Blair; John Alder, FAN; Anne Hall; Faye Bartlett; Ross Coble; Bryan Gilderoy; Nancy Jacobs; Julie Kageler; Sarah Detweiler; Donna Smith; Judith THIERRY; Mary Stephenson, NAMI Yakima; cheryl greene, Sravasti Abbey; Paula Clark; Bruce Radtke; Oolaa kaplan; Larry Fox; Katherine Long, Faith Action Network; Melissa Anderson Trust; Paula Harper-christensen, --None--; Jeanette Lunceford; PHYLLIS SMITH; Kasey Shultz; Jaime Krishnamachari, Faith Action Network (FAN); John Skans; Lorraine Hartmann, Please Select; Margaret Nelson-Low; Jameson Varpness; Patsy Reynolds; Joanne and Jim Cortese; Ethan Bergman; JULIA COCHRANE; Suzanne Duncan; Frances Pavlas Bose; Judith Oerkvitz; Margaret Snell; eleanor van Noppen, United Churches; William Engels; Evan Wipf; Catie Light; Pam Beal; Darla Austerman; Pierrette Wing; Linda Moulder; Judith Byron; Maria Christina Perez; Barbara Vining; Martha Nichols, FAN; Frank Marre; Audrey Pitigliano; Rupert Ayton; Christine Zarker Primomo; Janet C Robertson; Alice Woldt; John Birnel; Terry Eaton; Anne Hundley; Drew Goodrich, --None--; B Prevo; Calvin Malone, Buddhist - Olympia Zen Center; Terry Avila; Maureen Reid; Vivian Morrison; Patricia Wittmann-Todd; Lora Rathbone; Carolyn Stevens; Lauren

Schubring; Frances Goodrow; Judy LeBlanc, university gathering UMC; Marijke Fakasiieiki; Jess Ingman, Faith Action Network; Oneida Arnold; Katharine Strange; Paree Raval; Barbara Anderson, Retired; Rosanna Yates-Bailey.