
SENATE BILL 5481

State of Washington

69th Legislature

2025 Regular Session

By Senators J. Wilson, Chapman, Hasegawa, and Krishnadasan

Read first time 01/24/25. Referred to Committee on Human Services.

1 AN ACT Relating to providing access to behavioral health services
2 to children using licensed clinicians colocated within the school;
3 adding a new section to chapter 71.24 RCW; and creating a new
4 section.

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

6 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** Throughout Washington state, there is a
7 growing need for behavioral health services for children and youth, a
8 crisis made worse by limited service capacity, especially in rural
9 areas. This need is acute in less populated regions where many
10 students come from families of limited means and a high proportion of
11 children's health insurance is delivered through the state medicaid
12 program. Providing behavioral health services in schools is an
13 innovative practice and an efficient method to reach children in need
14 who are often unable to access services due to time, distance, and
15 transportation barriers. Providing services in schools helps
16 establish a more comprehensive integrated framework for support with
17 school staff, reduces the stigma of having behavioral health services
18 in school rather than in a clinical setting, and dramatically
19 increases the attendance rate for medicaid-based services. Many
20 children who do not receive behavioral health services in schools do
21 not get these services. Barriers to engaging children in a timely and

1 accessible manner create missed opportunities which are costly for
2 families and increase risks of rapid decompensation that can affect
3 whole communities. We must do our part to remove barriers to
4 treatment to ensure that the health and wellness of each child, in
5 each of our schools, is supported, prioritized, and comprehended.

6 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** A new section is added to chapter 71.24
7 RCW to read as follows:

8 A managed care organization shall provide reimbursement for
9 medically necessary behavioral health services provided within a
10 school by a licensed or certified behavioral health agency to a
11 student within that school who is enrolled in the medicaid program,
12 regardless of whether the behavioral health agency is within the
13 network of the managed care organization, unless the managed care
14 organization provides equivalent services colocated within the school
15 which are available to the child using in-network providers.

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