
SENATE BILL 6637

State of Washington

66th Legislature

2020 Regular Session

By Senators Salomon, Kuderer, Hunt, Lovelett, Wellman, and Wilson, C.

Read first time 01/29/20. Referred to Committee on Health & Long Term Care.

1 AN ACT Relating to creating a license for the operation of a
2 wilderness therapy program; and adding a new section to chapter 43.70
3 RCW.

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

5 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** A new section is added to chapter 43.70
6 RCW to read as follows:

7 (1) The department shall create a business license for wilderness
8 therapy programs catering to troubled youth who experience emotional
9 and behavioral problems. The requirements for the program must
10 include behavioral health treatment for youth with mental health or
11 substance use disorders which is delivered by licensed professionals,
12 including professionals practicing as agency affiliated counselors.

13 (2) For the purpose of this section, a wilderness therapy program
14 is a form of residential treatment provided in a nontraditional
15 setting that employs supportive peer groups, skill building, and
16 experiential learning challenges alongside more traditional therapy
17 techniques. A wilderness therapy program must build self-confidence
18 and deliver important lessons while providing medically necessary
19 behavioral health therapy. A wilderness therapy program must help
20 youth to develop social connections and help to move them in the
21 direction of repair to fractured family units. A wilderness therapy

1 program uses wilderness as a healing source for adolescents who may
2 not be reached by traditional therapeutic techniques.

3 (3) By December 31, 2021, the department shall establish rules
4 for licensed wilderness therapy programs. In developing these rules,
5 the department must reference and study the regulations for licensed
6 wilderness therapy programs being utilized in states that have mature
7 wilderness therapy programs including, but not limited to, the states
8 of Utah, Idaho, Minnesota, and Alaska. The research that informs the
9 rule-making process must emphasize wilderness therapy models that are
10 grounded in evidence demonstrating their effectiveness to the extent
11 possible. The rule making must consider youth safety, cultural
12 competency, and strategies that maximize the potential for family
13 reintegration. The department may solicit stakeholder feedback as
14 part of this research. The rule making shall consider program design
15 that facilitates coverage of treatment by licensed wilderness therapy
16 programs by insurance providers to help defray the cost to families
17 of a youth's participation in a licensed wilderness therapy program.

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