

SSWLHC Position Paper

December 2010

Social Work Licensure Legislation: Response to Efforts to Alter Existing Legislation, and Suggestions for Future Changes to the RCW Pertaining to Social Work Licensure

Per a board decision, The SSWLHC held a meeting for interested members on November 16, 2010, to discuss concerns regarding Substitute House Bill 3006, introduced in the 2010 legislative session, which proposed amending RCW 18.225.145, Associate Licensing Requirements. It is the impression of attendees, as well as the SSWLHC board, that this proposed legislation inhibits the work of social workers in certain practice settings, and it was decided to not support the legislation if it were to re-emerge in the 2011 session.

The key concerns about the legislation (HB 3006) are:

Section 1: The words *“under supervision”* were added to the sentence, “The secretary shall issue an associate license to any applicant who demonstrates to the satisfaction of the secretary that the applicant meets the following requirements for the applicant’s practice area and submits a declaration that the applicant is working *“under supervision”* toward full licensure in that category.” Having to claim that an applicant is working “under supervision” with the goal of obtaining full licensure is an onerous burden to an applicant who may be applying for associate status while in the midst of a job search, or while working in a setting that does not afford opportunities for supervision. The law already requires a certain number of hours of supervision be obtained prior to applying for full licensure. This additional burden is not necessary, and would make it impossible for a candidate to even begin the process of obtaining associate status.

Section 2: This section adds significant requirements for an associate. It prohibits an associate from providing any services as a volunteer, specifically stipulating that associates must be “employees of a public or private agency, institution, or incorporated clinic to acquire the experience hours necessary for full licensure.” The amended language goes on to state that the associates “may not provide services ... under any other circumstance on a voluntary basis...” In many social service agencies, programs depend on volunteers to provide supportive counseling in a supervised environment. Not being able to utilize associates as volunteers restricts the ability of many social service agencies to serve their clients, and they do not have the option of paying for the associates’ time. In addition, associates who are supervised in a volunteer setting, by a professional who meets the requirements of supervision in the RCW, should be allowed to count those hours towards supervision hours required for licensure. These suggested amendments remove an opportunity for an associate to gain experience that counts towards licensure, and restricts agencies from conducting their work on behalf of clients.

As part of the board discussion and the discussion held at the November 16th meeting, it was agreed that the following issues should be addressed in the event of further attempts to revise the language of the RCW pertaining to social work licensure:

RCW 18.225.090: Issuance of license-requirements, # 2C: This section indicates that an associate must have a “minimum of four thousand hours of experience, *over a three year period...*” Since this RCW was introduced, this sentence has confounded applicants for licensure. It is believed that the intention was to state that applicants must have a “minimum of four thousand hours of experience, in *not less than three years*” as it was deemed unrealistic to obtain that many hours in less than three years. A simple solution would be to amend the language to state, “Applicants must be post-Masters for at least three years prior to being eligible for LICSW status. Applicants must also have a minimum of four thousand hours of supervised post Masters experience.” We recommend clarifying the language to parallel the intent.

RCW 18.225.100: Disclosure Information. This section requires every licensed social worker to present a form for clients to sign, detailing the social worker’s fee structure, therapeutic orientation, proposed course of treatment, etc.... While this is a valuable concept in a voluntary, planned first meeting, it is not realistic nor helpful to the patient in many other settings where the client may be affected by symptoms of mental illness or chemical dependency, in a situation in which they are being treated against their will (i.e. involuntary treatment), or where they are in a medical crisis. In addition, many institutions already have an admissions process that is done detailing the rights of the individual to privacy and confidentiality, and outlining the institutional fee structure (i.e. hospitals and community clinics). Finally, social workers work as a part of a treatment team in many institutions, thus a disclosure form for one discipline of the team is impractical and counter to the concept of interdisciplinary care. We propose that an exception requiring the disclosure form be created for social workers who work in such settings.

RCW 18.225.145: Associate Licensing-requirements, #6. This section requires that the associate license may be renewed no more than four times. Given the lack of supervision available to candidates for licensure, and the fact that an associate is held to this title until they have the appropriate number of hours of experience and supervision to apply for full licensure, it seems unnecessary to limit the number of times an associate license can be renewed. We see no harm to the public if an associate remains in associate status for as long as it takes them to obtain the required hours of experience and supervision, and recommend deleting this section.