
SENATE BILL 5056

State of Washington

67th Legislature

2021 Regular Session

By Senators Salomon and Hunt

Prefiled 01/04/21.

1 AN ACT Relating to wilderness therapy programs; and adding a new
2 section to chapter 71.24 RCW.

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

4 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** A new section is added to chapter 71.24
5 RCW to read as follows:

6 (1) The department shall create a business license for wilderness
7 therapy programs catering to persons who experience emotional and
8 behavioral problems. The requirements for the program must include
9 provision of behavioral health treatment delivered by licensed
10 professionals, which may include professionals practicing as agency
11 affiliated counselors.

12 (2) For the purpose of this section, a wilderness therapy program
13 is a form of behavioral health treatment provided in a nontraditional
14 setting that employs supportive peer groups, skill building, and
15 experiential learning challenges alongside more traditional therapy
16 techniques. A wilderness therapy program must build self-confidence
17 and deliver important lessons while providing medically necessary
18 behavioral health therapy. A wilderness therapy program must help
19 participants develop social connections and help to move them in the
20 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, 2022, the department shall establish rules
4 for licensed wilderness therapy programs. In developing these rules,
5 the department shall examine the regulations for licensed wilderness
6 therapy programs being utilized in states with mature wilderness
7 therapy programs such as Utah, Idaho, Minnesota, and Alaska. This
8 research must emphasize wilderness therapy models that are grounded
9 in evidence demonstrating their effectiveness to the extent possible.
10 The department must consider safety, cultural competency, and, in the
11 case of youth participants, strategies that maximize the potential
12 for family reintegration. The department may solicit stakeholder
13 feedback. The department shall consider program design that
14 facilitates coverage of treatment by licensed wilderness therapy
15 programs by insurance providers to help defray the cost of
16 participation in a licensed wilderness therapy program.

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