

- SUBJECT:** Requirements for chemical dependency counselors and counselor interns
- COMMITTEE:** Public Health — favorable, without amendment
- VOTE:** 5 ayes — Laubenberg, Dawson, Taylor, Truitt, Zedler
0 nays
4 absent — Capelo, Coleman, McReynolds, Naishtat
- SENATE VOTE:** On final passage, March 26 — voice vote
- WITNESSES:** For — Chilo Madrid, Aliviane No-Ad Inc.; Richard Rosing; Richard Spence
Against — None
On — Patricia Greer, Texas Association of Addiction Professionals
- BACKGROUND:** Occupations Code, sec. 504.152 requires that a licensed chemical dependency counselor:
- be at least 18 years of age;
 - have a high school diploma or its equivalent;
 - have completed 270 classroom hours of approved curricula and 4,000 hours of approved supervised experience working with chemically dependent persons; and 300 hours of approved supervised field work practicum;
 - provide two letters of reference from chemical dependency counselors;
 - pass an oral examination approved by the Texas Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse (TCADA);
 - submit a case presentation to the test administrator;
 - pass an oral examination approved by TCADA;
 - be determined by TCADA to be worthy of the public trust and confidence;
 - successfully complete the chemical dependency counselor examination required by statute; and
 - sign a written agreement to comply TCADA's standards of ethics.

DIGEST: SB 333 would amend Occupations Code, ch. 504.152 to raise eligibility requirements for chemical dependency counselors, requiring them to hold at least an associate degree. It still would require 270 classroom hours of approved curricula, but would specify that 135 hours, or nine semester hours, be related to substance abuse disorders and treatment, and the remaining 135 hours, or nine semester hours, be related to chemical dependency counseling. An applicant would be exempt from these classroom requirements, and from the required 300 hours of field work practicum, if the applicant held at least a baccalaureate degree in chemical dependency counseling, psychology, sociology, or any other related program approved by TCADA.

The bill would create a new category of counselor interns. A person who sought a license as a chemical dependency counselor would register with the TCADA as a counselor intern by submitting the following:

- an application fee and a background investigation fee;
- a completed, signed, dated, and notarized application on a form prescribed by TCADA;
- a recent full-face wallet-sized photograph;
- two sets of fingerprints completed in accordance with TCADA requirements;
- documentation verifying the successful completion of required classroom hours and field work practicum; and
- proof of a high school diploma or its equivalent.

TCADA could obtain criminal record information from the DPS and the FBI relating to a counselor intern or an intern applicant.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2004. It would apply only to new licenses issued after that date, and current license holders would not have to comply with these new requirements in order to renew their licenses.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

Addiction science has made dramatic advances in recent years, including new research on the effects of addiction on the brain and the impact of trauma and other conditions in relation to substance abuse. Requiring new counselors to hold at least an associate degree would reflect the need for the profession to keep pace with those advances. Stakeholders agree that eligibility requirements must be raised in statute in order to elevate the perceived status

of the profession and to improve the current pass rate of 55 percent for the required licensing exam.

In creating the counselor intern requirements, SB 333 would require that all applicants who registered as counselor interns on or after September 1, 2004, met these specifications. This would assist counselor interns to face new challenges in the profession and should increase the eventual number of qualified chemical dependency counselors.

Persons in recovery make up a significant proportion of the counselor pool and bring valuable experience and perspective to their work. There is no reason to assume that such individuals are any less able to complete and benefit from higher education than persons who are not in recovery. Requiring course work specific to abuse disorders, treatment, and chemical dependency counseling is central to the bill's overall goal of improving professional standards. These requirements, combined with the experiences of counselors, would only elevate the profession.

Academic institutions offering the required course work and degrees exist throughout the state, including rural areas. Low-income individuals would benefit under this bill because numerous financial aid opportunities are available for students to obtain these educational requirements, which generally is not the case for current non-degree programs. In addition, evidence suggests that minorities are well represented among community colleges across Texas, so this bill should not jeopardize ethnic diversity in the counselor pool.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

By requiring that counselors hold associate degrees, this bill could shrink access to the field among the most qualified applicants. Chemical dependency counselors come largely from the ranks of recovering addicts, individuals who are uniquely qualified for this sort of work, but who in many cases would not meet the educational requirements under this bill. It particularly could thwart low-income individuals seeking to serve their communities through chemical dependency counseling. The effectiveness of chemical dependency counselors has more to do with life experiences than with academic qualifications.