



On March 12, 2021, members of the Washington Mental Health Counselor Association met with 15 legislators. Our discussions focused on mental health issues and related legislation. We let the legislators know how they could support us, our members, and our clients. We also shared how we can provide support to them and their constituents. WMHCA received a very positive response from Senators and Representatives throughout the state.

We focused on these bills:

HB 1196-This bill expands telemedicine reimbursement to include audio-only telemedicine. It creates an opportunity for providers to bill insurance for audio-only services. This is crucial for clients who have limited access to reliable internet.

HB 1504 - It adds workforce education as an allowable use of the Workforce Education Investment Account. A portion of non-federal funding in the Health Professional Loan Repayment program will be prioritized by the Department of Health for applications that reflect underrepresented students. The HCA must establish a behavioral health workforce pilot program and training support grants for community mental health providers. These initiatives increase our workforce shortage and help to bring diversity to the profession, while addressing the needs of our most vulnerable.

SB 5293 - It creates a mental health sentencing alternative (MHSA). If the sentencing court determines that the MHSA is appropriate, the court must waive imposition of the standard range sentence and instead impose a term of community custody and treatment. This seeks to provide treatment to those who are seriously mentally ill instead of housing them in jails and prisons.

SB 5370 - It simplifies the form used to create a mental health advanced directive. Mental health advanced directives will be acknowledged by a single notary rather than two witnesses. Mental health advanced directives will be simpler to understand, create, and execute for the patient. It will also be easier to understand for the medical provider.

We also stated our strong support of HB 1477, which implements the national 988 system to enhance and expand behavioral health crisis response and suicide prevention services. This bill has passed the House and is in the Senate.

Warmly,

The Washington Mental Health Counselor Association



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