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BILL ANALYSIS

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Senate Bill 1121 (Substitute S-1 as reported)
Sponsor: Senator Tony Stamas
Committee: Health Policy

Date Completed: 5-5-06

RATIONALE

Public Act 61 of 2004 amended the Public Health Code to require that, beginning July 1, 2005, social workers obtain a license, rather than a registration or certification, from the State. The Act created two levels of licensure, a licensed master's social worker (L.M.S.W.) and a licensed bachelor's social worker (L.B.S.W.). Public Act 499 of 2004 amended the definition of "mental health professional" within the Mental Health Code to reflect the licensure requirement. Previously, the term included "a certified social worker, a social worker, or a social worker technician registered in this state". ("Certified social worker" referred to an individual with a master's degree in social work, while "social worker" referred to an individual with a bachelor's degree in social work.) Since July 1, 2005, the term "mental health professional" has referred to an L.M.S.W. licensed under the Public Health Code (in addition to other professionals).

Evidently, the exclusion of social workers with bachelor's degrees under the amended definition of "mental health professional" has resulted in staffing difficulties for some community mental health services programs (CMHSPs), particularly those located in rural areas. Under the Mental Health Code, each CMHSP must establish at least one preadmission screening unit with 24-hour availability to provide assessment and screening services for individuals being considered for admission into hospitals or alternative treatment programs. A CMHSP must employ "mental health professionals" to provide the preadmission screening services, or contract with another agency. In the past, preadmission screenings often were performed by social workers with bachelor's degrees, who are precluded from

continuing to perform those services under the amended definition. Some people believe that CMHSPs should be allowed to hire L.B.S.W.s to perform the assessments.

CONTENT

The bill would amend the Mental Health Code to allow CMHSPs to employ licensed bachelor's social workers, as well as mental health professionals, to provide preadmission screening services.

("Mental health professional" means an individual who is trained and experienced in the area of mental illness or developmental disabilities and who is a licensed physician, a licensed psychologist, a registered professional nurse, a licensed master's social worker, a licensed professional counselor, or a licensed marriage and family therapist.)

MCL 330.1409

ARGUMENTS

(Please note: The arguments contained in this analysis originate from sources outside the Senate Fiscal Agency. The Senate Fiscal Agency neither supports nor opposes legislation.)

Supporting Argument

Under the amended definition of "mental health professional", some social workers who had been performing preadmission screening for CMHSPs had to stop. Reportedly, the new definition has resulted in significant reductions in personnel, particularly for programs serving rural areas. According to the Director of the Northeast Michigan Community Mental Health Authority, that program lost 38% of its on-call eligible staff members, many with years

of experience serving the mentally ill. These staff reductions can lead to scheduling problems and significant disruptions in the provision of services. The bill would allow L.B.S.W.s to perform these critical screenings, and enable those who had to cease performing the screenings to resume those duties.

Legislative Analyst: Julie Koval

FISCAL IMPACT

The bill would have no fiscal impact on State or local government.

Fiscal Analyst: Steve Angelotti

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This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan Senate staff for use by the Senate in its deliberations and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.