

April 27, 2015

Testimony before the Assembly Committee on Commerce and Labor

Prepared Statement of the Kenny Guinn Center for Policy Priorities

Nevada faces significant mental health workforce shortages.

- The Guinn Center released a policy brief in October 2014 titled, *Nevada's Mental Health Workforce: Shortages and Opportunities*.
- Currently, 1.4 million people in Nevada (53 percent) reside in an area designated as a Mental Health Professional Shortage Area by the Federal Health Resources and Services Administration.
- Nevada ranks 50th in the U.S. in the number of psychiatrists per 100,000 people, and 47th in the U.S. in the number of psychologists per 100,000 people. Shortages are particularly pronounced in rural areas.
- The current pipeline of graduates from Nevada public and private colleges has been inadequate to meet demand.
- Nevada Department of Health and Human Services has high vacancy rates for psychiatrists and psychiatric nurses, which has increased reliance on contract staff.

Expediting licensing would help address shortages.

- While health licensing boards have endorsement processes for professionals coming from other states, significant barriers exist in processing time, exam requirements, years of experience requirements, and training requirements.
- SB 68 requires licensing boards for health professions to comply with a standard timeline: 15 days to notify an applicant if additional information is necessary, and 45 days to review the application and make a determination. For certain boards, the timeline to make a final determination would be extended to 10 days after return of fingerprint results.
- Creating a universal timeline to review endorsement applications can provide out-of-state professional more certainty when they are offered a job in Nevada and can make Nevada more attractive in recruitment efforts.

Licensing boards will need to revise existing policies to accommodate new timelines.

- For example, the Board of Psychological Examiners requires applicants from other states to take a written state examination. Currently it is only offered three times per year. The Board anticipates it will move to an electronic exam that is offered every 60 days to accommodate the proposed timelines.
- Boards with oral exam requirements will either need to expedite these exams, move to written exams, or eliminate the requirements through regulation.

Recommendations

- 1. Approve SB 68 to expedite licensing for health professionals coming from other states.**
- 2. Future legislation can revise existing endorsement statutes.**
 - SB 68 is an overlay to existing endorsement statutes. For most professions, the bill does not amend the existing endorsement statute.
 - This could cause differences in interpretation of requirements.
 - Incorporating the expedited timelines into the existing endorsement statutes would eliminate potential conflicts between statutory provisions and would give boards the opportunity to revise or eliminate requirements that cause delays in processing such as state-required written and oral exams.
- 3. Future legislation can create uniform fingerprinting requirements.**
 - Boards have different fingerprinting requirements.
 - The Board of Medical Examiners and Board of Psychological Examiners issue licenses before fingerprint results have been received.
 - The Board of Nursing issues a temporary license pending receipt of fingerprints. A permanent license is issued upon receipt of fingerprints.
 - Other boards require that fingerprint results be received prior to issuing a license.
 - Fingerprinting processing times vary. The Department of Public Safety indicates the process takes 45 days but some boards report it can take up to four months in some cases.
 - Statutes could be amended to create a universal standard for fingerprinting processes. Given that very few potential licensees fail to disclose an issue that is later revealed in a background check, a reasonable path forward would be to expedite licensing by not waiting for background checks to be completed, and then address any issues after the background check is completed.

See full report: *Nevada's Mental Health Workforce: Shortages and Opportunities*
<http://guinncenter.org/publications/policy-reports/#SustainingNevada>

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