

Date of Hearing: April 29, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Buffy Wicks, Chair

AB 1598 (Quirk-Silva) – As Amended April 15, 2026

Policy Committee: Business and Professions Vote: 19 - 0

Urgency: No State Mandated Local Program: Yes Reimbursable: No

SUMMARY:

This bill revises and recasts provisions of the Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist Act (LMFTA), the Educational Psychologist Practice Act (EPPA), the Clinical Social Worker Practice Act (CSWPA), and the Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor Act (LPCCA) to extend timelines for supervised experience and exam validity, align associate registration limits with those timelines, modernize outdated statutory language, and clarify the scope of faith-based counseling and other professional exemptions.

Specifically, this bill:

- 1) Specifies that the LMFTA, CSWPA, and LPCCPA do not prevent qualified members of other professional groups from doing work of a psychosocial nature consistent with the standards, ethics, and scope of practice of their respective professions.
- 2) Expands an exemption for priests, rabbis, and ministers in the LMFTA, CSWPA, and LPCCPA to a religious official of any denomination, clarifies that the exemption is for faith-based counseling services as part of their regular professional duties for an established and legally recognizable faith-based entity, and establishes criteria for the exemption.
- 3) Repeals requirements for associates to take a California law and ethics examination within the first year of registration and every year thereafter until successful completion of the examination. Requires the Board of Behavioral Sciences (Board) to grant eligibility to take the California law and ethics examination upon approval of an application for registration or licensure and submission of the required application and fee.
- 4) Requires, beginning January 1, 2030, an applicant and registrant for initial licensure to pass an exam on California law and ethics and a clinical examination no more than seven years before the Board receives the licensure application, and allows the applicant to re-take the exam after any waiting period specified by the Board in regulation.
- 5) Extends the time limit for an associate to gain their supervised experience hours prior to applying for licensure, from six years to seven years.
- 6) Allows associate registration to be renewed six times (instead of five times) and prohibits a registration from being renewed or reinstated beyond seven years (instead of six years) from the month it was issued.

- 7) Allows a person who holds, or is applying for, a subsequent associate registration number, to request a one-time, two-consecutive-year hardship extension to allow them to be employed or volunteer at one private practice or professional corporation employer with their subsequent associate registration number, as specified.
- 8) Repeals and recasts various provisions, deletes obsolete language, and makes other technical, clarifying, and conforming changes.

FISCAL EFFECT:

The Board estimates the two-year hardship extension for private practice under subsequent registration will result in a one-time backlog that will require additional staff to review and process approximately 2,700 extension requests from existing associates and respond to an estimated 1,350 inquiries before the workload normalizes. The Board will need one analyst for one year to verify each request for legitimacy, ensure attestations are complete, and issue approval or denial letters. The Board will also need to update forms, FAQs, and website content, and conduct outreach to inform associates of changes to registration and licensure requirements. The Board estimates one-time costs of \$133,000 for one analyst for year.

The Board also anticipates ongoing workload to evaluate an additional year of supervised experience hours for applications annually, as well as a reduction in revenues due to fewer associates attempting the California Law and Ethics exam in their first year of registration. Annual costs would be approximately \$73,000 per year, or less, and are absorbable.

Finally, the Department of Consumer Affairs' Office of Information Services has determined this bill necessitates many changes to the licensing and enforcement system, at estimated costs of \$44,625, which is absorbable within existing resources.

The Behavioral Sciences Fund is the fund source for all costs cited above.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **Purpose.** This bill is sponsored by the Board. According to the author:

California continues to face a shortage of behavioral health professionals while the need for services continues to grow. Unfortunately, current licensing timelines can unintentionally delay qualified applicants who experience life events such as medical leave, caregiving responsibilities, or financial hardship. [This bill] modernizes the Board's licensing process to better address real-world challenges faced by applicants, without compromising the standards required for safe and competent practice.

- 2) **Background.** The Board is responsible for the regulatory oversight of over 148,000 licensees and registrants, including licensed marriage and family therapists and associate marriage and family therapists, licensed clinical social workers and associate clinical social workers, licensed educational psychologists, and licensed professional clinical counselors and associate professional clinical counselors. Each profession has its own scope of practice, entry-level requirements, and professional settings, with some overlap in areas.

Prior to licensure as a marriage and family therapist, clinical social worker, or professional clinical counselor, applicants must have completed all education, supervised experience, and examination requirements. After obtaining a qualifying master's degree, an individual may apply for registration as an associate. Registration allows associates to work under supervision while accumulating the required 3,000 supervised experience hours for licensure.

The author's office contends this bill will reduce barriers to licensure that can disproportionately affect individuals from low-income communities and communities of color, as licensure requires thousands of supervised hours, often at low wages. The author's office asserts this bill, by extending timelines and providing a hardship exemption for associates to continue earning hours in private practice under a subsequent registration number, affords applicants flexibility to complete licensure requirements while maintaining professional standards.

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