

ASSEMBLY THIRD READING

AB 1598 (Quirk-Silva)

As Amended April 15, 2026

Majority vote

SUMMARY

Repeals a requirement for associates registered with the Board of Behavioral Sciences (BBS or board) to attempt the California law and ethics examination each year as a condition of registration renewal; establishes a seven-year age limit on scores for the California law and ethics examination; extends the validity of supervised experience hours from six years to seven years, increases the maximum number of times associates may renew their registration from five to six, establishes a limited exception for associates to continue working in private practice with a subsequent registration number; and clarifies the pastoral counseling exemption in the Marriage and Family Therapist Act, Clinical Social Worker Practice Act, and the Professional Clinical Counselor Act.

Major Provisions

- 1) Specifies that nothing in the Clinical Social Worker Practice Act shall prevent qualified members of other professional groups, *including registered nurses and educational psychologists*, from doing work of a psychosocial nature consistent with the standards, ethics, and *scope of practice* of their respective profession (emphasis added to distinguish from existing law) and prohibits qualified members from stating that they are registered to practice clinical social work.
- 2) Specifies that nothing in the Professional Clinical Counselor Practice Act shall 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 profession (emphasis added to distinguish from existing law); prohibits qualified members from stating that they are registered to practice professional clinical counseling; and specifies that qualified members of other professional groups, include but are not limited to, physicians and surgeons, registered nurses, psychologists, members of the State Bar, marriage and family therapists, educational psychologists, and clinical social workers.
- 3) Expands an exemption for priests, rabbis, and ministers in the Marriage and Family Therapist Act, Clinical Social Worker Practice Act, and Professional Clinical Counselor Act to an imam or other religious official of any denomination; clarifies that the exemption is for faith-based counseling services rendered as part of their regular professional duties for an established and legally recognizable faith-based entity, such as a church, synagogue, mosque, or other recognized religious organization; and establishes criteria to claim the exemption.
- 4) 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, and requires the board to grant eligibility to take the California law and ethics examination upon approval of an application for registration or an application for licensure and submission of the required application and fee.
- 5) Repeals language allowing a registrant or applicant for licensure to take the clinical exam only upon completion of all supervised work experience and education requirements and passage of the California law and ethics examination, and instead *authorizes the Board to*

grant an application for licensure *eligibility* to take the clinical exam if those requirements are met (emphasis added to distinguish from existing law).

- 6) Authorizes the board to establish a waiting period to retake the California law and ethics examination and requires an applicant to submit a reexamination application.
- 7) Establishes a seven-year age limit on all examinations and experience required for licensure by the BBS and makes several conforming changes.
- 8) Allows associate registration to be renewed a maximum of six times (currently five) and prohibits a registration from being renewed or reinstated beyond seven years (currently six) from the last day of the month during which it was issued.
- 9) Allows an applicant applying for or who currently holds a subsequent associate registration number to request that the board grant them 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.
- 10) Repeals and recasts various provisions, deletes obsolete language, and makes other technical, clarifying, and conforming changes.

COMMENTS

Registration and licensure. 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, individuals 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. During their registration period, associates must take the California law and ethics examination each renewal period until they pass. Associates must also pass a practice-specific clinical examination. Associate registrations are valid for five renewal periods and expire six years from the original issuance date. If an individual has not completed the necessary supervised experience hours or met licensure requirements within this timeframe, they may apply for a subsequent registration. This additional registration permits them to continue working under supervision and collecting hours, but prohibits them from working or volunteering in a private practice or a professional corporation.

This bill repeals the requirement that associates take the California law and ethics exam within the first year of registration and every year thereafter until they pass. Instead, this bill would allow associates to choose when to take the exam and authorize the board to establish a waiting period before an associate who fails the California law and ethics examination can retake it. Additionally, this bill establishes a seven-year age limit on the California law and ethics examination and prohibits the board from issuing a subsequent registration number unless the applicant has passed the California law and ethics examination within seven years of the board's receipt of their application. This bill also requires applicants for licensure to have passed their respective clinical examination within seven years of the board's receipt of their licensure application. Clinical examination scores are currently valid for seven years from the examination date. This bill also increases the maximum number of times associates may renew their registration from five to six and allows a registration to be renewed or reinstated within seven years (currently six) from the last day of the month during which it was issued. Additionally, this

bill would create a narrow exemption for an applicant applying for or who currently holds a subsequent registration number to request a one-time, two-consecutive-year hardship extension to continue working or volunteering in private practice if among other things the applicant shows good cause for being unable to complete the licensure process within seven years and provides a plan to gain the needed hours toward licensure during the extension period.

Applicants for an educational psychologist license must obtain a qualifying master's degree and complete 60 semester or 90 quarter units of postgraduate coursework. Applicants are not required to register with the board while gaining experience, but they must have at least two years of full-time experience as a credentialed school psychologist in public schools or equivalent experience in private or parochial schools. Additionally, applicants must complete either one year of supervised experience in a school psychology program or an additional year of full-time experience as a credentialed school psychologist in public schools under the direction of a licensed educational psychologist or licensed psychologist. Applicants are required to take only one examination, the LEP Written Examination, developed and administered by the board. This bill would establish a seven-year age limit for experience gained to count to licensure (currently six years) and require the licensure examination to be passed within seven years of the board's receipt of the application for an initial license (currently seven years from the date the examination was taken).

Pastoral counseling exemption. The Marriage and Family Therapist Practice Act, the Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor Act, and the Clinical Social Worker Practice Act exempt counseling services provided by a priest, rabbi, or minister. According to the author's office, "the Board's exemption for pastoral counseling is vague, and not specific enough to take disciplinary actions in cases where an individual was claiming a pastoral counseling exemption, but the Board believes the services they were providing were not of a pastoral nature." As such, this bill clarifies that the exemption applies to faith-based counseling services provided by a priest, rabbi, minister, imam, or other religious official of any denomination as part of their regular professional duties for an established and legally recognized faith-based entity, such as a church, synagogue, or mosque. This bill also establishes criteria to claim the exemption.

Exemptions for qualified members of other professional groups. The Marriage and Family Therapist Act, Clinical Social Worker Practice Act, and Professional Clinical Counselor Act specify that they are not to be construed to constrict, limit, or withdraw the Medical Practice Act, the Nursing Practice Act, or the Psychology Licensing Law. Moreover, each practice act exempts various members of other professional groups, such as physicians, registered nurses, psychologists, attorneys, and other behavioral health professionals, though the exemptions are inconsistent across the practice acts. This bill attempts to standardize the exemptions across all three practice acts such that qualified members of other professional groups, including but not limited to physicians, registered nurses, psychologists, attorneys, and other licensees of the board, may do work of a psychosocial nature consistent with the standards, ethics, and *scope of practice* of their respective profession (emphasis added to distinguish from existing law).

According to the Author

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."

Arguments in Support

As the sponsor of this bill, the *California Board of Behavioral Sciences* writes in support:

Becoming licensed requires completing a graduate degree, passing multiple exams, and accumulating thousands of hours of supervised experience—often while earning low wages. The process is time-consuming and costly, and many individuals experience life events such as medical issues, caregiving responsibilities, or financial hardship that may delay or interrupt their progress. These challenges can disproportionately affect individuals from underrepresented communities and contribute to workforce shortages in behavioral health. This bill aims to make the path to licensure more accessible and responsive to real-world challenges faced by applicants without compromising the standards required for safe and competent practice...Additionally, this bill modernizes the exemption language for faith-based counseling by clarifying the criteria for when faith-based counseling is exempt from licensure. These changes will help ensure the licensure process is fair, practical, and aligned with the needs of today's behavioral health workforce.

Arguments in Opposition

There is no opposition on file.

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee:

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.

VOTES

ASM BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONS: 19-0-0

YES: Berman, Johnson, Addis, Ahrens, Alanis, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Caloza, Chen, Elhawary, Hadwick, Haney, Hart, Irwin, Jackson, Lowenthal, Macedo, Nguyen, Pellerin

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 15-0-0

YES: Wicks, Hoover, Aguiar-Curry, Calderon, Caloza, Dixon, Fong, Mark González, Krell, Pacheco, Pellerin, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Ta, Tangipa

UPDATED

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