

CONCURRENCE IN SENATE AMENDMENTS

AB 1598 (Quirk-Silva)

As Amended August 19, 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.

Senate Amendments

- 1) Require marriage and family therapist trainees, associate marriage and family therapist applicants and registrants, social work interns, associate clinical social worker applicants and registrants, professional clinical counselor trainees, and associate professional clinical counselor applicants and registrants to provide each client or patient with the name of their employer, or if not employed, the name of the entity for which they volunteer prior to initiating any professional services, as specified.
- 2) Address chaptering conflicts and make other technical 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.

Current law requires trainees and associates to disclose to a client or patient that they are unlicensed and working under supervision prior to initiating professional services. This bill would require them to also provide the name of their employer or the entity for which they volunteer. 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 Senate Appropriations Committee, the BBS reports:

- 1) One-time cost of approximately \$133,000 for a limited-term staff to address an anticipated workload backlog resulting from the two-year hardship extension proposed in the bill. This estimate is based on an expected 2,700 extension requests and 1,350 inquiries, and is not absorbable.
- 2) Ongoing annual costs of up to \$12,500 to evaluate an additional year of supervised experience hours for applications, which are anticipated to be absorbable.
- 3) Annual revenue reduction of approximately \$50,000 due to an estimated 20% fewer associates attempting the California Law and Ethics exam in their first year of registration, which is anticipated to be absorbable.
- 4) Minor costs to update forms, frequently asked questions (FAQs), and website content, and to conduct outreach to inform associates of changes to registration and licensure requirements.

- 5) The Office of Information Services within the Department of Consumer Affairs estimates costs of approximately \$45,000 to make BreEZe system updates, which is considered absorbable within existing maintenance resources.

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

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 74-0-6

YES: Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alanis, Alvarez, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Bryan, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, Castillo, Connolly, Davies, DeMaio, Dixon, Elhawary, Ellis, Flora, Fong, Gabriel, Gallagher, Gipson, Jeff Gonzalez, Mark González, Hadwick, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Hoover, Irwin, Jackson, Johnson, Kalra, Krell, Lee, Lowenthal, Macedo, McKinnor, Muratsuchi, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Patterson, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ransom, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Sanchez, Schiavo, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Ta, Tangipa, Valencia, Wallis, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

ABS, ABST OR NV: Arambula, Chen, Garcia, Lackey, Ramos, Celeste Rodriguez

UPDATED

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