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SENATE BILL NO. 812

Offered January 12, 2018

A BILL to amend and reenact §§ 54.1-2400.1 and 54.1-3500 of the Code of Virginia, relating to definition of qualified mental health professional.

Patron—Barker

Referred to Committee on Education and Health

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That §§ 54.1-2400.1 and 54.1-3500 of the Code of Virginia are amended and reenacted as follows:

§ 54.1-2400.1. Mental health service providers; duty to protect third parties; immunity.

A. As used in this section:

"Certified substance abuse counselor" means a person certified to provide substance abuse counseling in a state-approved public or private substance abuse program or facility.

"Client" or "patient" means any person who is voluntarily or involuntarily receiving mental health services or substance abuse services from any mental health service provider.

"Clinical psychologist" means a person who practices clinical psychology as defined in § 54.1-3600.

"Clinical social worker" means a person who practices social work as defined in § 54.1-3700.

"Licensed practical nurse" means a person licensed to practice practical nursing as defined in § 54.1-3000.

"Licensed substance abuse treatment practitioner" means any person licensed to engage in the practice of substance abuse treatment as defined in § 54.1-3500.

"Marriage and family therapist" means a person licensed to engage in the practice of marriage and family therapy as defined in § 54.1-3500.

"Mental health professional" means a person who by education and experience is professionally qualified and licensed in Virginia to provide counseling interventions designed to facilitate an individual's achievement of human development goals and remediate mental, emotional, or behavioral disorders and associated distresses which interfere with mental health and development.

"Mental health service provider" or "provider" refers to any of the following: (i) a person who provides professional services as a certified substance abuse counselor, clinical psychologist, clinical social worker, licensed substance abuse treatment practitioner, licensed practical nurse, marriage and family therapist, mental health professional, physician, physician assistant, professional counselor, psychologist, qualified mental health professional, registered nurse, registered peer recovery specialist, school psychologist, or social worker; (ii) a professional corporation, all of whose shareholders or members are so licensed; or (iii) a partnership, all of whose partners are so licensed.

"Professional counselor" means a person who practices counseling as defined in § 54.1-3500.

"Psychologist" means a person who practices psychology as defined in § 54.1-3600.

"Qualified mental health professional" means a person who by education and experience is professionally qualified and registered by the Board of Counseling to provide collaborative mental health services for adults or children. A qualified mental health professional shall provide such services as an employee or independent contractor of the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, the Department of Corrections, or a provider licensed by the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services.

"Registered nurse" means a person licensed to practice professional nursing as defined in § 54.1-3000.

"Registered peer recovery specialist" means a person who by education and experience is professionally qualified and registered by the Board of Counseling to provide collaborative services to assist individuals in achieving sustained recovery from the effects of addiction or mental illness, or both. A registered peer recovery specialist shall provide such services as an employee or independent contractor of the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, a provider licensed by the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, a practitioner licensed by or holding a permit issued from the Department of Health Professions, or a facility licensed by the Department of Health.

"School psychologist" means a person who practices school psychology as defined in § 54.1-3600.

"Social worker" means a person who practices social work as defined in § 54.1-3700.

B. A mental health service provider has a duty to take precautions to protect third parties from violent behavior or other serious harm only when the client has orally, in writing, or via sign language,

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59 communicated to the provider a specific and immediate threat to cause serious bodily injury or death to  
60 an identified or readily identifiable person or persons, if the provider reasonably believes, or should  
61 believe according to the standards of his profession, that the client has the intent and ability to carry out  
62 that threat immediately or imminently. If the third party is a child, in addition to taking precautions to  
63 protect the child from the behaviors in the above types of threats, the provider also has a duty to take  
64 precautions to protect the child if the client threatens to engage in behaviors that would constitute  
65 physical abuse or sexual abuse as defined in § 18.2-67.10. The duty to protect does not attach unless the  
66 threat has been communicated to the provider by the threatening client while the provider is engaged in  
67 his professional duties.

68 C. The duty set forth in subsection B is discharged by a mental health service provider who takes  
69 one or more of the following actions:

70 1. Seeks involuntary admission of the client under Article 16 (§ 16.1-335 et seq.) of Chapter 11 of  
71 Title 16.1 or Chapter 8 (§ 37.2-800 et seq.) of Title 37.2.

72 2. Makes reasonable attempts to warn the potential victims or the parent or guardian of the potential  
73 victim if the potential victim is under the age of 18.

74 3. Makes reasonable efforts to notify a law-enforcement official having jurisdiction in the client's or  
75 potential victim's place of residence or place of work, or place of work of the parent or guardian if the  
76 potential victim is under age 18, or both.

77 4. Takes steps reasonably available to the provider to prevent the client from using physical violence  
78 or other means of harm to others until the appropriate law-enforcement agency can be summoned and  
79 takes custody of the client.

80 5. Provides therapy or counseling to the client or patient in the session in which the threat has been  
81 communicated until the mental health service provider reasonably believes that the client no longer has  
82 the intent or the ability to carry out the threat.

83 6. In the case of a registered peer recovery specialist, or a qualified mental health professional who  
84 is not otherwise licensed by a health regulatory board at the Department of Health Professions, reports  
85 immediately to a licensed mental health service provider to take one or more of the actions set forth in  
86 this subsection.

87 D. A mental health service provider shall not be held civilly liable to any person for:

88 1. Breaching confidentiality with the limited purpose of protecting third parties by communicating the  
89 threats described in subsection B made by his clients to potential third party victims or law-enforcement  
90 agencies or by taking any of the actions specified in subsection C.

91 2. Failing to predict, in the absence of a threat described in subsection B, that the client would cause  
92 the third party serious physical harm.

93 3. Failing to take precautions other than those enumerated in subsection C to protect a potential third  
94 party victim from the client's violent behavior.

95 **§ 54.1-3500. Definitions.**

96 As used in this chapter, unless the context requires a different meaning:

97 "Appraisal activities" means the exercise of professional judgment based on observations and  
98 objective assessments of a client's behavior to evaluate current functioning, diagnose, and select  
99 appropriate treatment required to remediate identified problems or to make appropriate referrals.

100 "Board" means the Board of Counseling.

101 "Certified substance abuse counseling assistant" means a person certified by the Board to practice in  
102 accordance with the provisions of § 54.1-3507.2.

103 "Certified substance abuse counselor" means a person certified by the Board to practice in  
104 accordance with the provisions of § 54.1-3507.1.

105 "Counseling" means the application of principles, standards, and methods of the counseling  
106 profession in (i) conducting assessments and diagnoses for the purpose of establishing treatment goals  
107 and objectives and (ii) planning, implementing, and evaluating treatment plans using treatment  
108 interventions to facilitate human development and to identify and remediate mental, emotional, or  
109 behavioral disorders and associated distresses that interfere with mental health.

110 "Licensed substance abuse treatment practitioner" means a person who: (i) is trained in and engages  
111 in the practice of substance abuse treatment with individuals or groups of individuals suffering from the  
112 effects of substance abuse or dependence, and in the prevention of substance abuse or dependence; and  
113 (ii) is licensed to provide advanced substance abuse treatment and independent, direct, and unsupervised  
114 treatment to such individuals or groups of individuals, and to plan, evaluate, supervise, and direct  
115 substance abuse treatment provided by others.

116 "Marriage and family therapist" means a person trained in the assessment and treatment of cognitive,  
117 affective, or behavioral mental and emotional disorders within the context of marriage and family  
118 systems through the application of therapeutic and family systems theories and techniques.

119 "Marriage and family therapy" means the assessment and treatment of cognitive, affective, or  
120 behavioral mental and emotional disorders within the context of marriage and family systems through

121 the application of therapeutic and family systems theories and techniques and delivery of services to  
122 individuals, couples, and families, singularly or in groups, for the purpose of treating such disorders.

123 "Practice of counseling" means rendering or offering to render to individuals, groups, organizations,  
124 or the general public any service involving the application of principles, standards, and methods of the  
125 counseling profession, which shall include appraisal, counseling, and referral activities.

126 "Practice of marriage and family therapy" means the assessment and treatment of cognitive, affective,  
127 or behavioral mental and emotional disorders within the context of marriage and family systems through  
128 the application of therapeutic and family systems theories and techniques, which shall include  
129 assessment, treatment, and referral activities.

130 "Practice of substance abuse treatment" means rendering or offering to render substance abuse  
131 treatment to individuals, groups, organizations, or the general public.

132 "Professional counselor" means a person trained in the application of principles, standards, and  
133 methods of the counseling profession, including counseling interventions designed to facilitate an  
134 individual's achievement of human development goals and remediating mental, emotional, or behavioral  
135 disorders and associated distresses that interfere with mental health and development.

136 "Qualified mental health professional" means a person who by education and experience is  
137 professionally qualified and registered by the Board to provide collaborative mental health services for  
138 adults or children. A qualified mental health professional shall provide such services as an employee or  
139 independent contractor of the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, *the*  
140 *Department of Corrections*, or a provider licensed by the Department of Behavioral Health and  
141 Developmental Services.

142 "Referral activities" means the evaluation of data to identify problems and to determine advisability  
143 of referral to other specialists.

144 "Registered peer recovery specialist" means a person who by education and experience is  
145 professionally qualified and registered by the Board to provide collaborative services to assist individuals  
146 in achieving sustained recovery from the effects of addiction or mental illness, or both. A registered peer  
147 recovery specialist shall provide such services as an employee or independent contractor of the  
148 Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, a provider licensed by the Department of  
149 Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, a practitioner licensed by or holding a permit issued  
150 from the Department of Health Professions, or a facility licensed by the Department of Health.

151 "Residency" means a post-internship supervised clinical experience registered with the Board.

152 "Resident" means an individual who has submitted a supervisory contract to the Board and has  
153 received Board approval to provide clinical services in professional counseling under supervision.

154 "Substance abuse" and "substance dependence" mean a maladaptive pattern of substance use leading  
155 to clinically significant impairment or distress.

156 "Substance abuse treatment" means (i) the application of specific knowledge, skills, substance abuse  
157 treatment theory, and substance abuse treatment techniques to define goals and develop a treatment plan  
158 of action regarding substance abuse or dependence prevention, education, or treatment in the substance  
159 abuse or dependence recovery process and (ii) referrals to medical, social services, psychological,  
160 psychiatric, or legal resources when such referrals are indicated.

161 "Supervision" means the ongoing process, performed by a supervisor, of monitoring the performance  
162 of the person supervised and providing regular, documented individual or group consultation, guidance,  
163 and instruction with respect to the clinical skills and competencies of the person supervised.