

1 SENATE BILL NO. 342

2 INTRODUCED BY C. SQUIRES

3
4 A BILL FOR AN ACT ENTITLED: "AN ACT REQUIRING APPLICANTS FOR LICENSURE AS SOCIAL
5 WORKERS AND PROFESSIONAL COUNSELORS TO SUBMIT FINGERPRINTS FOR CRIMINAL
6 BACKGROUND CHECKS PRIOR TO THE ISSUANCE OF A LICENSE; AMENDING SECTIONS 37-22-101,
7 37-22-301, 37-23-101, AND 37-23-202, MCA; AND PROVIDING AN APPLICABILITY DATE."
8

9 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MONTANA:

10
11 **Section 1.** Section 37-22-101, MCA, is amended to read:

12 **"37-22-101. Purpose.** (1) The legislature finds and declares that because the profession of social work
13 profoundly affects the lives of people of this state, it is the purpose of this chapter to provide for the common good
14 by:

15 (a) insuring ensuring the ethical, qualified, and professional practice of social work; and

16 (b) instituting an effective mechanism for obtaining accurate public information regarding an applicant's
17 criminal background:

18 (i) to prevent convicted criminal offenders who committed crimes relevant to working with children, the
19 elderly, the mentally ill, or other vulnerable persons from obtaining a Montana social work license as an attempt
20 to gain access to and perpetrate crimes against new victims; and

21 (ii) to protect the state from claims of negligence.

22 (2) This chapter and the rules promulgated under 37-22-201 set standards of qualification, education,
23 training, and experience and ~~will~~ establish professional ethics for those who seek to engage in the practice of
24 social work as licensed social workers."
25

26 **Section 2.** Section 37-22-301, MCA, is amended to read:

27 **"37-22-301. License requirements -- exemptions.** (1) A license applicant shall satisfactorily complete
28 an examination prescribed by the board.

29 (2) Before an applicant may take the examination, the applicant shall present three letters of reference
30 from licensed social workers, licensed clinical social workers, psychiatrists, or psychologists who have knowledge

1 of the applicant's professional performance and shall demonstrate to the board that the applicant:

2 (a) has a doctorate or master's degree in social work from a program accredited by the council on social
3 work education or approved by the board;

4 (b) has completed at least 24 months of supervised post master's degree work experience in
5 psychotherapy, which included 3,000 hours of social work experience, of which at least 1,500 hours were in direct
6 client contact, within the past 5 years; and

7 (c) abides by the social work ethical standards adopted under 37-22-201.

8 (3) An applicant who fails the examination may reapply to take the examination.

9 (4) An applicant is exempt from the examination requirement if the applicant satisfies the board that the
10 applicant is licensed, certified, or registered under the laws of a state or territory of the United States that imposes
11 substantially the same requirements as this chapter and that the applicant has passed an examination similar
12 to that required by the board.

13 (5) (a) As a prerequisite to the issuance of a license, the board shall require the applicant to submit
14 fingerprints for the purpose of fingerprint checks by the Montana department of justice and the federal bureau
15 of investigation.

16 (b) The applicant shall sign a release of information to the board and is responsible to the department
17 of justice for the payment of all fees associated with the criminal background check.

18 (c) Upon completion of the criminal background check, the department of justice shall forward all criminal
19 justice information, as defined in 44-5-103, concerning the applicant that involves the conviction of a criminal
20 offense in any jurisdiction to the board, as authorized in 44-5-303.

21 (d) At the conclusion of any background check required by this section, the board must receive the
22 criminal background check report but may not receive the fingerprint card of the applicant. Upon receipt of the
23 criminal background check report, the department of justice shall promptly destroy the fingerprint card of the
24 applicant.

25 (6) If an applicant has a history of criminal convictions, then pursuant to 37-1-203, the applicant has the
26 opportunity to demonstrate to the board that the applicant is sufficiently rehabilitated to warrant the public trust,
27 and if the board determines that the applicant is not, the license may be denied."

28

29 **Section 3.** Section 37-23-101, MCA, is amended to read:

30 **"37-23-101. Purpose.** (1) The legislature finds and declares that because the profession of professional

1 counseling profoundly affects the lives of people of this state, it is the purpose of this chapter to provide for the
2 common good by:

3 (a) ensuring the ethical, qualified, and professional practice of professional counseling; and

4 (b) instituting an effective mechanism for obtaining accurate public information regarding an applicant's
5 criminal background:

6 (i) to prevent convicted criminal offenders who committed crimes relevant to working with children, the
7 elderly, the mentally ill, or other vulnerable persons from obtaining a Montana professional counseling license
8 as an attempt to gain access to and perpetrate crimes against new victims; and

9 (ii) to protect the state from claims of negligence.

10 (2) This chapter and the rules promulgated by the board under 37-22-201 set standards of qualification,
11 education, training, and experience and establish professional ethics for those who seek to engage in the practice
12 of professional counseling as licensed professional counselors."

13

14 **Section 4.** Section 37-23-202, MCA, is amended to read:

15 **"37-23-202. Licensure requirements.** (1) An applicant for licensure must have satisfactorily:

16 (a) completed a planned graduate program of 60 semester hours, primarily counseling in nature, 6
17 semester hours of which were earned in an advanced counseling practicum that resulted in a graduate degree
18 from an institution accredited to offer a graduate program in counseling;

19 (b) completed 3,000 hours of counseling practice supervised by a licensed professional counselor or
20 licensed member of an allied mental health profession, at least half of which was postdegree. The applicant must
21 have each supervisor endorse the application for licensure, attesting to the number of hours supervised.

22 (c) passed an examination prepared and administered by:

23 (i) the national board of certified counselors; or

24 (ii) the national academy of certified clinical mental health counselors; and

25 (d) completed an application.

26 (2) The board shall provide by rule for licensure of a person who possesses a graduate degree that
27 consists of a minimum of 45 semester hours primarily related to counseling and that is from an institution
28 accredited to offer a graduate program in counseling, by specifying the additional graduate credit hours necessary
29 to fulfill the requirements of subsection (1)(a) in counseling courses in an approved program within a period of
30 5 years.

1 (3) (a) As a prerequisite to the issuance of a license, the board shall require the applicant to submit
 2 fingerprints for the purpose of fingerprint checks by the Montana department of justice and the federal bureau
 3 of investigation.

4 (b) The applicant shall sign a release of information to the board and is responsible to the department
 5 of justice for the payment of all fees associated with the criminal background check.

6 (c) Upon completion of the criminal background check, the department of justice shall forward all criminal
 7 justice information, as defined in 44-5-103, concerning the applicant that involves the conviction of a criminal
 8 offense in any jurisdiction to the board, as authorized in 44-5-303.

9 (d) At the conclusion of any background check required by this section, the board must receive the
 10 criminal background check report but may not receive the fingerprint card of the applicant. Upon receipt of the
 11 criminal background check report, the department of justice shall promptly destroy the fingerprint card of the
 12 applicant.

13 (4) If an applicant has a history of criminal convictions, then pursuant to 37-1-203, the applicant has the
 14 opportunity to demonstrate to the board that the applicant is sufficiently rehabilitated to warrant the public trust,
 15 and if the board determines that the applicant is not, the license may be denied."

16
 17 COORDINATION SECTION. SECTION 5. COORDINATION INSTRUCTION. IF HOUSE BILL NO. 668 AND [THIS
 18 ACT] ARE BOTH PASSED AND APPROVED, THEN THE SECTION IN [THIS ACT] AMENDING 37-22-301 IS VOID AND 37-22-301
 19 IS AMENDED TO READ AS FOLLOWS:

20 **"37-22-301. License requirements -- exemptions.** (1) A license applicant shall satisfactorily complete
 21 an examination prescribed by the board.

22 (2) Before an applicant may take the examination, the applicant shall present three letters of reference
 23 from licensed social workers, licensed clinical social workers, psychiatrists, or psychologists who have knowledge
 24 of the applicant's professional performance and shall demonstrate to the board that the applicant:

25 (a) has a doctorate or master's degree in social work from a program accredited by the council on social
 26 work education or approved by the board;

27 (b) has completed at least 24 months of supervised post master's degree work experience in
 28 psychotherapy, which included 3,000 hours of social work experience, of which at least 1,500 hours were in direct
 29 client contact, within the past 5 years; and

30 (c) abides by the social work ethical standards adopted under 37-22-201.

1 (3) An applicant who fails the examination may reapply to take the examination.

2 (4) An applicant is exempt from the examination requirement if the applicant satisfies the board that the
3 applicant is licensed, certified, or registered under the laws of a state or territory of the United States that imposes
4 substantially the same requirements as this chapter and that the applicant has passed an examination similar
5 to that required by the board.

6 (5) As a prerequisite to the issuance of a license, the board shall require the applicant to submit
7 fingerprints for the purpose of fingerprint checks by the Montana department of justice and the federal bureau
8 of investigation as provided in 37-1-307.

9 (6) If an applicant has a history of criminal convictions, then pursuant to 37-1-203, the applicant has the
10 opportunity to demonstrate to the board that the applicant is sufficiently rehabilitated to warrant the public trust,
11 and if the board determines that the applicant is not, the license may be denied."
12

13 COORDINATION SECTION. SECTION 6. COORDINATION INSTRUCTION. IF HOUSE BILL NO. 668 AND [THIS
14 ACT] ARE BOTH PASSED AND APPROVED, THEN THE SECTION AMENDING 37-23-202 IN [THIS ACT] IS VOID AND 37-23-202
15 IS AMENDED TO READ AS FOLLOWS:

16 **"37-23-202. Licensure requirements.** (1) An applicant for licensure must have satisfactorily:

17 (a) completed a planned graduate program of 60 semester hours, primarily counseling in nature, 6
18 semester hours of which were earned in an advanced counseling practicum that resulted in a graduate degree
19 from an institution accredited to offer a graduate program in counseling;

20 (b) completed 3,000 hours of counseling practice supervised by a licensed professional counselor or
21 licensed member of an allied mental health profession, at least half of which was postdegree. The applicant must
22 have each supervisor endorse the application for licensure, attesting to the number of hours supervised.

23 (c) passed an examination prepared and administered by:

24 (i) the national board of certified counselors; or

25 (ii) the national academy of certified clinical mental health counselors; and

26 (d) completed an application.

27 (2) The board shall provide by rule for licensure of a person who possesses a graduate degree that
28 consists of a minimum of 45 semester hours primarily related to counseling and that is from an institution
29 accredited to offer a graduate program in counseling, by specifying the additional graduate credit hours necessary
30 to fulfill the requirements of subsection (1)(a) in counseling courses in an approved program within a period of

1 5 years.

2 (3) As a prerequisite to the issuance of a license, the board shall require the applicant to submit
3 fingerprints for the purpose of fingerprint checks by the Montana department of justice and the federal bureau
4 of investigation as provided in 37-1-307.

5 (4) If an applicant has a history of criminal convictions, then pursuant to 37-1-203, the applicant has the
6 opportunity to demonstrate to the board that the applicant is sufficiently rehabilitated to warrant the public trust,
7 and if the board determines that the applicant is not, the license may be denied."

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9 NEW SECTION. Section 7. Applicability. [This act] applies to applications for licensure submitted on
10 or after [the effective date of this act].

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