

SANITARIANS: ADOPT NATIONAL STANDARDS AND CREATE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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House Bill 5664 (Substitute H-1)

Sponsor: Rep. John Stakoe

Committee: Local Government and Urban Policy

First Analysis (4-21-04)

BRIEF SUMMARY: The bill would adopt by reference the education and examination standards of the National Environmental Health Association, and enable the Department of Community Health to accept the association's certification process for sanitarians who meet the standards. The bill also would create a seven-member advisory committee to make recommendations to the department regarding the registration and education standards, as well as disciplinary proceedings.

FISCAL IMPACT: Implementation of House Bill 5664 as introduced may have modest cost implications related to the establishment and ongoing operations of a 7-member advisory committee regarding the registration of sanitarians in the state. There may be administrative savings to the state from implementation of acceptance of certification by the National Environmental Health Association as sufficient to satisfy registration requirements as a sanitarian under the Public Health Code if it streamlines the current process. This may consequently require changes to the Administrative Rules under which other standards are currently established, which would have modest cost implications related to the formal process of promulgation of rules.

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

Sanitarians are the environmental scientists employed in the state and local departments of public health throughout Michigan. Local health departments employ about 6,000 people in the state, and an estimated 570 of those employees are registered sanitarians.

Sanitarians have specialized education and experience in the physical, biological, and sanitary sciences, as those sciences are applied to the field of environmental health. Customarily they hold a bachelor's of science degree, and in order to practice, they must pass a national test, and serve an apprenticeship in the field under the supervision of a veteran sanitarian.

Generally, the duties of sanitarians are educational and technical in nature. For example, the sanitarians employed by local health departments inspect campgrounds (to ensure sanitary conditions), restaurants (to locate sources of food-borne illness), on-site septic systems and private wells (to ensure their separation), public swimming pools (for proper filtration systems), mobile home parks (to ensure properly functioning water and sewage systems), and most non-municipal water supplies serving more than 25 people. In addition, sanitarians are often paired with public health nurses to investigate

environmental contaminants such as lead-based health hazards, and also to test indoor air quality.

The occupation 'sanitarian' is regulated under Part 184 of the Public Health Code, and in order to practice, sanitarians must pass an examination and be registered. Until May 15 1996, the occupation was overseen by a licensing board located in the Department of Commerce whose duties included oversight of the profession, and administration of the state licensure examination. However, when then-Governor Engler created the successor agency for the Department of Commerce called the Department of Consumer and Industry Services (under Executive Order No. 1996-2), the occupational licensure responsibilities for sanitarians shifted to that department, and the oversight board was eliminated, with the board's duties transferred to the director of CIS. Recently, under Governor Granholm, the occupational licensure responsibilities for sanitarians have been relocated to the Department of Community Health, within the Bureau of Health Professions, under Executive Order No. 2003-18, (as the Department of Consumer and Industry Services was again renamed, now known as the Department of Labor and Economic Growth).

Since the occupational licensure responsibility for sanitarians has been relocated to the state health department, some have suggested that an advisory board once again be established to guide the profession. However, rather than re-institute a state licensure exam those who promote an advisory board suggest that the state rely, instead, upon a test created by the National Environmental Health Association, in order to establish certification of sanitarians.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

The bill would adopt by reference the standards of the National Environmental Health Association on qualifications, education, and examinations. The Department of Community Health would accept the certification by the association of the successful completion of any education or examination for the purposes of registration under Part 184. The department could adopt by rule any other or additional appropriate standards and any updates and amendments to the standards of the National Environmental Health Association. If enacted, the bill would take effect on January 1, 2005. The bill would amend Part 184 of the Public Health Code, (MCL 333.18401).

In addition, the bill would create a seven-member advisory committee responsible for making recommendations to the department regarding the qualifications for registration, establishment of education and training standards, and disciplinary proceedings. The members would be appointed by the governor and serve for a term of three years, and would include four registered sanitarians and representatives from the Michigan Restaurant Association, Michigan Groundwater Association, and Michigan Onsite Wastewater Recycling Association, or their successor organizations. Initial members would serve staggered terms of one, two, or three years. Current provisions in Part 184 regarding a nine-member current board of sanitarians (consisting of five registered sanitarians and four members of the general public) would be eliminated.

ARGUMENTS:

For:

This bill sets state-level occupational procedures and guidelines for the more than 570 sanitarians who serve as the environmental scientists working in local health departments throughout the state. It also sets up an advisory committee of sanitarians that includes representatives of industries regulated by sanitarians—associations of restaurateurs, groundwater well drillers, and wastewater recyclers—to advise the director of the Department of Community Health about the profession. The bill may well save the state money, since it proposes that the national examination offered by the National Environmental Health Association be used to certify sanitarians, in lieu of the state licensure exam, thereby recognizing current and best practice in the field.

POSITIONS:

The Michigan Association for Local Public Health supports the bill. (4-20-04)

The Michigan Department of Community Health supports the bill. (4-20-04)

The Michigan Environmental Health Association supports the bill. (4-20-04)

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■ This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan House staff for use by House members in their deliberations, and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.