H.816

An act relating to regulating the use of artificial intelligence in the provision of mental health services

The Senate proposes to the House to amend the bill by striking out all after the enacting clause and inserting in lieu thereof the following:

Sec. 1. PURPOSE

It is the purpose of this act to safeguard individuals seeking mental health services in Vermont from psychological harm, including death by suicide, by ensuring that these services are delivered by mental health professionals and not independently by artificial intelligence systems.

Sec. 2. 3 V.S.A. § 129a is amended to read:

§ 129a. UNPROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

(a) In addition to any other provision of law, the following conduct by a licensee constitutes unprofessional conduct. When that conduct is by an applicant or person who later becomes an applicant, it may constitute grounds for denial of a license or other disciplinary action. Any one of the following items or any combination of items, whether the conduct at issue was committed within or outside the State, shall constitute unprofessional conduct:

* * *

(30) For any mental health professional, engaging in the prohibited use of artificial intelligence pursuant to 18 V.S.A. § 7115.

* * *

Sec. 3. 18 V.S.A. § 7115 is added to read:

§ 7115. PROHIBITED USES OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

(a) As used in this section:

(1) "Artificial intelligence" means an engineered or machine-based system that varies in its level of autonomy and that can, for explicit or implicit objectives, infer from the input it receives how to generate outputs that can influence physical or virtual environments.

(2) "Mental health professional" means an individual licensed, certified, or rostered, respectively, to provide mental health services as a physician pursuant to 26 V.S.A. chapter 23 or 33; an advanced practice registered nurse specializing in psychiatric mental health pursuant to 26 V.S.A. chapter 28; a psychologist pursuant to 26 V.S.A. chapter 55; a peer support provider or peer recovery support specialist pursuant to 26 V.S.A. chapter 60; a social worker pursuant to 26 V.S.A. chapter 61; an alcohol and drug abuse counselor pursuant to 26 V.S.A. chapter 62; a clinical mental health counselor pursuant to 26 V.S.A. chapter 65; a marriage and family therapist pursuant to 26 V.S.A chapter 76; a psychoanalyst pursuant to 26 V.S.A. chapter 77; an applied behavior analyst pursuant to 26 V.S.A. chapter 95; a nonlicensed or noncertified psychotherapist or a noncertified psychoanalyst; or any other professional who provides mental health services.

(3) "Mental health services" means counseling, therapy, or psychotherapy services used to diagnose or treat an individual's mental or behavioral health or provide ongoing recovery support, including providing therapeutic decisions, issuing direct therapeutic communications, generating treatment plans or recommendations, or detecting or interpreting emotion or mental states.

(4) "Therapeutic communication" means a written, verbal, or nonverbal interaction intended to diagnose or treat any type of mental or behavioral health concern, provide ongoing recovery support, or provide any advice related to diagnosis, treatment, or recovery, such as:

(A) engaging in direct interactions with clients or patients for the purpose of understanding or reflecting the client's or patient's thoughts;

(B) providing guidance, therapeutic strategies, or interventions designed to achieve mental health outcomes;

(C) offering emotional support, reassurance, or empathy in response to emotional or psychological distress;

(D) collaborating with a patient or client to develop or modify treatment plans or therapeutic goals; and

(E) delivering feedback intended to promote growth or address mental health outcomes.

(5) "Therapeutic decision" means the final clinical determination regarding diagnosis or the selection, modification, or termination of treatment or care.

(b) A corporation or entity shall not provide, advertise, or otherwise offer mental health services, including through the use of artificial intelligence, to the public unless the mental health services are provided by a mental health professional.

(c)(1) A violation of this section by a corporation or entity shall be deemed a violation of the Consumer Protection Act, 9 V.S.A. chapter 63. The Attorney General has the same authority, and private parties have the same rights and remedies, as provided under 9 V.S.A. chapter 63, subchapter 1. Each violation of this section shall carry a civil penalty of $10,000.00 as set forth in 9 V.S.A. § 2461.

(2) Nothing in this section shall be construed to preclude or supplant any other statutory or common law remedies.

(d) Nothing in this section shall preclude a mental health professional who is operating within the professional's scope of practice from utilizing artificial intelligence tools that are compliant with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996, Pub. L. No. 104-191, provided that the mental health professional reviews and approves any mental health services.

Sec. 4. 26 V.S.A. § 1354 is amended to read:

§ 1354. UNPROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

(a) Prohibited conduct. The Board shall find that any one of the following, or any combination of the following, whether the conduct at issue was committed within or outside the State, constitutes unprofessional conduct:

* * *

(3) engaging in the prohibited use of artificial intelligence pursuant to 18 V.S.A. § 7115;

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Sec. 5. REPORT; USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN REGULATED PROFESSIONS

On or before January 15, 2027, the Office of Professional Regulation and the Board of Medical Practice shall jointly submit a written report to the House Committees on Government Operations and Military Affairs, on Health Care, and on Human Services and the Senate Committees on Government Operations and on Health and Welfare containing recommendations for the regulation of the use of artificial intelligence by regulated professionals, including recommendations for legislative action.

Sec. 6. EFFECTIVE DATE

This act shall take effect on passage.