

By Senator Rouson

16-00595A-23

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1 A bill to be entitled
2 An act relating to the Certified Peer Specialist Pilot
3 Program; creating the pilot program within the
4 Department of Corrections; providing purposes of the
5 pilot program; authorizing inmates at participating
6 facilities to apply to participate in the pilot
7 program; requiring the department to develop criteria
8 for selecting applicants; exempting persons who
9 complete the pilot program's requirements from a
10 specified background screening for peer specialists;
11 requiring the pilot program to assist potential
12 employers with acquiring specified bonds; authorizing
13 the pilot program to offer funding to potential
14 employers to cover specified costs under certain
15 circumstances; requiring the department to adopt
16 rules; providing for the expiration of the pilot
17 program; providing an effective date.

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19 Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

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21 Section 1. The Certified Peer Specialist Pilot Program is
22 created within the Department of Corrections.

23 (1) (a) The purpose of the pilot program is to provide
24 participating inmates with a path to becoming certified peer
25 specialists under s. 397.417, Florida Statutes, upon release by
26 offering such inmates while incarcerated the necessary training
27 hours and experience needed for certification and to assist
28 inmates who complete the pilot program's requirements with post-
29 incarceration employment.

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30 (b) The pilot program will be used to recruit and enroll
31 graduates of the pilot program into certified peer specialist
32 training programs approved under s. 397.417, Florida Statutes;
33 provide core educational training and on-the-job work experience
34 during each participant's incarceration which meets all of the
35 requirements for peer specialist certification; assist with
36 completing the national certification exam before each
37 participant's release; and assist in placing participants in
38 employment as certified peer specialist professionals upon their
39 release.

40 (2) Inmates at participating facilities may apply to
41 participate in the pilot program. The Department of Corrections
42 shall develop criteria for selecting qualified applicants for
43 the pilot program, which may include, but is not limited to,
44 requiring that participants:

45 (a) Have the appropriate custody classification.

46 (b) Meet certain discipline criteria.

47 (c) Have an expected release date within a specified
48 timeframe.

49 (d) Be housed at the institution providing training.

50 (e) Have served as a positive role model during their
51 incarceration.

52 (f) Express a desire to work in the behavioral health
53 treatment field after release.

54 (g) Not have any offenses that would prohibit them from
55 becoming a certified peer specialist.

56 (3) A person who completes the pilot program's requirements
57 is exempt from the background screening requirements for peer
58 specialists under s. 397.417, Florida Statutes.

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59 (4) In assisting persons who have completed the pilot
60 program's requirements with post-incarceration employment, the
61 pilot program:

62 (a) Shall assist potential employers with acquiring bonds
63 from the United States Department of Labor's Federal Bonding
64 Program, if applicable.

65 (b) May offer funding to potential employers to cover the
66 initial costs of hiring and retaining such persons, dependent
67 upon the pilot program securing applicable grant funds for such
68 purpose.

69 (5) The Department of Corrections shall adopt rules to
70 implement this act.

71 (6) The pilot program expires June 30, 2029.

72 Section 2. This act shall take effect July 1, 2023.