

By the Committee on Children, Families, and Elder Affairs; and  
Senator Rouson

586-03514-23

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1 A bill to be entitled  
2 An act relating to the Certified Peer Specialist  
3 Gateway Pilot Program; creating the pilot program  
4 within the Department of Corrections; providing the  
5 purpose of, and requirements for, the pilot program;  
6 authorizing inmates at participating facilities to  
7 apply to participate in the pilot program; requiring  
8 the department to develop certain criteria for  
9 selecting qualified applicants; exempting persons who  
10 complete the pilot program's requirements from a  
11 specified background screening for peer specialists;  
12 requiring the pilot program to assist potential  
13 employers with acquiring specified bonds; authorizing  
14 the pilot program to offer funding to potential  
15 employers to cover specified costs under certain  
16 circumstances; requiring persons who have completed  
17 the pilot program's requirements to provide  
18 prospective employers with incarceration records;  
19 requiring such persons to receive a signed informed  
20 consent form from any potential clients; providing  
21 requirements for such form; requiring the department  
22 to adopt rules; providing for expiration of the pilot  
23 program; providing an effective date.

24  
25 Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

26  
27 Section 1. The Certified Peer Specialist Gateway Pilot  
28 Program is created within the Department of Corrections. The  
29 purpose of the pilot program is to provide participating inmates

586-03514-23

20231012c1

30 with a path to becoming certified peer specialists under s.  
31 397.417, Florida Statutes, upon release by offering such inmates  
32 while incarcerated the necessary training hours and experience  
33 needed for certification and to assist inmates who complete the  
34 pilot program's requirements with post-incarceration employment.

35 (1) The pilot program shall:

36 (a) Recruit and enroll inmates who have completed certain  
37 treatment programs while incarcerated into certified peer  
38 specialist training programs approved under s. 397.417, Florida  
39 Statutes.

40 (b) Provide core educational training and on-the-job work  
41 experience during each participant's incarceration which meets  
42 all of the requirements for peer specialist certification.

43 (c) Assist participants with completing the national  
44 certification exam before each participant's release.

45 (d) Assist in placing participants in employment as  
46 certified peer specialist professionals upon their release.

47 (2) Inmates at participating facilities may apply to  
48 participate in the pilot program. The Department of Corrections  
49 shall develop criteria for selecting qualified applicants for  
50 the pilot program including, but not limited to, requiring that  
51 applicants:

52 (a) Have the appropriate custody classification.

53 (b) Meet certain discipline criteria.

54 (c) Have an expected release date within a specified  
55 timeframe.

56 (d) Be housed at the facility providing training.

57 (e) Have served as a positive role model during their  
58 incarceration.

586-03514-23

20231012c1

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

61 (g) Not have any convictions for an offense that would  
62 prohibit them from becoming a certified peer specialist.  
63 However, an inmate who has been convicted of murder or a felony  
64 sexual offense as those terms are defined in s. 98.0751(2),  
65 Florida Statutes, or an offense under s. 787.01, Florida  
66 Statutes, relating to kidnapping; s. 806.01, Florida Statutes,  
67 relating to arson; or s. 784.045, Florida Statutes, relating to  
68 aggravated battery may not participate in the program.

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

72 (4) In assisting persons who have completed the pilot  
73 program's requirements with post-incarceration employment, the  
74 pilot program:

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

78 (b) May offer funding to a potential employer to cover the  
79 initial costs of hiring and retaining such persons, if the pilot  
80 program secures applicable grant funds for such purpose.

81 (5) After a person who has completed the pilot program's  
82 requirements has been released, he or she must provide each  
83 prospective employer with a copy of his or her incarceration  
84 record before the employer may hire the person. The person must  
85 also receive a signed informed consent form from any potential  
86 client seeking treatment from him or her. Such consent form must  
87 specify that the person has completed the pilot program's

586-03514-23

20231012c1

88 requirements and is certified as a peer specialist under s.  
89 397.417, Florida Statutes.

90 (6) The Department of Corrections shall adopt rules to  
91 implement this act.

92 (7) The pilot program expires June 30, 2026.

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