

By the Committees on Fiscal Policy; and Children, Families, and Elder Affairs; and Senator Rouson

594-04284-23

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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
11 specified background screening requirements for peer
12 specialists; requiring the pilot program to assist
13 potential employers with acquiring specified bonds;
14 authorizing the pilot program to offer funding to
15 potential employers to cover specified costs under
16 certain circumstances; requiring persons who have
17 completed the pilot program's requirements to provide
18 prospective employers with their incarceration
19 records; requiring such persons to receive a signed
20 informed consent form from any potential clients;
21 providing requirements for such form; requiring the
22 department to adopt rules; providing for expiration of
23 the pilot program; providing an effective date.

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

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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

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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 meet
42 all of the requirements for peer specialist certification.

43 (c) Assist participants with completing any examinations
44 required to become a certified peer specialist under s. 397.417,
45 Florida Statutes.

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

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

53 (a) Have the appropriate custody classification.

54 (b) Meet certain discipline criteria.

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

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

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

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59 incarceration.

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

62 (g) Not have been found guilty of, regardless of
63 adjudication, or entered a plea of nolo contendere or guilty to,
64 or have been adjudicated delinquent and the record has not been
65 sealed or expunged for, any offense that would prohibit them
66 from becoming a certified peer specialist under s.
67 397.417(4)(e), Florida Statutes.

68 (3) A person who completes the pilot program's requirements
69 is exempt from the background screening requirements for peer
70 specialists under s. 397.417(4)(a)-(d), Florida Statutes.

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

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

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

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

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88 397.417, Florida Statutes.

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

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

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