

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
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.

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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
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.

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
70 requirements is exempt from the background screening
71 requirements for peer specialists under s. 397.417, Florida
72 Statutes.

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

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

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

82 (5) After a person who has completed the pilot program's
83 requirements has been released, he or she must provide each
84 prospective employer with a copy of his or her incarceration
85 record before the employer may hire the person. The person must
86 also receive a signed informed consent form from any potential
87 client seeking treatment from him or her. Such consent form must
88 specify that the person has completed the pilot program's
89 requirements and is certified as a peer specialist under s.
90 397.417, Florida Statutes.

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

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

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