



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  
 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 any examinations  
 44 required to become a certified peer specialist under s. 397.147,  
 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  
 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  
 69 requirements is exempt from the background screening  
 70 requirements for peer specialists under s. 397.417(4)(a)-(d),  
 71 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  
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.