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Section 1. The Certified Peer Specialist Gateway Pilot Program is created within the Department of Corrections. The purpose of the pilot program is to provide participating inmates with a path to becoming certified peer specialists under s. 397.417, Florida Statutes, upon release by offering such inmates while incarcerated the necessary training hours and experience needed for certification and to assist inmates who complete the pilot program's requirements with post-incarceration employment.

(1) The pilot program shall:

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

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

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

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

(2) Inmates at participating facilities may apply to participate in the pilot program. The Department of Corrections 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.