

CHAPTER 2023-286

Committee Substitute for Committee Substitute for House Bill No. 1045

An act relating to the Certified Peer Specialist Gateway Pilot Program; creating the pilot program within the Department of Corrections; providing purpose of and requirements for the pilot program; authorizing inmates at participating facilities to apply to participate in the pilot program; requiring the department to develop certain criteria for selecting qualified applicants; exempting persons who complete the pilot program's requirements from specified background screening requirements for peer specialists; requiring the pilot program to assist potential employers with acquiring specified bonds; authorizing the pilot program to offer funding to potential employers to cover specified costs under certain circumstances; requiring persons who have completed the pilot program's requirements to provide prospective employers with incarceration records; requiring such persons to receive a signed informed consent form from any potential clients; providing requirements for such form; requiring the department to adopt rules; providing for expiration of the pilot program; providing an effective date.

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

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 the pilot program including, but not limited to, requiring that applicants:

- (a) Have the appropriate custody classification.
- (b) Meet certain discipline criteria.
- (c) Have an expected release date within a specified timeframe.
- (d) Be housed at the facility providing training.
- (e) Have served as a positive role model during their incarceration.
- (f) Express a desire to work in the behavioral health treatment field after release.
- (g) Not have been found guilty of, regardless of adjudication, or entered a plea of nolo contendere or guilty to, or have been adjudicated delinquent and the record has not been sealed or expunged for, any offense that would prohibit them from becoming a certified peer specialist under s. 397.417(4)(e), Florida Statutes.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Approved by the Governor June 23, 2023.

Filed in Office Secretary of State June 23, 2023.