

Committee on Children, Families, and Elder Affairs

CS/CS/HB 1045 — Certified Peer Specialist Gateway Pilot Program

by Judiciary Committee; Criminal Justice Subcommittee; and Reps. Hart, Jacques, and others (CS/CS/SB 1012 by Fiscal Policy Committee; Children, Families, and Elder Affairs Committee; and Senator Rouson)

The bill creates the Certified Peer Specialist Gateway Pilot Program (Program) within the Department of Corrections (the DOC). The bill explains the purpose of the Program and specifies that the Program will be used to recruit and enroll qualified graduates of the Program into approved certified peer specialist training programs. The Program will provide the training and on-the-job experience required for peer specialist certification, assist in completion of exams required to become a certified peer specialist, and will assist participants in obtaining employment upon release.

The bill allows inmates at participating facilities to apply to participate in the Program. The bill directs the DOC to develop criteria for selecting qualified applicants for the Program, which may include, but is not limited to, requiring that participants:

- Have the appropriate custody classification;
- Meet certain discipline criteria;
- Have an expected release date within a specified timeframe;
- Be housed at the institution providing training;
- Have served as a positive role model during their incarceration;
- Express a desire to work in the behavioral health treatment field after release; and
- Have not 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 been sealed or expunged for, any offense that would prohibit them from becoming a certified peer specialist under s. 397.417(4)(e), F.S.

The bill specifies that the Program will assist those that complete the Program in obtaining employment upon release by aiding potential employers to obtain bonds from the U.S. Department of Labor, if applicable, or offering funding for initial hiring and retention costs dependent on securing grant funds.

The bill requires that 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.

If approved by the Governor, or allowed to become law without the Governor's signature, these provisions take effect July 1, 2023.

Vote: Senate 39-0; House 114-0