

By Senator Arrington

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A bill to be entitled
An act relating to community rehabilitation programs;
amending s. 413.014, F.S.; providing minimum
requirements a community rehabilitation program must
meet to qualify to enter into a cooperative agreement
with the Division of Blind Services to provide certain
services; authorizing the director of the division to
temporarily waive certain requirements for certain
purposes; providing that a community rehabilitation
program that meets specified requirements is
considered a priority service provider for purposes of
program funding; authorizing the division to enter
into a cooperative agreement with a noncommunity
rehabilitation program private vendor for a certain
purpose; providing requirements for such cooperative
agreement; requiring the Florida Association of
Agencies Serving the Blind, Inc., to coordinate with
the division to ensure cooperative agreements meet
certain needs; providing for funding; providing
requirements for the disbursement of funds; providing
an effective date.

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

Section 1. Section 413.014, Florida Statutes, is amended to
read:

413.014 Community rehabilitation programs.—

(1) The Division of Blind Services shall enter into
cooperative agreements with community rehabilitation programs as

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defined by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, to be the service providers for the blind citizens of their communities.

(2) The division shall, as rapidly as feasible, increase the amount of such services provided by community rehabilitation programs under subsection (3). The goal shall be to decrease the amount of such services provided by division employees and to increase to the maximum extent allowed by federal law the amount of such services provided through cooperative agreements with community service providers. The division shall seek, to the maximum extent allowed by federal and state law and regulation, all available federal funds for such purposes. Funds and in-kind matching contributions from community and private sources shall be used to maximize federal funds. Unless prohibited by federal law or regulation, the share of the federal vocational rehabilitation grant apportioned for services to the blind may not be less than 17 percent.

(3) A community rehabilitation program must, at a minimum, meet all of the following requirements to qualify to enter into a cooperative agreement with the division to provide services to persons who are blind or visually impaired:

(a) Be a qualified nonprofit agency for the blind as defined in s. 413.033(3) and be organized and operated exclusively for charitable purposes under s. 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code or be an approved program at a state college or university.

(b) Maintain current accreditation from at least one of the following national accrediting organizations:

1. The Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities.

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59 2. The Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the
60 Blind and Visually Impaired.

61 3. Any other nationally recognized accrediting body for
62 vision rehabilitation services as determined by the director of
63 the division.

64 (c) Employ staff who hold a current, valid certification
65 from at least one of the following:

66 1. The Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation
67 and Education Professionals.

68 2. The National Blindness Professional Certification Board.

69 3. Any other nationally recognized certifying body for
70 vision rehabilitation professionals as determined by the
71 director of the division.

72 (d) Provide services required under the cooperative
73 agreement by the division, including, but not limited to, the
74 following:

75 1. Activities of daily living.

76 2. Assessments.

77 3. Assistive technology training.

78 4. Communication skills training.

79 5. Community integration.

80 6. Counseling.

81 7. Guidance and career counseling.

82 8. Low vision training.

83 9. Orientation and mobility training.

84 10. Preemployment transition services, including, but not
85 limited to, career coaching, development, and placement;
86 workplace readiness; personal assistance; vocational
87 rehabilitation; technology training; and transportation

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88 services.

89 11. Recreation and leisure activities training.

90 12. Self-advocacy training.

91 13. Sensory and cognitive development.

92 14. Other services as determined by the director of the
93 division or as may be required by state and federal guidelines.

94
95 The director of the division may temporarily waive staff
96 requirements and community rehabilitation program requirements
97 under this subsection in order to approve new community
98 rehabilitation program organizations.

99 (4)(a) A community rehabilitation program that meets the
100 requirements in subsection (3) is a priority service provider
101 for purposes of program funding. In addition to the requirements
102 in subsection (3), the community rehabilitation program must be
103 qualified, accredited, and certified with evidence-supported
104 outcomes aligned with the federal Rehabilitation Services
105 Administration performance indicators for services to persons
106 who are blind or visually impaired to ensure quality, safety,
107 accountability, and sustainability.

108 (b) In the event a community rehabilitation program is
109 unable to provide services to a specific client for any reason,
110 including client choice, suspension of services, capacity, or
111 timeliness, the division may enter into a cooperative agreement
112 for services with a noncommunity rehabilitation program private
113 vendor. The noncommunity rehabilitation program private vendor
114 must meet the requirements in subsection (3) and comply with all
115 requirements provided in the community rehabilitation program
116 cooperative agreement to ensure quality, safety, accountability,

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and sustainability. If the division enters into a cooperative agreement with a noncommunity rehabilitation program private vendor to provide services, the community rehabilitation program serving that same geographic area must be notified by the division of the name of such private vendor to ensure that the client receives the same level of high-quality service offered by the community rehabilitation program.

(5) The Florida Association of Agencies Serving the Blind, Inc., shall coordinate with the division to ensure cooperative agreements for services meet the needs of blind and visually impaired clients served by community rehabilitation program member organizations and act on behalf of such clients on cooperative agreement issues or other issues in the best interest of serving the clients.

(6) As authorized by and consistent with funding appropriated in the General Appropriations Act, the Florida Association of Agencies Serving the Blind, Inc., may submit requests to the Legislature for funding for community rehabilitation programs. The division shall disperse funds to community rehabilitation programs that are considered priority service providers under paragraph (4)(a) within 45 days after receipt of a qualified invoice and shall disperse subsequent monthly payments thereafter.

Section 2. This act shall take effect July 1, 2026.