

Senate Bill 371

By: Senator Strickland of the 42nd

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
AN ACT

1 To amend Title 37 and Title 42 of the Official Code of Georgia, relating to mental health and
2 penal institutions, respectively, so as to establish a grant program to create peer support
3 programs in hospitals; to create peer support programs for individuals in penal institutions;
4 to provide for quarterly and annual reports; to provide for consultation and cooperation with
5 agencies, courts, organizations, and any entity which interacts with individuals who are
6 incarcerated, on parole, or on probation to establish peer mentor programs; to provide for
7 rules and regulations; to provide for related matters; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other
8 purposes.

9 BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA:

10 **SECTION 1.**

11 Title 37 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to mental health, is amended in
12 Chapter 1, relating to governing and regulation of mental health, by revising paragraph (6)
13 of Code Section 37-1-20, relating to obligations of the Department of Behavioral Health and
14 Developmental Disabilities, as follows:

15 "(6) Establish and support programs for the training of professional and technical
16 personnel and certified peer specialists, as well as regional advisory councils and

17 community service boards. Certified peer specialists may be designated by area of focus,
18 such as mental health or addictive disease, or by personnel, such as youth or parent, and
19 shall include a designation for maternal mental health;"

20 **SECTION 2.**

21 Said title is further amended by revising Chapter 8, which is reserved, as follows:

22 "CHAPTER 8

23 37-8-1.

24 As used in this chapter, the term:

25 (1) 'Addiction recovery support center' means a peer-led community based program
26 offering nonclinical support and activities for individuals and families of individuals who
27 are in recovery from substance use disorders as defined by department policy.

28 (2) 'Certification training body' means an entity approved by the department to provide
29 training and testing for certified peer specialists in accordance with department policies.

30 (3) 'Certified peer specialist' means an individual who is trained and certified to provide
31 ongoing support to individuals and families of individuals who are receiving mental
32 health or substance use recovery supports and services. A certified peer specialist works
33 from the perspective of his or her lived experience to help build environments conducive
34 to recovery. Certified peer specialists promote hope, personal responsibility,
35 empowerment, education, and self-determination in the communities served. Such term
36 includes the following certified peer specialist designations recognized by the
37 department:

38 (A) Certified Peer Specialist-Mental Health or CPS-MH;

39 (B) Certified Peer Specialist-Addictive Disease or CPS-AD;

40 (C) Certified Peer Specialist-Youth or CPS-Y;

41 (D) Certified Peer Specialist-Parent or CPS-P; and
42 (E) Other ancillary peer credentials, such as forensic peer mentors, which may be
43 added by the department designated training entity.

44 (4) 'Department' means the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental
45 Disabilities and includes its duly authorized agents and designees.

46 (5) 'Peer support program' means services rendered to individuals in need of support that
47 are provided by a certified peer specialist. Such term includes, but is not limited to,
48 individual peer recovery coaching, group peer check-ins, advocacy, mutual aid support
49 groups, connection to treatment services, harm reduction services, connection to
50 medication for substance use disorder or alcohol use disorder, housing support,
51 transportation support, food insecurity support, acquiring identification, job placement,
52 or connections to other resources within the community. Reserved:

53 37-8-2.

54 (a) Peer specialists working in department services are required to be certified by the
55 department.

56 (b) Only the department shall certify individuals who complete training and testing
57 provided by certification training bodies. In addition to the training standards set by the
58 department, certified peer specialists shall be required to complete continuing education
59 on working in hospital settings and job readiness and workforce reentry.

60 37-8-3.

61 (a) In order to encourage and ensure the establishment of peer support programs for
62 individuals presenting with substance use disorders in hospitals throughout this state, the
63 department shall award grants, subject to appropriations from the General Assembly, to
64 hospitals or local addiction recovery support centers that seek to implement such programs

65 and that demonstrate a need for financial assistance to develop the necessary infrastructure,
66 including personnel and equipment.

67 (b) A hospital or addiction recovery support center seeking to implement a peer support
68 program for individuals presenting to hospitals with substance use disorders pursuant to
69 this Code section may apply to the department for a grant, in a manner and on a form
70 required by the department, and shall provide such information as the department deems
71 necessary to determine if the hospital or addiction recovery support center is eligible for
72 the grant.

73 (c) The department may provide grants to as many hospitals or addiction recovery support
74 centers as it deems appropriate, subject to appropriations, taking into consideration
75 adequate geographic diversity with respect to locations.

76 (d) The department shall annually prepare and submit a report to the Governor, the
77 President of the Senate, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and the chairpersons
78 of the House Committee on Public and Community Health and the Senate Health and
79 Human Services Committee for distribution to their committee members indicating the
80 total number of hospitals and addiction recovery support centers that applied for grants
81 pursuant to this Code section, the number of applicants that were determined by the
82 department to be eligible for such grants, the total number of grants awarded, the name and
83 address of each grantee hospital or addiction recovery support center, the amount of the
84 award to each grantee hospital or addiction recovery support center, and the amount of each
85 award disbursed to the grantee hospital or addiction recovery support center.

86 37-8-4.

87 The department shall contract on an annual basis with an independent organization, entity,
88 or consultant possessing expertise in the practice of peer support programs led by certified
89 peer specialists for individuals presenting with substance use disorders to serve as a
90 technical assistance provider for the grantees. The department, in consultation with the

91 grantees, shall review the performance of such technical assistance provider annually and
92 determine whether it is appropriate to seek a different technical assistance provider or
93 contract with the same technical assistance provider for the following year.

94 37-8-5.

95 (a) Prior to the commencement of funding for the peer support programs under Code
96 Section 37-8-3, the department shall contract with an independent organization, entity, or
97 consultant possessing expertise in the evaluation and quality improvement of peer support
98 programs and policies to evaluate and make quality improvement recommendations on:

99 (1) The effectiveness of such peer support programs in reducing criminal justice
100 interactions among vulnerable individuals with substance use disorders;

101 (2) The cost-effectiveness of such peer support programs, including the impact on
102 spending within the public behavioral health care system on the individuals receiving
103 peer support and spending within the criminal justice system on the arrest, incarceration,
104 and prosecution of such individuals;

105 (3) Differences in implementation of such peer support programs among the grantees and
106 the impact of such differences on program outcomes;

107 (4) The impact of such peer support programs on the behavioral health care system at
108 large, including any unintended impacts; and

109 (5) The perceptions of such peer support programs and their effectiveness among
110 participating individuals, behavioral health care providers, and program staff.

111 (b) As a condition for participation in the grant program, the department shall require each
112 grantee to agree to share program information data with the contracted organization, entity,
113 or consultant as the department may require and to make reasonable accommodation for
114 such organization, entity, or consultant to have access to the grantee's site and the
115 individuals served. The department shall further ensure that the contracted organization,

116 entity, or consultant is able to perform its functions consistent with all state and federal
117 restrictions on the privacy of personal health information.

118 (c) In contracting with the organization, entity, or consultant, the department shall require
119 such organization, entity, or consultant to submit a quarterly report on the effectiveness of
120 the peer support programs for individuals presenting with behavioral health conditions to
121 the Governor, the chairpersons of the House Committee on Public and Community Health
122 and the Senate Health and Human Services Committee, and the Office of Health Strategy
123 and Coordination.

124 37-8-6.

125 (a) The department shall adopt and prescribe rules and regulations necessary or appropriate
126 to administer and carry out the grant program provided for in this chapter.

127 (b) The department shall adopt and prescribe rules and regulations necessary or
128 appropriate to establish a forensic peer mentor training program as provided in Article 7
129 of Chapter 3 of Title 42."

130 **SECTION 3.**

131 Title 42 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to penal institutions, is amended
132 in Chapter 3, relating to community supervision and transition, by adding a new article to
133 read as follows:

134 "ARTICLE 7

135 42-3-120.

136 (a) The Department of Corrections and DCS shall establish forensic peer mentor programs
137 in every state prison, county jail, and municipal jail.

138 (b) Such forensic peer mentor programs shall be led by individuals who are certified peer
139 specialists pursuant to Chapter 8 of Title 37.

140 (c) The Department of Corrections and DCS shall adopt rules and regulations necessary
141 to establish such programs in every state prison, county jail, and municipal jail.

142 42-3-121.

143 The Department of Corrections and DCS shall consult and coordinate with agencies,
144 departments, organizations, courts, and any entity which interacts with individuals who are
145 incarcerated, on parole, or on probation to establish forensic peer mentor programs led by
146 certified peer specialists, including, but not limited to, individuals in probation programs,
147 accountability courts, day reporting centers, recovery housing or residences, and other
148 mental health or drug diversion programs."

149

SECTION 4.

150 All laws and parts of laws in conflict with this Act are repealed.