



VERMONT LEGISLATIVE Joint Fiscal Office

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Fiscal Note

3/11/2022

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S.195 – an act relating to the certification of mental health peer support specialists and the expansion of peer-operated respite centers

As amended by the Senate Committee on Health and Welfare, Draft 3.3

<https://legislature.vermont.gov/Documents/2022/WorkGroups/Senate%20Health%20and%20Welfare/Bills/S.195/Drafts,%20Amendments,%20and%20Legal%20Documents/S.195~Katie%20McLinn~%20Draft%203.3,%203-9-2022%20Strike-All%20Amendment~3-9-2022.pdf>

Bill Summary

The bill has two parts. First, it proposes to establish a mental health peer support specialist certification program. The second part proposes to fund four peer-operated respite centers.

The bill has two FY 2023 appropriations:

- Sec. 6 would **appropriate \$525,000** from the General Fund to the Agency of Human Services (AHS) for the development and operation of the peer support specialist certification program. This appropriation is based on estimates provided to legislators by advocates that include both one-time and on going costs.
- Sec. 9 would **appropriate up to \$2,000,000** from the General Fund to the Department of Mental Health (DMH) for the purpose of distributing \$500,000 to each of the four new peer-operated respite centers created in the bill.
- Sec. 10 would require DMH to fund nine geographically distinct peer-run or peer-led respite centers effective July 1, 2025. **This section could have fiscal implications in FY 2026.**

Peer Support Specialist Certification Program (Secs. 2 - 6)

- Sec. 2 would require the DMH to enter into an agreement with a peer-run or peer-led entity to develop a statewide certification program for peer support specialists in accordance with guidance issued by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) for the purpose of enabling a certified mental health peer support specialist to receive Medicaid reimbursement for the individual's services.
- Sec. 4 would require AHS to seek approval from CMS to amend Vermont's Medicaid state plan to

include certified peer support specialists as a Medicaid covered service and Sec. 5 would require the Department of Vermont Health Access to provide Medicaid reimbursements for peer support specialist services once Vermont receives CMS approval.

- Sec. 6 would appropriate \$525,000 from the General Fund to AHS for the development and operation of the peer support specialist certification program. This appropriation was based on estimates provided to legislators by advocates and includes both one-time and on going costs. It should be noted that at this time, JFO does not have enough information to verify if these estimates are the adequate amounts to fund the start-up and implementation costs of the certification program as proposed in the bill.
- The following chart shows the estimates that are the basis of the appropriation in Sec. 6 of the bill.

Peer Support Specialist Certification Program - Estimated costs

(Basis for appropriation in Sec. 6.)

Description	Estimated Costs
One-Time Costs	\$200,000
DMH / AHS	\$125,000
Development of statewide peer support specialist program	\$75,000
On-Going Costs	\$325,000
Administering a screening and training program	\$250,000
Certifying body	\$75,000
TOTAL	\$525,000

Source: Based on estimates provided by Wilda White, MadFreedom, Inc.

Peer-Operated Respite Centers (Secs. 7 - 10)

- A peer-operated respite is a voluntary, short-term, overnight program that provides community-based, non-clinical crisis support. Peer-operated respite centers operate 24 hours per day in a homelike environment and are staffed and operated by people with lived experience of recovery from mental health challenges. Currently, there is one two-bed peer-operated respite in Vermont, called Alyssum, Inc., located in Rochester. Alyssum receives an annual grant of \$477,000 from DMH. This base funding is through global commitment (with a mix of both program and investment dollars). DMH also recently amended the grant to add funding through a COVID-19 Emergency Supplemental grant for \$24,000 (federal funds) to support home visits for individuals who are either unable to come to the program due to transport issues, COVID-19 related issues, or other issues that render someone housebound and isolated.
- Sec. 8 would require DMH to distribute funds to six geographically distinct peer-run or peer-led organizations to ensure that a peer-operated respite center, operating singly or in collaboration with a peer-run or peer-led community center is established and maintained. This language was intended to be inclusive of both the existing as well the four new peer-respite centers created in the bill. Legislators assumed there were two existing peer-respite centers, but according to the advocates, there is only one.¹
- Sec. 9 would appropriate up to \$2,000,000 from the General Fund to DMH for the purpose of distributing \$500,000 to each of the four newly established peer-operated respite centers.

¹ Alyssum is a peer-operated respite center whereas Soteria House is a peer-run therapeutic community residence.

- Sec. 10 would require DMH to distribute funds to nine geographically distinct peer-run or peer-led respite centers effective July 1, 2025. This could have fiscal implications for FY 2026. If each new peer-operated respite center were to receive \$500,000, the costs could be as much as \$4 million.

Fiscal Summary

Fiscal Summary - S.195

Sec.	Description	Funding	Estimated Fiscal impact	Notes
6	Peer Support Specialist Certification Program	General Funds	\$525,000	Appropriation to AHS for the development and operation of the peer support specialist certification program.
9	Peer Operated Respite Centers	General Funds	Up to \$2,000,000	Appropriation to DMH for the distribution of \$500,000 to <u>four</u> new peer-operated respite centers.
10	Requires DMH to fund <u>nine</u> geographically peer-operated respite centers	N/A	No FY 2023 appropriation needed	Effective July, 1, 2025
TOTAL APPROPRIATION = \$2,525,000				