

HOUSE No. 5231

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, March 12, 2026.

The committee on Mental Health, Substance Use and Recovery, to whom was referred the petition (accompanied by bill, House, No. 2231) of Lindsay N. Sabadosa and Leigh Davis that the Department of Mental Health be authorized to establish peer-run respite centers, reports recommending that the accompanying bill (House, No. 5231) ought to pass.

For the committee,

MINDY DOMB.

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**In the One Hundred and Ninety-Fourth General Court
(2025-2026)**

An Act establishing peer respites throughout the Commonwealth.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Chapter 19 of the General Laws is hereby amended by inserting after
2 section 26 the following section:-

3 Section 27. (a) As used in this section, the following words shall, unless the context
4 clearly requires otherwise, have the following meanings:

5 “BIPOC”, Black, Indigenous and other People of Color.

6 “Guest”, an adult, 18 years of age or older, who has been accepted by and approved to
7 stay at and receive services from a peer respite.

8 “LGBTQIA+”, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual and other
9 gender identities and sexual orientations that individuals may identify as but which may not fall
10 within the preceding classifications.

11 “Lived or living experience”, knowledge, understanding, expertise and insight into the
12 experiences, choices and options of an individual with behavioral health needs that is based on a

13 person’s perspective, personal identities and history beyond their professional or educational
14 experience and gained from such person’s psychiatric history, traumatic experiences or history of
15 facing or navigating other similar, life-interrupting challenges.

16 “Peer respite”, a voluntary, short-term, community-based residential peer-run program
17 that: (i) provides peer respite services on a 24-hour basis in a home-like environment to guests
18 experiencing emotional or mental distress either as an immediate precursor to or as a part of a
19 crisis; (ii) addresses social isolation and lack of social connectedness; and (iii) offers peer
20 support and peer respite services by peer respite supporters and other individuals trained or in the
21 process of completing training to provide such services pursuant to applicable department
22 regulations, rules or other guidance; provided, that the department may promulgate regulations or
23 issue further guidance regarding additional requirements of peer respites including, but not
24 limited to, requirements regarding training, and access for guests with disabilities.

25 “Peer respite services”, voluntary, short-term, trauma-informed, person-centered support
26 and prevention services provided to peer respite guests that: (i) are the least restrictive of
27 individual freedom; (ii) are culturally competent; (iii) focus on recovery, resiliency and wellness;
28 and (iv) are not clinical services; provided, that the department may promulgate regulations or
29 issue further guidance further defining peer respite services.

30 “Peer-run program”, a peer respite that: (i) is a non-profit entity itself or within a non-
31 profit entity; (ii) is controlled and operated by a majority of individuals who have lived or living
32 experience; (iii) provides a venue for support and advocacy for individuals with similar
33 experiences by peer respite supporters who have completed or are in the process of completing
34 training required to work in a peer respite pursuant to applicable department regulations, rules or

35 other guidance; (iv) specializes in the provision of peer respite and peer support services; (v) has
36 specialized in the provision of peer respite and peer support services for a minimum of 5 years;
37 (vi) maintains sufficient capacity to provide all staff with adequate supervision; and (vii) does
38 not provide clinical mental health services or in which clinical mental health services make up
39 less than 10 per cent of primary services provided to guests; provided, that the department may
40 promulgate regulations or issue further guidance regarding additional requirements of peer-run
41 programs including, but not limited to, required supervision of staff by individuals with training
42 and experience as a peer respite supporter and required accommodations for the disability-related
43 needs of a guest.

44 “Peer respite supporters”, individuals working in peer respites who: (i) have completed or
45 are in the process of completing training in the provision of peer support services pursuant to
46 applicable department regulations, rules or guidance; (ii) have lived or living experience; and
47 (iii) are trained in and capable of providing peer support and peer respite services.

48 “Peer support services”, assistance provided by peer respite supporters in peer respites
49 that promotes engagement, socialization, recovery, self-sufficiency, self-advocacy, development
50 of natural supports, identification of strengths and maintenance of skills learning in other support
51 services; provided, however, that the department may promulgate regulations or issue additional
52 guidance further defining peer support services.

53 (b) Subject to appropriation, the department shall establish a minimum of 14 regional
54 peer respites, with at least 1 in each county throughout the commonwealth to ensure access in all
55 geographic regions of the commonwealth; provided, that the department shall allocate and
56 provide the funding necessary for and assist with the establishment of each peer respite;

57 provided, however, that said funding for peer respites shall be sufficient to ensure that each peer
58 respite is capable of: (i) providing peer respite and peer support services; (ii) recruiting, training
59 and retaining peer respite supporters; (iii) supervising and overseeing peer respite supporters; (iv)
60 conducting informational sessions and training on the functions and qualifications of peer respite
61 supporters; (v) compensating peer respite supporters at a rate sufficient to ensure the retention of
62 highly trained and skilled peer respite supporters and to maximize the positive impact of their
63 support; and (vi) performing data collection and reporting as required by the department.

64 (1) At least 2 of such peer respites shall specialize in serving LGBTQIA+ individuals and
65 shall be geographically distributed so as to maximize access to peer respite services for
66 LGBTQIA+ individuals in all regions of the commonwealth; provided, however, that such peer
67 respites shall be managed, operated or controlled by individuals identifying as members of the
68 LGBTQIA+ community who also have related lived or living experience.

69 (2) At least 2 of such peer respites shall specialize in serving members of the BIPOC
70 community and shall be geographically distributed so as to maximize access to peer respite
71 services for members of the BIPOC community in all regions of the commonwealth; provided,
72 however, that such peer respites shall be managed, operated or controlled by individuals
73 identifying as members of the BIPOC community who also have related lived or living
74 experience.

75 (3) The department shall, prior to contracting for any new peer respite, conduct an
76 analysis of existing peer respites and regional gaps in behavioral health services to ensure: (A)
77 the continued operations of existing peer respites, subject to continued department approval; and
78 (B) the need-driven creation of any new peer respites, which may include the creation of peer

79 respites specializing in the delivery of services to specific populations or underserved
80 demographics; and provided further, that the department shall ensure that each peer respite for
81 which funding is appropriated shall be established and begin operations not less than 18 months
82 following such appropriation.

83 (c) Each peer respite shall: (i) be approved by the department to provide guests with peer
84 respite and peer support services including, but not limited to, short-term, temporary lodging; (ii)
85 be a peer-run program; (iii) employ peer respite supporters who have received and completed or
86 who are in the process of completing training as required to perform their essential job functions,
87 including, but not limited to, training required to serve LGBTQIA+ individuals and members of
88 the BIPOC community; provided, however, that all peer respite supporters working in a peer
89 respite specializing in serving LGBTQIA+ individuals or members of the BIPOC community
90 shall complete training required to serve LGBTQIA+ individuals or members of the BIPOC
91 community prior to their first day working at such peer respites; and (iv) be responsible for the
92 provision, operation and control of peer respite facilities, peer respite services and peer support
93 services.

94 (d) The department shall work with existing peer-run programs providing peer respite and
95 peer support services to identify any additional training requirements for peer respite supporters,
96 which may differ from training requirements for peer supporters or peer specialists working in
97 other contexts, as well as a fidelity tool to establish and measure ongoing adherence to the basic
98 components of each peer respite based on current leading guides to peer respites; provided, that
99 the department shall work with existing peer-run programs, as well as stakeholders within the
100 LGBTQIA+ and BIPOC communities, to develop any additional training requirements for peer

101 respite supporters working in peer respites specializing in serving LGBTQIA+ individuals or
102 members of the BIPOC community.

103 (e) The department shall, in consultation with existing peer-run programs and individuals
104 with experience and expertise in running peer-run programs, promulgate regulations and may
105 issue further guidance regarding the establishment and operation of peer respites; provided,
106 however, that such regulations or guidance shall employ definitions and criteria consistent with
107 this section.

108 (f) Annually, not later than March 1, each peer respite shall report to the department in a
109 form determined by the department site-specific information on: (i) the number of individuals
110 served, including, but not limited to, the number of each guest's visits and length of stay per
111 visit; (ii) criteria used by programs for intake, discharge and continued program eligibility,
112 including, but not limited to, criteria for evaluating the appropriateness of a guest's stay at the
113 peer respite; (iii) the process for receiving and responding to grievances; (iv) a self assessment,
114 including outcomes measured and the process for evaluating outcomes; (v) staffing levels; (vi)
115 staff experiences and perspectives; (vii) operating costs and all funding sources; (viii) the
116 number of calls to and transports by emergency medical services or other first responders, if
117 applicable; and (ix) any other information deemed relevant by the department.

118 (g) Annually, not later than October 1, the department shall prepare and submit a report
119 to the joint committee on mental health, substance use and recovery, the joint committee on
120 public health and the house and senate committees on ways and means that includes, but is not
121 limited to: (i) its progress toward implementing this section; (ii) any challenges or barriers
122 regarding implementation; (iii) the department's strategy for overcoming any identified

123 challenges or barriers; and (iv) a summary of annual reports received by the department under
124 subsection (f). The department shall publish the report on its public website.