

SENATE No.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

PRESENTED BY:

Joanne M. Comerford

To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in General Court assembled:

The undersigned legislators and/or citizens respectfully petition for the adoption of the accompanying bill:

An Act establishing peer-run respite centers throughout the Commonwealth.

PETITION OF:

NAME:

Joanne M. Comerford

DISTRICT/ADDRESS:

Hampshire, Franklin and Worcester

SENATE No.

[Pin Slip]

[SIMILAR MATTER FILED IN PREVIOUS SESSION
SEE SENATE, NO. 1238 OF 2023-2024.]

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

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

An Act establishing peer-run respite centers 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 Chapter 19 of the General Laws is hereby amended by inserting after section 26 the
2 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 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 who experience

33 similar struggles by peer 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 supporter and required accommodations for the disability-related needs
43 of a guest.

44 “Peer supporters”, individuals working in peer respites who: (i) have completed or are in
45 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 supporters in peer respites that
49 promotes engagement, socialization, recovery, self-sufficiency, self-advocacy, development of
50 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 throughout the commonwealth; provided, that at least 1 peer respite shall be

55 established in each county; provided further, that at least 2 peer respites shall be established for
56 the purpose of serving LGBTQIA+ individuals and shall be geographically distributed so as to
57 maximize access to peer respite services for LGBTQIA+ individuals in all regions of the
58 commonwealth; provided, however, that such LGBTQIA+ peer respites shall be managed,
59 operated and controlled by individuals identifying as members of the LGBTQIA+ community
60 who also have related lived or living experience; and provided further, that at least 2 peer
61 respites shall be established for the purpose of serving the BIPOC community and shall be
62 geographically distributed so as to maximize access to peer respite services for BIPOC
63 individuals in all regions of the commonwealth; provided, however, that such BIPOC peer
64 respites shall be managed, operated and controlled by individuals identifying as members of the
65 BIPOC community who also have related lived or living experience.

66 (c) Subject to appropriation, the department shall allocate and provide the funding
67 necessary for and assist with the establishment of each peer respite; provided, however, that said
68 funding for peer respites shall be sufficient to ensure that each peer respite is capable of: (i)
69 providing peer respite and peer support services; (ii) recruiting, training and retaining peer
70 supporters; (iii) supervising and overseeing peer supporters; (iv) conducting informational
71 sessions and training on the functions and qualifications of peer supporters; and (v)
72 compensating peer supporters at a rate sufficient to ensure the retention of highly trained and
73 skilled peer supporters and to maximize the positive impact of their support.

74 (d) Each peer respite shall: (i) be approved by the department to provide guests with peer
75 respite and peer support services including, but not limited to, short-term, temporary lodging; (ii)
76 be a peer run program; (iii) employ peer supporters who have received and completed or who are
77 in the process of completing training as required to perform their essential job functions;

78 provided, however, that all peer supporters working in a LGBTQIA+ or a BIPOC peer respite
79 shall receive additional training required to serve members of each respective community; and
80 (iv) be responsible for the provision, operation and control of peer respite facilities, peer respite
81 services and peer support services.

82 (e) The department shall work with existing peer-run programs providing peer respite and
83 peer support services to identify any additional training requirements for peer supporters, which
84 may differ from training requirements for peer supporters or peer specialists working in other
85 contexts, as well as a fidelity tool to establish and measure ongoing adherence to the basic
86 components of each peer respite based on current leading guides to peer respites; provided, that
87 the department shall work with existing peer-run programs, as well as stakeholders within the
88 LGBTQIA+ and BIPOC communities, to develop any additional training requirements for peer
89 supporters working in LGBTQIA+ peer respites and BIPOC peer respites.

90 (f) The department shall, in consultation with existing peer-run programs and individuals
91 with experience and expertise in running peer-run programs, promulgate regulations or issue
92 further guidance regarding the establishment and operation of peer respites; provided, however,
93 that such regulations or guidance shall employ definitions and criteria consistent with this
94 section.

95 (g) Annually, not later than October 1, the department shall prepare and submit a report
96 to the joint committee on mental health, substance use and recovery, the joint committee on
97 public health and the house and senate committees on ways and means that includes, but is not
98 limited to: (i) its progress toward implementing this section; (ii) any challenges or barriers

99 regarding implementation; and (iii) the department's strategy for overcoming any identified
100 challenges or barriers. The department shall publish the report on its public website.