



Legislation Text

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Authorizing the Committee on People with Disabilities and Special Needs to hold hearings regarding the Community Autism Peer Specialist program, also known as CAPS.

WHEREAS, When compared to other individuals with disabilities, individuals on the autism spectrum have lower rates of employment, are more likely to be living at home with their parents, and are less engaged in the community; and

WHEREAS, To address these disparities locally, the Philadelphia Autism Project, the ASERT (Autism Services, Education, Resources and Training) Collaborative Eastern Region, and the City of Philadelphia's Community Behavioral Health, a division of the Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual disAbilities Services ("DBHIDS"), partnered to create the wellness-oriented collaborative program Community Autism Peer Specialist ("CAPS"), which pairs individuals on the autism spectrum who have completed a peer support training program with other individuals on the spectrum to achieve their personal wellness and community participation goals; and

WHEREAS, In addition to the lead organizations who partnered on the development of CAPS, the success of CAPS would not have been possible without the work of the Steering and Advisory Committees, the voices and direction from self-advocates and family members, especially contributions by Aliko Koumenis, Valerie Paradiz, and Mary Kay Tuohy, and the leadership from both Pennsylvania's Department of Human Services' Bureau of Supports for Autism and Special Populations, in the Office of Developmental Programs, and the Bureau of Policy, Planning and Program Development, in the Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services; and

WHEREAS, Launched as a pilot in September 2019 through Mental Health Partnerships, a leader in peer-delivered services, the CAPS program is designed to fill a much needed gap in supports that are essential for living a life in the community, using a person-centered approach tailored to the specific wellness and community participation goals defined by the individuals receiving the service; and

WHEREAS, Eligibility for the CAPS service requires that the individual have an autism diagnosis, be 14 years or older, be eligible for HealthChoices (Medicaid), and reside in Philadelphia County; and

WHEREAS, Activities are chosen by the participant to help build skill sets in the areas of employment, post-secondary education, leadership, independent living, self-care and health management, interpersonal relationships, use of public transportation, and active community participation, among other areas of growth; and

WHEREAS, Designed to align with the existing state-approved Certified Peer Specialist service in mental health, Community Autism Peer Specialists are trained to support both young adults (ages 14-17) and adults on the spectrum who can benefit from peer support to achieve goals related to independent living and community participation; and

WHEREAS, To be eligible to become a CAPS, applicants needed to be adults diagnosed with autism, with a high school diploma or GED, who had maintained 12 months of work experience (paid or volunteer) or obtained 24 credits in postsecondary education within the previous three years; and

WHEREAS, CAPS are trained to support peers' generation of goals, identify corresponding activities, and help them navigate challenges to achieving their goals, using their own lived experiences with autism and skills learned from the 75-hour CAPS training course to provide support to young adults and adults on the spectrum, promote self-knowledge and self-advocacy, and increase community participation; and

WHEREAS, 20 candidates have successfully completed the CAPS training program, who in turn went on to peer assist 31 individuals through the pilot program; and

WHEREAS, CAPS' graduates have gone on to use their training to secure other employment including working at CBH on a clinical care management team, DBHIDS on the Community Wellness Engagement Unit, at Temple University on a peer delivered travel training study, as well as work in advocacy; and

WHEREAS, The initial success of this pilot serves as a promising start for further empowering individuals on the spectrum as they transition into independent adulthood, as well as building community power through training and partnership with adults on the spectrum; and

WHEREAS, The Pennsylvania Department of Human Services' Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (OMHSAS), has approved CBH's Community Autism Peer Specialist (CAPS) Program as a Medicaid supplemental service; NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT

RESOLVED, that the Council of the City of Philadelphia does hereby authorize the Committee on People with Disabilities and Special Needs to hold hearings regarding the Community Autism Peer Specialist program, also known as CAPS.