STATE OF NEW YORK

8268

IN SENATE

May 1, 2020

Introduced by Sen. FELDER -- read twice and ordered printed, and when printed to be committed to the Committee on Health

AN ACT to establish the compassionate helper volunteer program

The People of the State of New York, represented in Senate and Assembly, do enact as follows:

Section 1. Compassionate Helper Volunteer Program. 1. The department of health, in cooperation with the city of New York department of health and mental hygiene and local county departments of health, shall establish a compassionate helper volunteer program to implement a system by which eligible volunteers may provide free non-medical, quality of life services in hospitals to individuals hospitalized with COVID-19 and to their families.

2. The commissioner of health is authorized and directed to promulgate such rules and regulations as are necessary to implement the provisions of this act. Such rules and regulations shall:

(a) qualify individuals to participate in the volunteer program pursuant to subdivision three of this section;

(b) enable the compassionate helper volunteer program to provide free non-medical, quality of life services to individuals hospitalized with COVID-19 and to their families including but not limited to:

(i) providing support to hospitalized patients including reading, playing music or sitting with such hospitalized individuals; and

(ii) assisting hospitalized individuals with non-medical contact with families and friends including by mobile telephone or portable electronic device; and

(c) authorize hospitals that participate in the volunteer program to select and/or terminate all volunteers serving at such hospital.

3. A person is eligible to participate as a volunteer under this act if he or she:

(a) has been tested by the state or local department of health and has been found to have the antibodies to COVID-19;

(b) has agreed to participate in the volunteer program without compensation or the expectation of compensation;

EXPLANATION--Matter in *italics* (underscored) is new; matter in brackets [-] is old law to be omitted.

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(c) has received training from the state or a local department of health to provide volunteer program services; and

(d) meets any other qualifications established by the department of health.

4. Notwithstanding any inconsistent provision of law to the contrary, the commissioner of health is authorized to waive, modify or suspend the provisions of rules and regulations promulgated pursuant to article twenty-eight of the public health law if such commissioner determines that such waiver, modification or suspension is necessary for the successful implementing of the compassionate helper volunteer program authorized pursuant to this act and provided that such commissioner determines that the health, safety and general welfare of people receiving services under such volunteer program will not be impaired as a result of such waiver, modification or suspension.

§ 2. This act shall take effect immediately.