

STATE OF NEW YORK

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2025-2026 Regular Sessions

IN SENATE

January 29, 2025

Introduced by Sens. FERNANDEZ, JACKSON, MAY, RHOADS -- read twice and ordered printed, and when printed to be committed to the Committee on Alcoholism and Substance Use Disorders

AN ACT to establish the "recovery ready workplace act"

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

- 1 Section 1. Short title. This act shall be known and may be cited as
2 the "recovery ready workplace act".
- 3 § 2. Legislative findings and purpose. The legislature finds that:
- 4 1. Recovery ready workplace (RRW) programs have been initiated around
5 the country as important interventions in the opioid use disorder (OUD)
6 and substance use disorder (SUD) crisis.
- 7 2. The goal of RRW programs is to provide outreach, training, and
8 certification to employers in cooperation with government officials,
9 workers, labor unions, and communities to:
- 10 (a) prevent initiation of new cases of misuse and addiction related to
11 workplace injury and stress through primary prevention of exposure to
12 job hazards and stressors;
- 13 (b) support employees who are struggling and retain employees by
14 providing access to treatment and pathways to return to work;
- 15 (c) provide healthy, gainful employment for people in recovery; and
16 (d) reduce absenteeism, presenteeism, and lost productivity among
17 employees with substance use disorder.
- 18 3. Workers with painful injuries have frequently been overprescribed
19 opioids, resulting in as many as twenty-five percent of workers develop-
20 ing opioid dependence and OUD or SUD.
- 21 4. RRW programs address the prevention of addiction related to work-
22 place injury and stress while also providing support for workers who are
23 struggling and opportunities for people in recovery to reenter the work-
24 force.

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

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1 5. Between 2009 to 2015, an estimated 225,000 New York workers were
2 lost from the labor market due to opioids. New York's economy cumula-
3 tively lost \$179.4 billion dollars in real economic output, which trans-
4 lates to the state's annual real GDP growth rate slowing by 0.8 percent-
5 age points.

6 6. Employers who establish RRW programs have saved money due to
7 reduced absenteeism, healthier work environment, greater productivity,
8 lower healthcare costs, greater workplace safety, employee retention,
9 and reduced recruitment and hiring costs.

10 7. Employees in recovery save their employers an average of \$8,500
11 dollars annually, with \$8,175 dollars attributable to avoiding turnover,
12 replacement, and healthcare costs.

13 8. There is an urgent need to establish resources and standards for
14 RRWs in New York state as a key component of the state's response to the
15 opioid crisis.

16 § 3. Purpose. The purpose of this act shall be to:

17 1. establish the criteria for employers to obtain certification as an
18 RRW;

19 2. protect the rights of employees;

20 3. establish training, outreach, and certification resources;

21 4. establish an advisory board within the New York state office of
22 addiction services and supports; and

23 5. establish incentives for employers.

24 § 4. Definitions. For purposes of this act, the following terms shall
25 have the following meanings:

26 1. "Employer" shall have the same meaning as defined in section 190 of
27 the labor law, and shall include any person, corporation, limited
28 liability company, or association employing any individual in any occu-
29 pation, industry, trade, business, or service. "Employer" shall include
30 a public employer.

31 2. "Employee" means any person employed for hire by an employer in any
32 employment and shall include public employees.

33 3. "Lived experience" means having first-hand experience living with
34 mental health and/or substance use disorder and the associated chal-
35 lenges.

36 4. "Opioid use disorder" or "OUD" means a problematic pattern of
37 opioid use leading to clinically significant impairment or distress and
38 is a subset of SUD.

39 5. "Member assistance program" means a labor union administered educa-
40 tion and assistance program that provides support to members struggling
41 with mental health or substance use problems.

42 6. "Primary prevention" means a public health strategy that aims to
43 prevent disease or injury before it occurs by preventing exposures to
44 hazards that can cause disease or injury, altering unhealthy or unsafe
45 behaviors that can lead to disease or injury, and addressing mental
46 health issues that can affect physiological outcomes.

47 7. "Public employee" means any person holding a position by appoint-
48 ment or employment in the service of a public employer, except judges or
49 justices of the unified court system and members of the legislature.

50 8. "Public employer" shall mean:

51 (a) the state of New York;

52 (b) a county, city, town, village, or other political subdivision or
53 civil division of the state;

54 (c) a school district or any governmental entity operating a public
55 school, college, or university;

56 (d) a public improvement or special district;

1 (e) a public authority, commission, or public benefit corporation; and
2 (f) any other public corporation, agency, instrumentality, or unit of
3 government which exercises governmental power under the laws of the
4 state.

5 9. "Recovery" means a process of change through which individuals
6 improve their health and wellness, live a self-directed life, and strive
7 to reach their full potential.

8 10. "Recovery ready workplace advisor" means a person who is an
9 employee of or contractor for a recovery ready workplace program and
10 whose duties include, but are not limited to, assisting employers
11 through the process of becoming a certified recovery ready workplace;

12 11. "Certified peer support advocate" means a person with the lived
13 experience of recovery from a substance use disorder or co-occurring
14 disorder and who is certified to provide non-clinical, strengths-based
15 support to others experiencing similar challenges. "Certified peer
16 support advocates" shall also be known as "peer specialists", "peer
17 recovery coaches", and "peer recovery support specialists".

18 12. "Recovery ready workplace" or "RRW" means an established program
19 to prevent exposure to workplace factors that could cause or perpetuate
20 a SUD while lowering barriers to seeking care, receiving care, and main-
21 taining recovery, and to educate its management team and workers on
22 issues surrounding SUDs to reduce the stigma around such challenge.

23 13. "Substance use disorder" or "SUD" means the recurrent use of alco-
24 hol and/or drugs that causes clinically significant impairment, includ-
25 ing health problems, disability, and failure to meet major responsibil-
26 ities at work, school, or home.

27 14. "Workplace" means any office, warehouse, building, or any other
28 location outside of an employee's residence or other work-from-home
29 location, whether permanent or temporary, where an employee performs any
30 work-related duty or duties in the scope and course of the employee's
31 employment. For purposes of this act, employees may have more than one
32 workplace.

33 § 5. Criteria for employers to obtain certification as a recovery
34 ready workplace. The office of addiction services and supports, shall
35 promulgate regulations establishing the criteria by which an employer
36 can obtain certification as a RRW. Such criteria shall include, but not
37 be limited to, the following:

38 1. a signed letter of interest from the employer to become a RRW;

39 2. issuance of a written declaration to employees;

40 3. collaboration with employees, collective bargaining agents or labor
41 unions, recovery community organizations, and government officials in
42 establishing a RRW and the development of the proposed recovery ready
43 workplace program in writing;

44 4. proactively identifying and addressing the primary prevention of
45 workplace hazards and sources of stress at work associated with opioid
46 and other substance misuse, including prescription medications and
47 through self-medication;

48 5. establishing availability of naloxone onsite and training personnel
49 on its administration and other first aid measures that reduce the risk
50 of death as a result of an overdose;

51 6. supporting and providing information to injured workers on how to
52 avoid opioid and other substance misuse and seek alternative pain treat-
53 ments;

54 7. providing training and orientation to supervisors, management,
55 employees, and union officials;

56 8. providing resources and information to employees;

1 9. connecting with a recovery community organization within six months
2 of certification;

3 10. assessing and addressing workplace culture issues by:

4 (a) encouraging all qualified applicants, including persons in recov-
5 ery;

6 (b) having programs and practices that promote and support employee
7 health, wellness, and work-life balance, such as but not limited to
8 labor union based member assistance programs; and

9 (c) supporting employees who seek treatment and who require residen-
10 tial or outpatient treatment and related disability leave, including
11 planning for return to work;

12 11. offering health benefits that provide comprehensive coverage for
13 SUDs, including medications for OUD and SUD, aftercare, and counseling;

14 12. evaluating and improving, as needed, access to treatment and
15 recovery resources and ensure mental health and substance use benefits
16 are equal to those for physical health as required by paragraph 5 of
17 subsection (1) of section 3221 and subsections (g) and (h) of section
18 4303 of the insurance law, and the federal mental health parity
19 addiction equity act;

20 13. providing work accommodations for employees in recovery to attend
21 treatment and recovery services and providing reasonable work accommo-
22 dations to support workers in recovery in compliance with federal and
23 state law; and

24 14. ensuring employer RRW policies include confidentiality provisions
25 to maintain confidentiality of employees accessing services.

26 § 6. Employee involvement. 1. An employer shall develop the plan to
27 become certified as an RRW in cooperation with the collective bargaining
28 representative, if any, or with meaningful participation of employees
29 where there is no collective bargaining representative, for all aspects
30 of the plan, and such plan shall be tailored to the specific industry
31 and work sites of the employer.

32 2. Employers shall be encouraged to establish multi-stakeholder
33 committees, subcommittees, or task forces to help develop RRW programs.
34 Where there is a collective bargaining agent, the collective bargaining
35 representative shall select employees to be members of such committee.

36 3. To the extent that any individual voluntarily self-discloses lived
37 experience with SUD or recovery, a RRW committee, subcommittee, or task
38 force shall invite representatives with lived experience to participate
39 in the development and the annual review of the RRW plan, while main-
40 taining confidentiality.

41 4. The employer shall update its drug and alcohol policies in writing
42 within one year of certification. The employer shall make such policies
43 available to all employees, shall review such policies annually in
44 consultation with the employers' RRW committee, and shall update such
45 policies as necessary, except as described in subdivision five of this
46 section.

47 5. Employer policies related to accessing treatment and recovery
48 resources shall be evaluated and improved, as necessary, including a
49 review of mental health and substance use benefits to assess parity to
50 those for physical health in conformance with federal, state, and local
51 laws.

52 § 7. No diminishment of employee rights. The provisions of this act
53 shall not be construed to diminish the rights of any employee pursuant
54 to any other law, regulation, or collective bargaining agreement.

55 § 8. Certifying body. 1. A certifying body shall be established within
56 the office of addiction services and supports.

1 2. Such certifying body shall include an advisory board with multiple
2 state agency and stakeholder involvement, to be established by the
3 office of addiction services and supports, which shall include employ-
4 ers, labor unions, recovery community organizations, community represen-
5 tatives, local and county officials, and persons in recovery. The advi-
6 sory board shall assist in the development of regulations, outreach
7 materials, and program evaluation and shall work with employers to
8 ensure that public notification has been provided to the community about
9 such employer's certification as a RRW.

10 § 9. Incentives. 1. The office of addiction services and supports
11 shall develop a pilot program to provide stipends to employees in recov-
12 ery to cover expenses for transportation, including to and from work and
13 treatment, and auxiliary recovery services during work hours.

14 2. The office of addiction services and supports shall develop a pilot
15 program to reimburse employers for providing traineeships to workers in
16 recovery and shall promulgate rules and regulations to include places of
17 employment as eligible locations for reimbursing organizations who
18 deploy peer services.

19 § 10. This act shall take effect immediately.