

WEST VIRGINIA LEGISLATURE

2025 REGULAR SESSION

Introduced

Senate Bill 661

By Senator Willis

[Introduced March 3, 2025; referred
to the Select Committee on Substance Use Disorder
and Mental Health; and then to the Committee on
Finance]

1 A BILL to amend and reenact §27-5-4 of the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, relating to
2 involuntary hospitalization; providing for multiple deputies in the transportation of those
3 involuntarily hospitalized; authorizing counties the discretion to contract with hospital with
4 closer jurisdiction; and authorizing the ability to utilize out-of-state hospitals.

Be it enacted by the Legislature of West Virginia:

ARTICLE 5. INVOLUNTARY HOSPITALIZATION.

§27-5-4. Institution of final commitment proceedings; hearing requirements; release.

1 (a) Involuntary commitment. — Except as provided in §27-5-2 and §27-5-3 of this code, no
2 individual may be involuntarily committed to a mental health facility or state hospital except by
3 order entered of record at any time by the circuit court of the county in which the person resides or
4 was found, or if the individual is hospitalized in a mental health facility or state hospital located in a
5 county other than where he or she resides or was found, in the county of the mental health facility
6 and then only after a full hearing on issues relating to the necessity of committing an individual to a
7 mental health facility or state hospital. If the individual objects to the hearing being held in the
8 county where the mental health facility is located, the hearing shall be conducted in the county of
9 the individual's residence. Notwithstanding the provisions of this code to the contrary, all hearings
10 for the involuntary final civil commitment of a person who is committed in accordance with §27-6A-
11 1 et al. of this code shall be held by the circuit court of the county that has jurisdiction over the
12 person for the criminal charges and such circuit court shall have jurisdiction over the involuntary
13 final civil commitment of such person.

14 (b) How final commitment proceedings are commenced. — Final commitment proceedings
15 for an individual may be commenced by the filing of a written application under oath by an adult
16 person having personal knowledge of the facts of the case. The certificate or affidavit is filed with
17 the clerk of the circuit court or mental hygiene commissioner of the county where the individual is a
18 resident or where he or she may be found, or the county of a mental health facility if he or she is
19 hospitalized in a mental health facility or state hospital located in a county other than where he or

20 she resides or may be found. Notwithstanding anything any provision of this code to the contrary,
21 all hearings for the involuntary final civil commitment of a person who is committed in accordance
22 with §27-6A-1 *et seq.* of this code shall be commenced only upon the filing of a Certificate of the
23 Licensed Certifier at the mental health facility where the person is currently committed.

24 (c) Oath; contents of application; who may inspect application; when application cannot be
25 filed. —

26 (1) The person making the application shall do so under oath.

27 (2) The application shall contain statements by the applicant that the individual is likely to
28 cause serious harm to self or others due to what the applicant believes are symptoms of mental
29 illness or substance use disorder. Except for persons sought to be committed as provided in §27-
30 6A-1 *et seq.* of this code, the applicant shall state in detail the recent overt acts upon which the
31 clinical opinion is based.

32 (3) The written application, certificate, affidavit, and any warrants issued pursuant thereto,
33 including any related documents filed with a circuit court, mental hygiene commissioner, or
34 magistrate for the involuntary hospitalization of an individual are not open to inspection by any
35 person other than the individual, unless authorized by the individual or his or her legal
36 representative or by order of the circuit court. The records may not be published unless authorized
37 by the individual or his or her legal representative. Disclosure of these records may, however, be
38 made by the clerk, circuit court, mental hygiene commissioner, or magistrate to provide notice to
39 the Federal National Instant Criminal Background Check System established pursuant to section
40 103(d) of the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act, 18 U.S.C. §922, and the central state
41 mental health registry, in accordance with §61-7A-1 *et seq.* of this code, and the sheriff of a county
42 performing background investigations pursuant to §61-7-1 *et seq.* of this code. Disclosure may
43 also be made to the prosecuting attorney and reviewing court in an action brought by the individual
44 pursuant to §61-7A-5 of this code to regain firearm and ammunition rights.

45 (4) Applications shall be denied for individuals as provided in §27-5-2(a) of this code.

(d) Certificate filed with application; contents of certificate; affidavit by applicant in place of certificate. —

(1) The applicant shall file with his or her application the certificate of a physician or a psychologist stating that in his or her opinion the individual is mentally ill or has a substance use disorder and that because of the mental illness or substance use disorder, the individual is likely to cause serious harm to self or others and requires continued commitment and treatment, and should be hospitalized. Except for persons sought to be committed as provided in §27-6A-1 *et seq.* of this code, the certificate shall state in detail the recent overt acts on which the conclusion is based, including facts that less restrictive interventions and placements were considered but are not appropriate and available. The applicant shall further file with his or her application the names and last known addresses of the persons identified in §27-5-4(e)(3) of this code.

(2) A certificate is not necessary when an affidavit is filed by the applicant showing facts and the individual has refused to submit to examination by a physician or a psychologist.

(e) Notice requirements; eight days' notice required. — Upon receipt of an application, the mental hygiene commissioner or circuit court shall review the application, and if it is determined that the facts alleged, if any, are sufficient to warrant involuntary hospitalization, immediately fix a date for and have the clerk of the circuit court give notice of the hearing:

(1) To the individual;

(2) To the applicant or applicants;

(3) To the individual's spouse, one of the parents or guardians, or, if the individual does not have a spouse, parents or parent or guardian, to one of the individual's adult next of kin if the next of kin is not the applicant;

(4) To the mental health authorities serving the area;

(5) To the circuit court in the county of the individual's residence if the hearing is to be held in a county other than that of the individual's residence; and

(6) To the prosecuting attorney of the county in which the hearing is to be held.

(f) The notice shall be served on the individual by personal service of process not less than eight days prior to the date of the hearing and shall specify:

(1) The nature of the charges against the individual;

(2) The facts underlying and supporting the application of involuntary commitment;

(3) The right to have counsel appointed;

(4) The right to consult with and be represented by counsel at every stage of the proceedings; and

(5) The time and place of the hearing.

The notice to the individual's spouse, parents or parent or guardian, the individual's adult next of kin, or to the circuit court in the county of the individual's residence may be by personal service of process or by certified or registered mail, return receipt requested, and shall state the time and place of the hearing.

(g) Examination of individual by court-appointed physician, psychologist, advanced nurse practitioner, or physician assistant; custody for examination; dismissal of proceedings. —

(1) Except as provided in subdivision (3) of this subsection, and except when a Certificate of the Licensed Examiner and an application for final civil commitment at the mental health facility where the person is currently committed has been completed and filed, within a reasonable time after notice of the commencement of final commitment proceedings is given, the circuit court or mental hygiene commissioner shall appoint a physician, psychologist, an advanced nurse practitioner with psychiatric certification, or a physician assistant with advanced duties in psychiatric medicine to examine the individual and report to the circuit court or mental hygiene commissioner his or her findings as to the mental condition or substance use disorder of the individual and the likelihood of causing serious harm to self or others. Any such report shall include the names and last known addresses of the persons identified in §27-5-4-(e)(3) of this code.

(2) If the designated physician, psychologist, advanced nurse practitioner, or physician assistant reports to the circuit court or mental hygiene commissioner that the individual has

refused to submit to an examination, the circuit court or mental hygiene commissioner shall order him or her to submit to the examination. The circuit court or mental hygiene commissioner may direct that the individual be detained or taken into custody for the purpose of an immediate examination by the designated physician, psychologist, nurse practitioner, or physician assistant. All orders shall be directed to the sheriff of the county or other appropriate law-enforcement officer. After the examination has been completed, the individual shall be released from custody unless proceedings are instituted pursuant to §27-5-3 of this code.

(3) If the reports of the appointed physician, psychologist, nurse practitioner, or physician assistant do not confirm that the individual is mentally ill or has a substance use disorder and might be harmful to self or others, then the proceedings for involuntary hospitalization shall be dismissed.

(h) Rights of the individual at the final commitment hearing; seven days' notice to counsel required. —

(1) The individual shall be present at the final commitment hearing, and he or she, the applicant and all persons entitled to notice of the hearing shall be afforded an opportunity to testify and to present and cross-examine witnesses.

(2) If the individual has not retained counsel, the court or mental hygiene commissioner, at least six days prior to hearing, shall appoint a competent attorney and shall inform the individual of the name, address, and telephone number of his or her appointed counsel.

(3) The individual has the right to have an examination by an independent expert of his or her choice and to present testimony from the expert as a medical witness on his or her behalf. The cost of the independent expert is paid by the individual unless he or she is indigent.

(4) The individual may not be compelled to be a witness against himself or herself.

(i) Duties of counsel representing individual; payment of counsel representing indigent. —

(1) Counsel representing an individual shall conduct a timely interview, make investigation, and secure appropriate witnesses, be present at the hearing, and protect the interests of the

124 individual.

125 (2) Counsel representing an individual is entitled to copies of all medical reports,
126 psychiatric or otherwise.

127 (3) The circuit court, by order of record, may allow the attorney a reasonable fee not to
128 exceed the amount allowed for attorneys in defense of needy persons as provided in §29-21-1 *et*
129 *seq.* of this code.

130 (j) Conduct of hearing; receipt of evidence; no evidentiary privilege; record of hearing. —

131 (1) The circuit court or mental hygiene commissioner shall hear evidence from all
132 interested parties in chamber, including testimony from representatives of the community mental
133 health facility.

134 (2) The circuit court or mental hygiene commissioner shall receive all relevant and material
135 evidence which may be offered.

136 (3) The circuit court or mental hygiene commissioner is bound by the rules of evidence
137 promulgated by the Supreme Court of Appeals except that statements made to health care
138 professionals appointed under subsection (g) of this section by the individual may be admitted into
139 evidence by the health care professional's testimony, notwithstanding failure to inform the
140 individual that this statement may be used against him or her. A health care professional testifying
141 shall bring all records pertaining to the individual to the hearing. The medical evidence obtained
142 pursuant to an examination under this section, or §27-5-2 or §27-5-3 of this code, is not privileged
143 information for purposes of a hearing pursuant to this section.

144 (4) All final commitment proceedings shall be reported or recorded, whether before the
145 circuit court or mental hygiene commissioner, and a transcript made available to the individual, his
146 or her counsel or the prosecuting attorney within 30 days if requested for the purpose of further
147 proceedings. In any case where an indigent person intends to pursue further proceedings, the
148 circuit court shall, by order entered of record, authorize, and direct the court reporter to furnish a
149 transcript of the hearings.

(k) Requisite findings by the court. —

(1) Upon completion of the final commitment hearing and the evidence presented in the hearing, the circuit court or mental hygiene commissioner shall make findings as to the following based upon clear and convincing evidence:

(A) Whether the individual is mentally ill or has a substance use disorder;

(B) Whether, as a result of illness or substance use disorder, the individual is likely to cause serious harm to self or others if allowed to remain at liberty and requires continued commitment and treatment;

(C) Whether the individual is a resident of the county in which the hearing is held or currently is a patient at a mental health facility in the county; and

(D) Whether there is a less restrictive alternative than commitment appropriate for the individual that is appropriate and available. The burden of proof of the lack of a less restrictive alternative than commitment is on the person or persons seeking the commitment of the individual: *Provided*, That for any commitment to a state hospital as defined by §27-1-6 of this code, a specific finding shall be made that the commitment of, or treatment for, the individual requires inpatient hospital placement and that no suitable outpatient community-based treatment program exists that is appropriate and available in the individual's area.

(2) The findings of fact shall be incorporated into the order entered by the circuit court and must be based upon clear, cogent, and convincing proof.

(l) Orders issued pursuant to final commitment hearing; entry of order; change in order of court; expiration of order. —

(1) Upon the requisite findings, the circuit court may order the individual to a mental health facility or state hospital for a period not to exceed 90 days except as otherwise provided in this subdivision. During that period and solely for individuals who are committed under §27-6A-1 *et seq.* of this code, the chief medical officer of the mental health facility or state hospital shall conduct a clinical assessment of the individual at least every 30 days to determine if the individual

requires continued placement and treatment at the mental health facility or state hospital and whether the individual is suitable to receive any necessary treatment at an outpatient community-based treatment program. If at any time the chief medical officer, acting in good faith and in a manner consistent with the standard of care, determines that: (i) The individual is suitable for receiving outpatient community-based treatment; (ii) necessary outpatient community-based treatment is available in the individual's area as evidenced by a discharge and treatment plan jointly developed by the Department of Health Facilities and the comprehensive community mental health center or licensed behavioral health provider; and (iii) the individual's clinical presentation no longer requires inpatient commitment, the chief medical officer shall provide written notice to the court of record and prosecuting attorney as provided in subdivision (2) of this section that the individual is suitable for discharge. The chief medical officer may discharge the patient 30 days after the notice unless the court of record stays the discharge of the individual. In the event the court stays the discharge of the individual, the court shall conduct a hearing within 45 days of the stay, and the individual shall be thereafter discharged unless the court finds by clear and convincing evidence that the individual is a significant and present danger to self or others, and that continued placement at the mental health facility or state hospital is required.

If the chief medical officer determines that the individual requires commitment and treatment at the mental health facility or state hospital at any time for a period longer than 90 days, then the individual shall remain at the mental health facility or state hospital until the chief medical officer of the mental health facility or state hospital determines that the individual's clinical presentation no longer requires further commitment and treatment. The chief medical officer shall provide notice to the court, the prosecuting attorney, the individual, and the individual's guardian or attorney, or both, if applicable, that the individual requires commitment and treatment for a period in excess of 90 days and, in the notice, the chief medical officer shall describe how the individual continues to meet commitment criteria and the need for ongoing commitment and treatment. The court, prosecuting attorney, the individual, or the individual's guardian or attorney, or both, if

applicable, may request any information from the chief medical officer that the court or prosecuting attorney considers appropriate to justify the need for the individual's ongoing commitment and treatment. The court may hold any hearing that it considers appropriate.

(2) Notice to the court of record and prosecuting attorney shall be provided by personal service or certified mail, return receipt requested. The chief medical officer shall make the following findings:

(A) Whether the individual has a mental illness or substance use disorder that does not require inpatient treatment, and the mental illness or serious emotional disturbance is in substantial remission;

(B) Whether the individual has the independent ability to manage safely the risk factors resulting from his or her mental illness or substance use disorder and is not likely to deteriorate to the point that the individual will pose a likelihood of serious harm to self or others without continued commitment and treatment;

(C) Whether the individual is likely to participate in outpatient treatment with a legal obligation to do so;

(D) Whether the individual is not likely to participate in outpatient treatment unless legally obligated to do so;

(E) Whether the individual is capable of surviving safely in freedom by himself or herself or with the help of willing and responsible family members, guardian, or friends; and

(F) Whether mandatory outpatient treatment is a suitable, less restrictive alternative to ongoing commitment.

(3) The individual may not be detained in a mental health facility or state hospital for a period in excess of 10 days after a final commitment hearing pursuant to this section unless an order has been entered and received by the facility.

(4) An individual committed pursuant to §27-6A-3 of this code may be committed for the period he or she is determined by the court to remain an imminent danger to self or others.

(5) If the commitment of the individual as provided under subdivision (1) of this subsection exceeds two years, the individual or his or her counsel may request a hearing and a hearing shall be held by the mental hygiene commissioner or by the circuit court of the county as provided in subsection (a) of this section.

(m) Dismissal of proceedings. — If the individual is discharged as provided in subsection (l) of this section, the circuit court or mental hygiene commissioner shall dismiss the proceedings.

(n) Immediate notification of order of hospitalization. — The clerk of the circuit court in which an order directing hospitalization is entered, if not in the county of the individual's residence, shall immediately upon entry of the order forward a certified copy of the order to the clerk of the circuit court of the county of which the individual is a resident.

(o) Consideration of transcript by circuit court of county of individual's residence; order of hospitalization; execution of order. —

(1) If the circuit court or mental hygiene commissioner is satisfied that hospitalization should be ordered but finds that the individual is not a resident of the county in which the hearing is held and the individual is not currently a resident of a mental health facility or state hospital, a transcript of the evidence adduced at the final commitment hearing of the individual, certified by the clerk of the circuit court, shall immediately be forwarded to the clerk of the circuit court of the county of which the individual is a resident. The clerk shall immediately present the transcript to the circuit court or mental hygiene commissioner of the county.

(2) If the circuit court or mental hygiene commissioner of the county of the residence of the individual is satisfied from the evidence contained in the transcript that the individual should be hospitalized as determined by the standard set forth in subdivision one of this subsection, the circuit court shall order the appropriate hospitalization as though the individual had been brought before the circuit court or its mental hygiene commissioner in the first instance.

(3) This order shall be transmitted immediately to the clerk of the circuit court of the county in which the hearing was held who shall execute the order promptly.

(p) Order of custody to responsible person. — In lieu of ordering the individual to a mental health facility or state hospital, the circuit court may order the individual delivered to some responsible person who will agree to take care of the individual and the circuit court may take from the responsible person a bond in an amount to be determined by the circuit court with condition to restrain and take proper care of the individual until further order of the court.

(q) Individual not a resident of this state. — If the individual is found to be mentally ill or to have a substance use disorder by the circuit court or mental hygiene commissioner is a resident of another state, this information shall be immediately given to the Secretary of the Department of Health Facilities, or to his or her designee, who shall make appropriate arrangements for transfer of the individual to the state of his or her residence conditioned on the agreement of the individual, except as qualified by the interstate compact on mental health.

(r) Report to the Secretary of the Department of Health Facilities. —

(1) The chief medical officer of a mental health facility or state hospital admitting a patient pursuant to proceedings under this section shall immediately make a report of the admission to the Secretary of the Department of Health Facilities or to his or her designee.

(2) Whenever an individual is released from custody due to the failure of an employee of a mental health facility or state hospital to comply with the time requirements of this article, the chief medical officer of the mental health or state hospital facility shall immediately, after the release of the individual, make a report to the Secretary of the Department of Health Facilities or to his or her designee of the failure to comply.

(s) Payment of some expenses by the state; mental hygiene fund established; expenses paid by the county commission. —

(1) The state shall pay the commissioner's fee and the court reporter fees that are not paid and reimbursed under §29-21-1 *et seq.* of this code out of a special fund to be established within the Supreme Court of Appeals to be known as the Mental Hygiene Fund.

(2) The county commission shall pay out of the county treasury all other expenses incurred

in the hearings conducted under the provisions of this article whether or not hospitalization is ordered, including any fee allowed by the circuit court by order entered of record for any physician, psychologist, and witness called by the indigent individual. The copying and mailing costs associated with providing notice of the final commitment hearing and issuance of the final order shall be paid by the county where the involuntary commitment petition was initially filed.

(3) Effective July 1, 2022, the Department of Health Facilities shall reimburse the Sheriff, the ~~Department~~ Division of Corrections and Rehabilitation, or other law-enforcement agency for the actual costs related to transporting a patient who has been involuntary committed. The Sheriff, the Division of Corrections and Rehabilitation, or other law-enforcement agencies may use, and be reimbursed for, as many officers, staff, or other employees as necessary to ensure a safe transport for both the transporting party and the one being hospitalized.

(t) When considering the transportation of the hospitalized person, the county in which the final commitment proceedings are taking place shall have the discretion to use alternate hospitals. The county shall have the discretion to enter into contracts with hospitals that may be closer to the jurisdiction in which the hearing is occurring and may utilize hospitals outside of the state of West Virginia.

NOTE: The purpose of this bill is to allow for multiple deputies in the transportation of those involuntarily hospitalized, to allow counties the discretion to contract with hospital with closer jurisdiction, and to utilize out-of-state hospitals.

Strike-throughs indicate language that would be stricken from a heading or the present law and underscoring indicates new language that would be added.