WEST VIRGINIA LEGISLATURE

2022 REGULAR SESSION

ENROLLED

Committee Substitute for

House Bill 4377

BY DELEGATES ROHRBACH, D. JEFFRIES, PACK, REED,
WORRELL, BATES, ROWAN, G. WARD, MILLER, CRISS AND
PINSON

[Passed March 12, 2022; in effect ninety days from passage.]
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AN ACT to amend the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended by adding thereto three new sections, designated §27-5-1b and §27-5-3a; to amend and reenact §27-5-2, §27-5-3, §27-5-4 and §27-5-10 of said code and to amend and reenact §61-7A-2, §61-7A-4 and §61-7A-5 of said code, all relating generally to involuntary commitment; directing participation by certain groups and entities in a study of the feasibility of developing alternatives to law enforcement transportation of patients; requiring an audit process for mental hygiene services; clarifying conditions for which involuntary commitment is inappropriate; authorizing video conferencing for hearings and evaluations; establishing time limits for completion tasks necessary to the commitment process; requiring reimbursement for transportation costs to the appropriate law enforcement agency; establishing state policy that a person committed for what is determined to be a physical condition is not considered to have been committed for a mental illness or addiction and not a basis for firearms disqualification, professional licensure, or employment purposes; requiring the entry of an order when a mistaken commitment is discovered; clarifying the distinction between hospitalizations for evaluation from those for treatment; and defining terms.

Be it enacted by the Legislature of West Virginia:

ARTICLE 5. INVOLUNTARY HOSPITALIZATION.

§27-5-1b. Pilot projects and other initiatives.

(a) Duties of the Department of Health and Human Resources. — The Secretary shall, in collaboration with designees of the Supreme Court of Appeals, the Sheriff’s Association, the Prosecuting Attorney’s Association, the Public Defender Services, the Behavioral Health Providers Association, Disability Rights of West Virginia, and a designee of the Dangerousness Assessment Advisory Board, undertake an evaluation of the utilization of alternative transportation providers and the development of standards that define the role, scope, regulation, and training necessary for the safe and effective utilization of alternative transportation providers
and shall further identify potential financial sources for the payment of alternative transportation providers. Recommendations regarding such evaluation shall be submitted to the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Delegates on or before July 31, 2022. The Legislature requests the Supreme Court of Appeals cooperate with the listed parties and undertake this evaluation.

(b) Civil Involuntary Commitment Audits. – The secretary shall establish a process to conduct retrospective quarterly audits of applications and licensed examiner forms prepared by certifiers for the involuntary civil commitment of persons as provided in §27-5-1 et seq. of this code. The process shall determine whether the licensed examiner forms prepared by certifiers are clinically justified and consistent with the requirements of this code and, if not, develop corrective actions to redress identified issues. The Legislature requests the Supreme Court of Appeals participate in this process with the secretary. The process and the findings thereof shall be confidential, not subject to subpoena, and not subject to the provisions of §6-9A-1 et seq. and §29B-1-1 et seq. of this code.

(i) Duties of the Mental Health Center for Purposes of Evaluation for Commitment. – Each mental health center shall make available as necessary a qualified and competent licensed person to conduct prompt evaluations of persons for commitment in accordance with §27-5-1 et seq. of this code. Evaluations shall be conducted in person, unless an in-person evaluation would create a substantial delay to the resolution of the matter, and then the evaluation may be conducted by videoconference. Each mental health center that performs these evaluations shall exercise reasonable diligence in performing the evaluations and communicating with the state hospital to provide all reasonable and necessary information to facilitate a prompt and orderly admission to the state hospital of any person who is or is likely to be involuntarily committed to such hospital. Each mental health center that performs these evaluations shall explain the involuntary commitment process to the applicant and the person proposed to be committed and
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further identify appropriate alternative forms of potential treatment, loss of liberty if committed, and the likely risks and benefits of commitment.

(k) Notwithstanding any provision of this code to the contrary, the Supreme Court of Appeals, mental health facilities, law enforcement, and the Department of Health and Human Resources may participate in pilot projects in Cabell, Berkeley, and Ohio Counties to implement an involuntary commitment process. Further, notwithstanding any provision of this code to the contrary, no alternative transportation provider may be utilized until standards are developed and implemented that define the role, scope, regulation, and training necessary for an alternative transportation provider as provided in subsection (a) of this section.

§27-5-2. Institution of proceedings for involuntary custody for examination; custody; probable cause hearing; examination of individual.

(a) Any adult person may make an application for involuntary hospitalization for examination of an individual when the person making the application has reason to believe that the individual to be examined has a substance use disorder as defined by the most recent edition of the American Psychiatric Association in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, inclusive of substance use withdrawal, or is mentally ill and because of his or her substance use disorder or mental illness, the individual is likely to cause serious harm to himself, herself, or to others if allowed to remain at liberty while awaiting an examination and certification by a physician, psychologist, licensed professional counselor, licensed independent social worker, an advanced nurse practitioner, or physician assistant as provided in subsection (e) of this section: Provided, That a diagnosis of dementia, epilepsy, or intellectual or developmental disability alone may not be a basis for involuntary commitment to a state hospital.

(b) Notwithstanding any language in this subsection to the contrary, if the individual to be examined under the provisions of this section is incarcerated in a jail, prison, or other correctional facility, then only the chief administrative officer of the facility holding the individual may file the application, and the application must include the additional statement that the correctional facility
itself cannot reasonably provide treatment and other services necessary to treat the individual's
mental illness or substance use.

(c) Application for involuntary custody for examination may be made to the circuit court,
manistrate court, or a mental hygiene commissioner of the county in which the individual resides,
or of the county in which he or she may be found. A magistrate before whom an application or
matter is pending may, upon the availability of a mental hygiene commissioner or circuit court
judge for immediate presentation of an application or pending matter, transfer the pending matter
or application to the mental hygiene commissioner or circuit court judge for further proceedings
unless otherwise ordered by the chief judge of the judicial circuit.

(d) The person making the application shall give information and state facts in the
application required by the form provided for this purpose by the Supreme Court of Appeals.

(e) The circuit court, mental hygiene commissioner, or magistrate may enter an order for
the individual named in the application to be detained and taken into custody as provided in §27-5-1 and §27-5-10 of this code for the purpose of holding a probable cause hearing as provided in
§27-5-2 of this code. An examination of the individual to determine whether the individual meets
involuntary hospitalization criteria shall be conducted in person unless an in person examination
would create a substantial delay in the resolution of the matter in which case the examination may
be by video conference, and shall be performed by a physician, psychologist, a licensed
professional counselor practicing in compliance with §30-31-1 et seq. of this code, a licensed
independent clinical social worker practicing in compliance with §30-30-1 et seq. of this code, an
advanced nurse practitioner with psychiatric certification practicing in compliance with §30-7-1 et seq. of this code, a physician assistant practicing in compliance with §30-3-1 et seq. of this code, or a physician assistant practicing in compliance with §30-3E-1 et seq. of this code: Provided,
That a licensed professional counselor, a licensed independent clinical social worker, a physician
assistant, or an advanced nurse practitioner with psychiatric certification may only perform the
examination if he or she has previously been authorized by an order of the circuit court to do so,
the order having found that the licensed professional counselor, the licensed independent clinical
social worker, physician assistant, or advanced nurse practitioner with psychiatric certification has
particularized expertise in the areas of mental health and mental hygiene or substance use
disorder sufficient to make the determinations required by the provisions of this section. The
examination shall be provided or arranged by a community mental health center designated by
the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Resources to serve the county in which
the action takes place. The order is to specify that the evaluation be held within a reasonable
period of time not to exceed two hours and shall provide for the appointment of counsel for the
individual: Provided, however, That the time requirements set forth in this subsection only apply
to persons who are not in need of medical care for a physical condition or disease for which the
need for treatment precludes the ability to comply with the time requirements. During periods of
holding and detention authorized by this subsection, upon consent of the individual or if there is
a medical or psychiatric emergency, the individual may receive treatment. The medical provider
shall exercise due diligence in determining the individual’s existing medical needs and provide
treatment the individual requires, including previously prescribed medications. As used in this
section, “psychiatric emergency” means an incident during which an individual loses control and
behaves in a manner that poses substantial likelihood of physical harm to himself, herself, or
others. Where a physician, psychologist, licensed professional counselor, licensed independent
clinical social worker, physician assistant, or advanced nurse practitioner with psychiatric
certification has, within the preceding 72 hours, performed the examination required by this
subsection the community mental health center may waive the duty to perform or arrange another
examination upon approving the previously performed examination. Notwithstanding this
subsection, §27-5-4(r) of this code applies regarding payment by the county commission for
examinations at hearings. If the examination reveals that the individual is not mentally ill or has
no substance use disorder, or is determined to be mentally ill or has a substance use disorder but
not likely to cause harm to himself, herself, or others, the individual shall be immediately released
without the need for a probable cause hearing and the examiner is not civilly liable for the
rendering of the opinion absent a finding of professional negligence. The examiner shall
immediately, but no later than 60 minutes after completion of the examination, provide the mental
hygiene commissioner, circuit court, or magistrate before whom the matter is pending, and the
state hospital to which the individual may be involuntarily hospitalized, the results of the
examination on the form provided for this purpose by the Supreme Court of Appeals for entry of
an order reflecting the lack of probable cause.

(f) A probable cause hearing shall be held promptly before a magistrate, the mental
hygiene commissioner, or circuit judge of the county of which the individual is a resident or where
he or she was found. If requested by the individual or his or her counsel, the hearing may be
postponed for a period not to exceed 48 hours. Hearings may be conducted via videoconferencing
unless the individual or his or her attorney object for good cause or unless the magistrate, mental
hygiene commissioner, or circuit judge orders otherwise. The Supreme Court of Appeals is
requested to develop regional mental hygiene collaboratives where mental hygiene
commissioners can share on-call responsibilities, thereby reducing the burden on individual
circuits and commissioners.

The individual shall be present at the hearing and has the right to present evidence,
confront all witnesses and other evidence against him or her, and examine testimony offered,
including testimony by representatives of the community mental health center serving the area.
Expert testimony at the hearing may be taken telephonically or via videoconferencing. The
individual has the right to remain silent and to be proceeded against in accordance with the Rules
of Evidence of the Supreme Court of Appeals, except as provided in §27-1-12 of this code. At the
conclusion of the hearing, the magistrate, mental hygiene commissioner, or circuit court judge
shall find and enter an order stating whether or not it is likely that deterioration will occur without
clinically necessary treatment, or there is probable cause to believe that the individual, as a result
of mental illness or substance use disorder, is likely to cause serious harm to himself or herself.
or to others. Any such order entered shall be provided to the state hospital to which the individual may or will be involuntarily hospitalized within 60 minutes of filing absent good cause.

(g) Probable cause hearings may occur in the county where a person is hospitalized. The judicial hearing officer may: use videoconferencing and telephonic technology; permit persons hospitalized for substance use disorder to be involuntarily hospitalized only until detoxification is accomplished; and specify other alternative or modified procedures that are consistent with the purposes and provisions of this article to promote a prompt, orderly, and efficient hearing. The alternative or modified procedures shall fully and effectively guarantee to the person who is the subject of the involuntary commitment proceeding and other interested parties due process of the law and access to the least restrictive available treatment needed to prevent serious harm to self or others.

(h) If the magistrate, mental hygiene commissioner, or circuit court judge at a probable cause hearing or a mental hygiene commissioner or circuit judge at a final commitment hearing held pursuant to the provisions of §27-5-4 of this code finds that the individual, as a direct result of mental illness or substance use disorder is likely to cause serious harm to himself, herself, or others and because of mental illness or a substance use disorder requires treatment, the magistrate, mental hygiene commissioner, or circuit court judge may consider evidence on the question of whether the individual's circumstances make him or her amenable to outpatient treatment in a nonresidential or nonhospital setting pursuant to a voluntary treatment agreement. At the conclusion of the hearing, the magistrate, mental hygiene commissioner, or circuit court judge shall find and enter an order stating whether or not it is likely that deterioration will occur without clinically necessary treatment, or there is probable cause to believe that the individual, as a result of mental illness or substance use disorder, is likely to cause serious harm to himself or herself or others. The agreement is to be in writing and approved by the individual, his or her counsel, and the magistrate, mental hygiene commissioner, or circuit court judge. If the
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119 magistrate, mental hygiene commissioner, or circuit court judge determines that appropriate
120 outpatient treatment is available in a nonresidential or nonhospital setting, the individual may be
121 released to outpatient treatment upon the terms and conditions of the voluntary treatment
122 agreement. The failure of an individual released to outpatient treatment pursuant to a voluntary
123 treatment agreement to comply with the terms of the voluntary treatment agreement constitutes
124 evidence that outpatient treatment is insufficient and, after a hearing before a magistrate, mental
125 hygiene commissioner, or circuit judge on the issue of whether or not the individual failed or
126 refused to comply with the terms and conditions of the voluntary treatment agreement and
127 whether the individual as a result of mental illness or substance use disorder remains likely to
128 cause serious harm to himself, herself, or others, the entry of an order requiring admission under
129 involuntary hospitalization pursuant to §27-5-3 of this code may be entered. Nothing in the
130 provisions of this article regarding release pursuant to a voluntary treatment agreement or
131 convalescent status may be construed as creating a right to receive outpatient mental health
132 services or treatment, or as obligating any person or agency to provide outpatient services or
133 treatment. Time limitations set forth in this article relating to periods of involuntary commitment to
134 a mental health facility for hospitalization do not apply to release pursuant to the terms of a
135 voluntary treatment agreement: Provided, That release pursuant to a voluntary treatment
136 agreement may not be for a period of more than six months if the individual has not been found
137 to be involuntarily committed during the previous two years and for a period of no more than two
138 years if the individual has been involuntarily committed during the preceding two years. If in any
139 proceeding held pursuant to this article the individual objects to the issuance or conditions and
140 terms of an order adopting a voluntary treatment agreement, then the circuit judge, magistrate, or
141 mental hygiene commissioner may not enter an order directing treatment pursuant to a voluntary
142 treatment agreement. If involuntary commitment with release pursuant to a voluntary treatment
143 agreement is ordered, the individual subject to the order may, upon request during the period the
order is in effect, have a hearing before a mental hygiene commissioner or circuit judge where the individual may seek to have the order canceled or modified. Nothing in this section affects the appellate and habeas corpus rights of any individual subject to any commitment order.

The commitment of any individual as provided in this article shall be in the least restrictive setting and in an outpatient community-based treatment program to the extent resources and programs are available, unless the clear and convincing evidence of the certifying professional under subsection (e) of this section, who is acting in a manner consistent with the standard of care establishes that the commitment or treatment of that individual requires an inpatient hospital placement. Outpatient treatment will be based upon a plan jointly prepared by the department and the comprehensive community mental health center or licensed behavioral health provider.

(i) If the certifying professional determines that an individual requires involuntary hospitalization for a substance use disorder as permitted by §27-5-2(a) of this code which, due to the degree of the disorder, creates a reasonable likelihood that withdrawal or detoxification will cause significant medical complications, the person certifying the individual shall recommend that the individual be closely monitored for possible medical complications. If the magistrate, mental hygiene commissioner, or circuit court judge presiding orders involuntary hospitalization, he or she shall include a recommendation that the individual be closely monitored in the order of commitment.

(j) The Supreme Court of Appeals and the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Resources shall specifically develop and propose a statewide system for evaluation and adjudication of mental hygiene petitions which shall include payment schedules and recommendations regarding funding sources. Additionally, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Resources shall also immediately seek reciprocal agreements with officials in contiguous states to develop interstate/intergovernmental agreements to provide efficient and
efficacious services to out-of-state residents found in West Virginia and who are in need of mental hygiene services.

§27-5-3. Admission under involuntary hospitalization for examination; hearing; release.

(a) Admission to a mental health facility for examination. — An individual shall be admitted to a mental health facility for examination and treatment upon entry of an order finding probable cause as provided in §27-5-2 of this code. Upon certification by a physician, psychologist, licensed professional counselor, licensed independent clinical social worker practicing in compliance with the provisions of §30-30-1 et seq. of this code, an advanced nurse practitioner with psychiatric certification practicing in compliance with §30-7-1 et seq. of this code, or a physician’s assistant practicing in compliance with §30-3E-1 et seq. of this code with advanced duties in psychiatric medicine that he or she has examined the individual and is of the opinion that the individual is mentally ill or has a substance use disorder and, because of the mental illness or substance use disorder, is likely to cause serious harm to himself, herself, or to others if not immediately restrained and treated: Provided, That the opinions offered by an independent clinical social worker, an advanced nurse practitioner with psychiatric certification, or a physician assistant with advanced duties in psychiatric medicine shall be within his or her particular areas of expertise, as recognized by the order of the authorizing court.

(b) Three-day time limitation on examination. — If the examination does not take place within three days from the date the individual is taken into custody, the individual shall be released. If the examination reveals that the individual is not mentally ill or has a substance use disorder, the individual shall be released.

(c) Three-day time limitation on certification. — The certification required in §27-5-3(a) of this code is valid for three days. Any individual with respect to whom the certification has been issued may not be admitted on the basis of the certification at any time after the expiration of three days from the date of the examination.
(d) Findings and conclusions required for certification. — A certification under this section shall include findings and conclusions of the mental examination, the date, time, and place of the examination, and the facts upon which the conclusion that involuntary commitment is necessary is based, including facts that less restrictive interventions and placements were considered but are not appropriate and available and that the risks and benefits were explained as required by §27-5-1(i) of this code.

(e) Notice requirements. — When an individual is admitted to a mental health facility or a state hospital pursuant to the provisions of this section, the chief medical officer of the facility shall immediately give notice of the individual’s admission to the individual’s spouse, if any, and one of the individual’s parents or guardians or if there is no spouse and are no parents or guardians, to one of the individual’s adult next of kin if the next of kin is not the applicant. Notice shall also be given to the community mental health facility, if any, having jurisdiction in the county of the individual’s residence. The notices other than to the community mental health facility shall be in writing and shall be transmitted to the person or persons at his, her, or their last known address by certified mail, return receipt requested.

(f) Three-day time limitation for examination and certification at mental health facility or state hospital. — After the individual’s admission to a mental health facility or state hospital, he or she may not be detained more than three days, excluding Sundays and holidays, unless, within the three-day period, the individual is examined by a staff physician and the physician certifies that in his or her opinion the patient is not suffering from a physical ailment manifesting behaviors which mimic mental illness but is mentally ill or has a substance use disorder and is likely to injure himself, herself, or others and requires continued commitment and treatment. If the staff physician determines that the individual does not meet the criteria for continued commitment, that the individual can be treated in an available outpatient community-based treatment program and poses no present danger to himself, herself or others, or that the individual has an underlying medical issue or issues that resulted in a determination that the individual should not have been
committed, the staff physician shall release and discharge the individual as appropriate as soon as practicable.

(g) Twenty-day time limitation for institution of final commitment proceedings. — If, in the opinion of the examining physician, the patient is mentally ill or has a substance use disorder and because of the mental illness or substance use disorder is likely to injure himself, herself, or others if allowed to be at liberty, the chief medical officer shall, within 20 calendar days from the date of admission, institute final commitment proceedings as provided in §27-5-4 of this code. If the proceedings are not instituted within the 20-day period absent good cause, the individual shall be immediately released. After the request for hearing is filed, the hearing may not be canceled on the basis that the individual has become a voluntary patient unless the mental hygiene commissioner concurs in the motion for cancellation of the hearing.

(h) Thirty-five day time limitation for conclusion of all proceedings. — If all proceedings as provided in §27-3-1 et seq. and §27-4-1 et seq. of this code are not completed within 35 days from the date of filing the Application for Involuntary Custody for Mental Health Examination, the individual shall be immediately released.

§27-5-3a. Legal effect of commitment after determined not to be based on mental illness or addiction.

(a) In the event that a person is involuntarily hospitalized, and it is determined after the entry of the order that the behavior which led to the entry of the order of involuntary hospitalization was caused by a physical condition or disorder rather than mental illness or addiction, the hospitalization shall not serve to make him or her a proscribed person under state laws relating to firearms possession or to negatively affect a person’s professional licensure, employment, employability, or parental rights. Furthermore, while it is clear that it is the government of the United States and not the government of West Virginia, which has authority under 18 U.S.C. 922(g)(4), to determine whether a person has been “committed to a mental institution” the
Legislature notes that "federal courts often look to state law to help determine whether a
commitment has occurred." United States v. Vertz, 40 F. App'x 69 (6th Cir. 2002). Under such
principles of interpretation, it is the express intent of the legislature to make clear that in
circumstances under which there is a judicial determination that a person's involuntary
hospitalization was necessitated and ordered as a result of a physical condition or disorder, the
legislature does not deem this to be a "commitment," under state law, and the Legislature's
determination that such an involuntary hospitalization is not a "commitment" should be viewed by
the government of the United States as consistent with the provisions of the amendments to the
NICS Improvement Amendments Act of 2007, Public Law 110-180, Tit. 1, Sec 101(c)(1), 121 Stat.
2559, 2562-63 (2008).

(b) Consistent with subsection (a) of this section, whenever a mental hygiene
commissioner, magistrate, or circuit judge is made aware that the circumstances addressed in
subsection (a) of this section have occurred, the mental hygiene commissioner, magistrate, or
circuit judge shall enter an order finding that the person was not suffering from a mental illness or
addiction and not committed therefor.

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

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

(b) *How final commitment proceedings are commenced.* — Final commitment proceedings
for an individual may be commenced by the filing of a written application under oath by an adult
person having personal knowledge of the facts of the case. The certificate or affidavit is filed with
the clerk of the circuit court or mental hygiene commissioner of the county where the individual is
a resident or where he or she may be found, or the county of a mental health facility if he or she
is hospitalized in a mental health facility or state hospital located in a county other than where he
or she resides or may be found. Notwithstanding anything any provision of this code to the
contrary, all hearings for the involuntary final civil commitment of a person who is committed in
accordance with §27-6A-1 *et seq.* of this code shall be commenced only upon the filing of a
Certificate of the Licensed Certifier at the mental health facility where the person is currently
committed.

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

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

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

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

(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.

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 individual.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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 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 and Human Resources, 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 and Human Resources. —

(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 and Human Resources 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 and Human
Resources 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 and Human Resources shall
reimburse the Sheriff, the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, or other law enforcement
agency for the actual costs related to transporting a patient who has been involuntary committed.
§27-5-10. Transportation for the mentally ill or persons with substance use disorder.

(a) Whenever transportation of an individual is required under the provisions of §27-4-1 et seq. and §27-5-1 et seq. of this code, the sheriff shall provide immediate transportation to or from the appropriate mental health facility or state hospital as described in §27-5-19(d) of this code:

Provided, That, where hospitalization occurs pursuant to §27-4-1 et seq. of this code, the sheriff may permit, upon the written request of a person having proper interest in the individual’s hospitalization, for the interested person to arrange for the individual’s transportation to the mental health facility or state hospital if the sheriff determines that those means are suitable given the individual’s condition.

(b) Upon written agreement between the county commission on behalf of the sheriff and the directors of the local community mental health center and emergency medical services, an alternative transportation program may be arranged. The agreement shall clearly define the responsibilities of each of the parties, the requirements for program participation, and the persons bearing ultimate responsibility for the individual’s safety and well-being.

(c) Use of certified municipal law-enforcement officers. — Sheriffs and municipal governments may enter into written agreements by which certified municipal law-enforcement officers may perform the duties of the sheriff as described in this article. The agreement shall determine jurisdiction, responsibility of costs, and all other necessary requirements, including training related to the performance of these duties, and shall be approved by the county commission and circuit court of the county in which the agreement is made. For purposes of this subsection, “certified municipal law-enforcement officer” means any duly authorized member of a municipal law-enforcement agency who is empowered to maintain public peace and order, make arrests, and enforce the laws of this state or any political subdivision thereof, other than parking ordinances, and who is currently certified as a law-enforcement officer pursuant to §30-29-1 et seq. of this code.
(d) In the event an individual requires transportation to a state hospital as defined by §27-1-6 of this code, the sheriff, or certified municipal law-enforcement officer shall contact the state hospital in advance of the transportation to determine if the state hospital has suitable bed capacity to place the individual.


As used in this article and as the terms are deemed to mean in 18 U. S. C. § 922(g) and §61-7-7 of this code as each exists as of January 31, 2008:

(1) "A person adjudicated as a mental defective" means a person who has been determined by a duly authorized court, tribunal, board or other entity to be mentally ill to the point where he or she has been found to be incompetent to stand trial due to mental illness or insanity, has been found not guilty in a criminal proceeding by reason of mental illness or insanity or has been determined to be unable to handle his or her own affairs due to mental illness or insanity. A child under fourteen years of age is not considered "a person adjudicated as a mental defective" for purposes of this article.

(2) "Committed to a mental institution" means to have been involuntarily committed for treatment pursuant to the provisions of §27-5-4(l) of this code. Children under 14 years of age are not considered "committed to a mental institution" for purposes of this article. "Committed to a mental institution" does not mean voluntary admission for mental health treatment.

(3) "Mental institution" means any facility or part of a facility used for the treatment of persons committed for treatment of mental illness.


(a) Notwithstanding any provision of this code to the contrary, the Superintendent of the State Police, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Resources, the circuit clerks, and the Administrator of the Supreme Court of Appeals may provide notice to the central state mental health registry and the National Instant Criminal Background Check System established pursuant to Section 103(d) of the Brady Handgun Violence Protection Act, 18 U. S. C. §922, that
(a) Any person who is prohibited from possessing a firearm pursuant to the provisions of §61-7-7 or by provisions of federal law by virtue solely of having previously been adjudicated to be mentally defective or to having a prior involuntary commitment to a mental institution pursuant to §27-5-4(1) of this code may petition the circuit court of the county of his or her residence to regain the ability to lawfully possess a firearm.

(b) Petitioners prohibited from possession of firearms due to a mental health disability, must include in the petition for relief from disability:

(1) A listing of facilities and location addresses of all prior mental health treatment received by petitioner;

(2) An authorization, signed by the petitioner, for release of mental health records to the prosecuting attorney of the county; and

(3) A verified certificate of mental health examination by a licensed psychologist or psychiatrist occurring within thirty days prior to filing of the petition which supports that the petitioner is competent and not likely to act in a manner dangerous to public safety.
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(c) The court may only consider petitions for relief due to mental health adjudications or commitments that occurred in this state, and only give the relief specifically requested in the petition.

(d) In determining whether to grant the petition, the court shall receive and consider at a minimum evidence:

(1) Concerning the circumstances regarding the firearms disabilities imposed by 18 U.S.C. §922(g)(4);

(2) The petitioner’s record which must include the petitioner’s mental health and criminal history records; and

(3) The petitioner’s reputation developed through character witness statements, testimony, or other character evidence.

(e) If the court finds by clear and convincing evidence that the person is competent and capable of exercising the responsibilities concomitant with the possession of a firearm, will not be likely to act in a manner dangerous to public safety, and that granting the relief will not be contrary to public interest, the court may enter an order allowing the petitioner to possess a firearm. If the order denies petitioner’s ability to possess a firearm, the petitioner may appeal the denial, which appeal is to include the record of the circuit court rendering the decision.

(f) All proceedings for relief to regain firearm or ammunition rights shall be reported or recorded and maintained for review.

(g) The prosecuting attorney or one of his or her assistants shall represent the state in all proceedings for relief to regain firearm rights and provide the court the petitioner’s criminal history records.

(h) The written petition, certificate, mental health or substance abuse treatment records and any papers or documents containing substance abuse or mental health information of the petitioner, filed with the circuit court, are confidential. These documents may not be open to inspection by any person other than the prosecuting attorney or one of his or her assistants only
for purposes of representing the state in and during these proceedings and by the petitioner and
his or her counsel. No other person may inspect these documents, except upon authorization of
the petitioner or his or her legal representative or by order of the court, and these records may
not be published except upon the authorization of the petitioner or his or her legal representative.

(i) The circuit clerk of each county shall provide the Superintendent of the West Virginia
State Police, or his or her designee, and the Administrator of the West Virginia Supreme Court of
Appeals, or his or her designee, with a certified copy of any order entered pursuant to the
provisions of this section which removes a petitioner’s prohibition to possess firearms. If the order
restores the petitioner’s ability to possess a firearm, petitioner’s name shall be promptly removed
from the central state mental health registry and the superintendent or administrator shall forthwith
inform the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the United States Attorney General, or other federal
entity operating the National Instant Criminal Background Check System of the court action.
The Joint Committee on Enrolled Bills hereby certifies that the foregoing bill is correctly enrolled.

Chairman, House Committee

Chairman, Senate Committee

Originating in the House.
In effect ninety days from passage.

Clerk of the House of Delegates

Clerk of the Senate

Speaker of the House of Delegates

President of the Senate

The within is approved this the 30th day of March 2022.

Governor