**South Carolina General Assembly**

125th Session, 2023-2024

**A19, R26, S146**

**STATUS INFORMATION**

General Bill

Sponsors: Senators Shealy, Goldfinch and Campsen

Companion/Similar bill(s): 3233

Document Path: SR-0032KM23.docx

Introduced in the Senate on January 10, 2023

Introduced in the House on April 5, 2023

Last Amended on March 30, 2023

Currently residing in the House

Governor's Action: May 16, 2023, Signed

Summary: Sexually Violent Predators Act

**HISTORY OF LEGISLATIVE ACTIONS**

Date Body Action Description with journal page number

11/30/2022 Senate Prefiled

11/30/2022 Senate Referred to Committee on **Medical Affairs**

1/10/2023 Senate Introduced and read first time ([Senate Journal‑page 80](h:\sj\20230110.docx))

1/10/2023 Senate Referred to Committee on **Medical Affairs** ([Senate Journal‑page 80](h:\sj\20230110.docx))

2/8/2023 Scrivener's error corrected

2/9/2023 Senate Recalled from Committee on **Medical Affairs** ([Senate Journal‑page 3](h:\sj\20230209.docx))

2/9/2023 Senate Committed to Committee on **Judiciary** ([Senate Journal‑page 3](h:\sj\20230209.docx))

3/3/2023 Senate Referred to Subcommittee: Hutto (ch), Matthews,
Rice, Senn, Adams

3/29/2023 Senate Committee report: Favorable with amendment **Judiciary** ([Senate Journal‑page 9](h:\sj\20230329.docx))

3/30/2023 Senate Committee Amendment Adopted ([Senate Journal‑page 31](h:\sj\20230330.docx))

3/30/2023 Senate Read second time ([Senate Journal‑page 31](h:\sj\20230330.docx))

3/30/2023 Senate Roll call Ayes-42 Nays-0 ([Senate Journal‑page 31](h:\sj\20230330.docx))

3/30/2023 Senate Unanimous consent for third reading on next legislative day ([Senate Journal‑page 31](h:\sj\20230330.docx))

3/31/2023 Scrivener's error corrected

4/3/2023 Scrivener's error corrected

4/5/2023 House Introduced and read first time ([House Journal‑page 90](h:\hj\20230405.docx))

4/5/2023 House Referred to Committee on **Judiciary** ([House Journal‑page 90](h:\hj\20230405.docx))

5/3/2023 House Committee report: Favorable **Judiciary**

5/4/2023 House Read second time ([House Journal‑page 95](h:\hj\20230504.docx))

5/4/2023 House Roll call Yeas-104 Nays-0 ([House Journal‑page 95](h:\hj\20230504.docx))

5/4/2023 House Unanimous consent for third reading on next legislative day ([House Journal‑page 98](h:\hj\20230504.docx))

5/5/2023 House Read third time and enrolled ([House Journal‑page 9](h:\hj\20230505.docx))

5/11/2023 Ratified R 26

5/16/2023 Signed By Governor

5/25/2023 Effective date 05/16/23

5/25/2023 Act No. 19

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[05/04/2023](https://www.scstatehouse.gov/sess125_2023-2024/prever/146_20230504.docx)

5/16/2023 Signed By Governor

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(A19, R26, S146)

AN ACT TO AMEND THE SOUTH CAROLINA CODE OF LAWS BY ADDING SECTIONS 44‑48‑115 AND 44-48-180 SO AS TO PROVIDE FOR THE RIGHT TO CHALLENGE COMMITMENT TO THE SEXUALLY VIOLENT PREDATOR TREATMENT PROGRAM BASED ON INEFFECTIVE ASSISTANCE OF COUNSEL AND TO GIVE PRIORITY STATUS TO SEXUALLY VIOLENT PREDATOR CASES FOR PURPOSES OF SCHEDULING COURT PROCEEDINGS, RESPECTIVELY; BY AMENDING SECTIONS 44-48-30, 44‑48‑40, 44‑48‑50, 44‑48‑80, 44-48-90, 44-48-100, 44-48-110, 44-48-120, 44-48-130, 44-48-150, AND 44-48‑160, ALL RELATING TO THE SEXUALLY VIOLENT PREDATOR ACT, SO AS TO ADD DEFINITIONS FOR “QUALIFIED EVALUATOR” AND “RESIDENT” AND CHANGE THE DEFINITION OF "LIKELY TO ENGAGE IN ACTS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE", TO ESTABLISH EFFECTIVE DATES FOR THE GRANTING OF SUPERVISED REENTRY, TO REQUIRE MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAMS TO DETERMINE WHETHER THERE IS PROBABLE CAUSE TO BELIEVE A PERSON IS A SEXUALLY VIOLENT PREDATOR, TO PROVIDE FOR THE USE OF COURT-APPOINTED QUALIFIED EVALUATORS AND TO ESTABLISH CERTAIN TIMELINES FOR EVALUATIONS, TO ALLOW FOR THE USE OF INDEPENDENT, QUALIFIED EVALUATORS IN CERTAIN CIRCUMSTANCES, TO REQUIRE COURTS TO CONDUCT A NONJURY HEARING BEFORE RELEASE OF A PERSON FOUND INCOMPETENT TO STAND TRIAL, TO ESTABLISH CERTAIN BENCHMARKS FOR ADDITIONAL REVIEWS OF MENTAL CONDITIONS, TO ESTABLISH CERTAIN REQUIREMENTS REGARDING EVALUATORS IN PROCEEDINGS ON PETITIONS FOR RELEASE, TO ALLOW ACCESS TO SEALED COURT RECORDS BY THE ATTORNEY GENERAL AND OTHER COUNSEL OF RECORD, TO MAKE CONFORMING CHANGES, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES; AND BY AMENDING SECTION 24-21-32, RELATING TO REENTRY SUPERVISION, SO AS TO MAKE INMATES DETERMINED TO BE SEXUALLY VIOLENT PREDATORS INELIGIBLE FOR REENTRY SUPERVISION.

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of South Carolina:

Definitions

SECTION 1. Section 44‑48‑30 of the S.C. Code is amended by adding:

(13) “Qualified evaluator” means an individual who has education, training, and experience in sex offender evaluations and who is:

(a) a licensed psychiatrist or psychologist; or

(b) a trainee of the Department of Mental Health Fellowship Program who is working under the supervision and license of a Department of Mental Health psychiatrist or psychologist and who is approved for exemption by the Department of Mental Health Fellowship Program.

(14) “Resident” means a person who has been committed as a sexually violent predator for the purposes of long‑term control, care, and treatment.

Definition

SECTION 2. Section 44‑48‑30(9) of the S.C. Code is amended to read:

(9) “Likely to engage in acts of sexual violence” means that a person is predisposed to engage in acts of sexual violence and more probably than not will engage in acts of sexual violence to such a degree as to pose a menace to the health and safety of others.

Supervised reentry

SECTION 3. Section 44‑48‑40(B) of the S.C. Code is amended to read:

(B) If a person has been convicted of a sexually violent offense and the Board of Probation, Parole and Pardon Services or the Board of Juvenile Parole intends to grant the person a parole or the South Carolina Department of Corrections or the Board of Juvenile Parole intends to grant the person a conditional release or supervised reentry, then the parole, conditional release, or supervised reentry must be granted to be effective one hundred eighty days after the date of the order of parole, conditional release, or supervised reentry. The Board of Probation, Parole and Pardon Services, the Board of Juvenile Parole, or the South Carolina Department of Corrections immediately must send notice of the parole, conditional release, or supervised reentry of the person to the multidisciplinary team, the victim, and the Attorney General. If the person is determined to be a sexually violent predator pursuant to this chapter, then the person is subject to the provisions of this chapter even though the person has been released on parole, conditional release, or supervised reentry. If at any time the person is determined to not be a sexually violent predator pursuant to this chapter, then the person shall be released pursuant to the order granting parole, or the order for conditional release or supervised reentry.

Multidisciplinary team

SECTION 4. Section 44‑48‑50 of the S.C. Code is amended to read:

Section 44‑48‑50. (A) The Director of the Department of Corrections must appoint a multidisciplinary team to review the records of each person referred to the team pursuant to Section 44‑48‑40. These records may include, but are not limited to, the person’s criminal offense record, any relevant medical and psychological records, treatment records, victim’s impact statement, and any disciplinary or other records formulated during confinement or supervision. The team, within thirty days of receiving notice as provided for in Section 44‑48‑40, must assess whether or not there is probable cause to believe the person satisfies the definition of a sexually violent predator. If it is determined that probable cause does exist, then the multidisciplinary team must forward a report of the assessment to the prosecutor’s review committee and notify the victim. The assessment must be accompanied by all records relevant to the assessment. Membership of the team must include:

(1) a representative from the Department of Corrections;

(2) a representative from the Department of Probation, Parole and Pardon Services;

(3) a representative from the Department of Mental Health who is a trained, qualified mental health clinician with education, training, or experience in assessing, examining, or treating sex offenders;

(4) a retired judge appointed by the Chief Justice who is eligible for continued judicial service pursuant to Section 2‑19‑100; and

(5) an attorney with substantial experience in the practice of criminal defense law to be appointed by the Chief Justice to serve a term of one year.

(B) The Director of the Department of Corrections or his designee appointed pursuant to subsection (A)(1) shall be the chairman of the team.

Probable cause determination and evaluations

SECTION 5. Section 44‑48‑80(D) of the S.C. Code is amended to read:

(D) If the probable cause determination is made, then the court must direct that, upon completion of the criminal sentence, the person must be transferred to a local or regional detention facility pending the conclusion of the proceedings under this chapter. The court must further direct that the person be transported to an appropriate facility of the South Carolina Department of Mental Health for an evaluation as to whether the person is a sexually violent predator and must order the person to comply with all reasonable testing and assessments deemed necessary by a court‑appointed qualified evaluator. The court‑appointed qualified evaluator must complete the evaluation within ninety days after the Department of Mental Health provides written certification to the Attorney General’s Office and the person’s legal counsel that it has received all medical, psychological, criminal offense, and disciplinary records and reports concerning the person but not greater than one hundred eighty days after the probable cause order is filed. The court may grant one extension upon the request of the court‑appointed qualified evaluator and a showing of extraordinary circumstances. After the evaluation by the court‑appointed qualified evaluator, if the person or the Attorney General seeks an independent evaluation by an independent qualified evaluator, pursuant to Section 44‑48‑90(C), then that evaluation must be completed within ninety days after receipt of the report by the court‑appointed qualified evaluator. The court may grant an extension upon the request of the independent qualified evaluator and a showing of extraordinary circumstances. Any qualified evaluator who will be submitted as an expert at either a hearing or trial must submit a written report available to both parties.

Trial proceedings

SECTION 6. Section 44-48-90(B) and (C) of the S.C. Code is amended to read:

(B) Within thirty days after the determination of probable cause by the court pursuant to Section 44‑48‑80, the person or the Attorney General may request, in writing, that the trial be before a jury. If no request is made, the trial must be before a judge in the county where the offense was committed within ninety days of the date the independent qualified evaluator requested by the person or Attorney General pursuant to Section 44-48-90(C) issues a report as to whether the person is a sexually violent predator, pursuant to Section 44-48-80(D), or, if there is no term of court, the next available date thereafter, and the case shall be treated as a priority case. If neither party seeks an independent evaluation, then the trial must be before a judge, or a jury if a jury trial is requested, in the county where the offense was committed within ninety days of the date the court appointed qualified evaluator issues the report as to whether the person is a sexually violent predator, pursuant to Section 44‑48‑80(D), or, if there is no term of court, the next available date thereafter. The trial may be continued upon the request of either party and a showing of good cause, or by the court on its own motion in the due administration of justice, and only if the respondent will not be substantially prejudiced. The Attorney General must notify the victim, in a timely manner, of the time, date, and location of the trial. At all stages of the proceedings under this chapter, a person subject to this chapter is entitled to the assistance of counsel, and if the person is indigent, the court must appoint counsel designated by the Office of Indigent Defense to handle sexual predator cases to assist the person.

(C) If the court appointed qualified evaluator determines that the person is not a sexually violent predator, then the Attorney General, with notice to the person, may seek an independent evaluation pursuant to this section. If the court appointed qualified evaluator determines that the person is a sexually violent predator, then the person, with notice to the Attorney General, may seek an opinion by an independent qualified evaluator pursuant to this section. In the case of an indigent person who requests an independent qualified evaluator, the indigent person must file and serve upon the Attorney General and the Commission on Indigent Defense a motion requesting payment and costs. The Attorney General shall have ten days from the date of service to file a response to the motion. If the court determines that the services are necessary and the requested compensation for the independent qualified evaluator is reasonable, then the court must authorize, in a written order prior to any fees or expenses being incurred, the person’s attorney to obtain the services of an independent qualified evaluator to perform an evaluation or participate in the trial on the person's behalf and must authorize the payment from funds available to the Commission on Indigent Defense. All qualified evaluators are permitted to have reasonable access to the person for the purpose of the evaluation, as well as reasonable access to all relevant medical, psychological, criminal offense, and disciplinary records and reports. The court shall order the person to comply with any reasonable testing and assessments deemed necessary by the qualified evaluator for a thorough evaluation.

Persons incompetent to stand trial

SECTION 7. Section 44‑48‑100(B) of the S.C. Code is amended to read:

(B) If the person charged with a sexually violent offense has been found incompetent to stand trial and is about to be released and the person’s commitment is sought pursuant to subsection (A), then the court first shall conduct a non‑jury hearing, where it will hear evidence and determine whether the person committed the act or acts with which he is charged. The hearing on this issue must comply with all the procedures specified in this section. In addition, the rules of evidence applicable in criminal cases apply, and all constitutional rights available to defendants at criminal hearings, except the right not to be tried while incompetent and the right to a jury trial, apply. After hearing evidence on this issue, the court must make specific findings on whether the person committed the act or acts with which he is charged; the extent to which the person’s incompetence or developmental disability affected the outcome of the hearing, including its effect on the person’s ability to consult with and assist counsel and to testify on the person’s own behalf; the extent to which the evidence could be reconstructed without the assistance of the person; and the strength of the prosecution’s case. If, after the conclusion of the hearing on this issue, the court finds beyond a reasonable doubt that the person committed the act or acts with which he is charged, then the court must enter a final order, appealable by the person, on that issue, and may proceed to consider whether the person should be committed pursuant to this chapter.

Evaluation of mental condition and related proceedings

SECTION 8. Section 44‑48‑110 of the S.C. Code is amended to read:

Section 44‑48‑110. (A)(1) A resident committed pursuant to this chapter must have an evaluation of his mental condition performed by a Department of Mental Health‑designated qualified evaluator within one year from the filing date of the initial commitment order. Thereafter, a Department of Mental Health‑designated qualified evaluator will evaluate the resident’s mental condition within one year after a pending review is resolved by a filed court order indicating:

(a) a finding of no probable cause;

(b) a waiver by the resident; or

(c) an order of continued commitment after a periodic review trial.

(2) The designated qualified evaluator’s report must be provided to the clerk of the court in the jurisdiction that committed the resident pursuant to this chapter, the Attorney General, the solicitor who prosecuted the resident, and the resident. The resident is entitled to the assistance of counsel, and if the person is indigent, the court must appoint counsel designated by the Office of Indigent Defense to handle sexual predator cases to assist the person.

(B) The resident may retain or, if the resident is indigent and so requests, the court may appoint a qualified evaluator to evaluate the resident, and the resident’s qualified evaluator must have reasonable access to all medical, psychological, criminal offense, disciplinary, and treatment records and reports concerning the resident. In the case of an indigent resident who seeks to retain a qualified evaluator, the indigent resident must file and serve upon the Attorney General and the Commission on Indigent Defense a motion requesting payment and costs. The Attorney General shall have ten days from the date of service to file a response to the motion. If, after considering the number and dates of the resident’s prior requests for funding, the court determines the resident’s request is reasonable, then the court must approve all reasonable expenses associated with the evaluation.

(C) The Attorney General must serve upon the resident a copy of the annual report along with a notice of the right to request a hearing within sixty days of service. The resident must request a hearing in writing for the court to review the resident’s status. If no request is made within sixty days of service, the resident’s right to a hearing pursuant to this chapter is deemed waived.

(D) The Department of Mental Health must provide the resident with written notice of the resident’s right to petition the court for release without the Department of Mental Health’s authorization and a waiver of rights form, within one year of the last periodic review order or waiver of rights. The department must forward the designated qualified evaluator’s report with the notice and waiver form to the clerk of court in the jurisdiction that committed the resident pursuant to this chapter, the Attorney General, and the solicitor who prosecuted the resident.

(E) The resident has a right to have an attorney represent him at the periodic review hearing, but the resident is not entitled to be present at the hearing. The resident may only be present at the hearing upon the issuance of a transport order received by the Department of Mental Health within not less than fifteen days of the hearing date. The Department of Mental Health‑designated qualified evaluator will only be required to be present at the hearing if subpoenaed by the resident’s attorney or the Attorney General in accordance with the South Carolina Rules of Civil Procedure. The Department of Mental Health must accept service of subpoenas for the appearance of the Department of Mental Health-designated qualified evaluator at the periodic review hearing.

(F) If the court determines that probable cause exists to believe that the resident’s mental abnormality or personality disorder has so changed that the resident is safe to be at large and, if released, is not likely to commit acts of sexual violence, the court must schedule a trial on the issue. At the trial, the resident is entitled to the benefit of all constitutional protections that were afforded the resident at the initial commitment proceeding. The Attorney General must notify the victim of all proceedings. The Attorney General must represent the State and has the right to have the resident evaluated by a qualified evaluator chosen by the State. The trial must be before a jury if requested in writing by either the resident, the Attorney General, or the solicitor. If no request is made, the trial must be before a judge in the county where the offense was committed. The resident also has the right to have a qualified evaluator evaluate the resident on the resident’s behalf, and the court must appoint a qualified evaluator if the resident is indigent and requests the appointment. The burden of proof at the trial is upon the State to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the resident’s mental abnormality or personality disorder remains such that the resident is not safe to be at large and, if released, is likely to engage in acts of sexual violence.

Ineffective assistance of counsel

SECTION 9. Chapter 48, Title 44 of the S.C. Code is amended by adding:

Section 44‑48‑115. (A) A resident committed to the South Carolina Sexually Violent Predator Treatment Program shall have the right to challenge the commitment and subsequent periodic reviews based on the ineffective assistance of counsel during the resident’s commitment trial or periodic review proceedings. The resident shall have the burden of proof to establish ineffective assistance of counsel in accordance with the applicable law.

(B) Petitions shall be filed in the original jurisdiction of the South Carolina Supreme Court under the South Carolina Appellate Court Rules within one hundred eighty days of the date that any appeals from the commitment or periodic review proceedings are final. Upon the receipt of the petition, the Clerk of Court of the Supreme Court shall issue an order designating a circuit court or appellate court judge as a referee to make appropriate findings of fact and conclusions of law and shall report the findings and conclusions to the Supreme Court. The designated judge shall have the statewide authority to issue orders as necessary.

(C) Except as provided in this chapter, the South Carolina Rules of Civil Procedure and the South Carolina Rules of Evidence apply to cases filed pursuant to this section, in evidentiary hearings before the designated hearing judge.

(D) The named respondent shall be the Department of Mental Health. A copy of the petition shall be served on the Department of Mental Health and the South Carolina Attorney General’s Office.

(E) Upon the filing of a petition alleging that the resident is indigent and desires appointed counsel, the designated judge shall appoint an attorney to represent the resident. Counsel shall be appointed from the contract attorney list of post‑conviction counsel maintained by the South Carolina Commission on Indigent Defense, or such other list of attorneys as the Executive Director of the South Carolina Commission on Indigent Defense shall designate. If no attorney is available from this list, then the designated circuit court judge shall appoint an attorney from the Appointment of Lawyers for Indigents. The designated judge shall not appoint an attorney who previously represented the resident in any prior criminal proceedings underlying the commitment or state post‑conviction relief proceedings or appeals from those proceedings, in the original sexually violent predator civil commitment proceeding or appeal from that proceeding, or in any previous or present periodic reviews or appeals therefrom.

(F) The designated judge shall authorize by court order to the particular county clerks of court the disclosure of any pleadings, evidence, transcripts, or other documents filed in any circuit court or appellate court clerk’s office of this State in any case in which the resident was a defendant, respondent, or party to a criminal action or an action under the Sexually Violent Predator Act that was ordered sealed. These materials shall be unsealed for the limited purpose of providing items to the appointed counsel for the resident or the resident himself, if he elects to proceed pro se, and to the Department of Mental Health and its attorneys.

(G) Regardless of whether the resident indicates that he has served the Department of Mental Health, the Clerk of Court of the South Carolina Supreme Court shall forward the filed petition and all accompanying papers to the Department of Mental Health’s Office of General Counsel, as the agent for the service of process for the Department of Mental Health, and a copy to the Attorney General’s Office. The Department of Mental Health, through the Attorney General’s Office acting as its representative, shall file its responsive pleading within thirty days of the receipt of the order appointing counsel, or within thirty days of the receipt of the petition, if counsel is retained, or the receipt of the petition, if the resident is proceeding pro se without a request for counsel at the time of the filing.

(H) In the event that a habeas petition alleging ineffective assistance of counsel claims relating to the resident’s commitment or periodic review is filed before the conclusion of the resident’s appeal from such proceeding, the Clerk of the Supreme Court shall dismiss the petition without prejudice and without requiring a response from the Department of Mental Health.

(I) Within thirty days of an assignment, the designated judge shall issue a scheduling order, including a discovery schedule, and shall set a hearing within not more than one hundred eighty days from the filing of the petition. A final report to the Supreme Court shall be submitted within thirty days from the conclusion of the hearing, including findings of fact and conclusions of law supporting the designated judge’s recommendation. This does not preclude the designated judge from recommending to the Supreme Court that the petition be denied on the basis of the pleadings without a hearing. The recommendation shall set forth the basis for dismissal.

(J) Upon receipt by the Supreme Court of the findings and conclusions of the designated judge, the Clerk of the Supreme Court may set forth an appropriate briefing schedule. The clerk may consider expediting the matter to determine whether the writ of habeas corpus should be granted and the appropriate relief. The court may also issue, as appropriate, orders relating to whether intervening and on‑going statutory status review proceedings or appeals from the proceedings are affected in any manner by the habeas corpus actions in its original jurisdiction.

Petition for release

SECTION 10. Section 44‑48‑120 of the S.C. Code is amended to read:

Section 44‑48‑120. (A) If the Director of the Department of Mental Health determines that the resident’s mental abnormality or personality disorder has so changed that the resident is safe to be at large and, if released, is not likely to commit acts of sexual violence, the director must certify such determination in writing with the specific basis thereof, authorize the resident to petition the court for release, and notify the Attorney General of the certification and authorization. Upon receipt of the certification and authorization, the resident or the Attorney General may file a petition for release, which must be served upon the court and the Attorney General, or on opposing counsel if filed by the Attorney General. The Attorney General must notify the victim of the proceeding.

(B) The court, upon receipt of the petition for release filed pursuant to subsection (A), must order a hearing within thirty days unless the Attorney General, with notice to the resident, requests an evaluation by a qualified evaluator as to whether the resident’s mental abnormality or personality disorder has so changed that the resident is safe to be at large and, if released, is not likely to commit acts of sexual violence, or the resident or the Attorney General requests a trial before a jury. The Attorney General must represent the State and has the right to have the resident examined by a qualified evaluator chosen by the State. If the Attorney General retains a qualified expert who concludes that the petitioner’s mental abnormality or personality disorder remains such that the petitioner is not safe to be at large and, if released, is likely to commit acts of sexual violence, the petitioner may retain a qualified expert of his own choosing to perform a subsequent examination. In the case of an indigent petitioner who would request an independent qualified evaluator, the indigent petitioner must file and serve upon the Attorney General and the Commission on Indigent Defense a motion requesting payment and costs for the evaluator. If the court determines that the services are necessary and the requested compensation is reasonable, then the court must authorize, in written order prior to any fees or expenses being incurred, the petitioner’s attorney to obtain the services of an independent qualified evaluator to perform an evaluation or participate in the trial on the petitioner’s behalf and authorize the payment from funds available to the Commission on Indigent Defense. All qualified evaluators are permitted to have reasonable access to the resident for the purpose of the examination, as well as reasonable access to all relevant medical, psychological, criminal offense, and disciplinary records and reports, and the court shall order the resident to comply with any reasonable testing and assessments deemed necessary by a qualified evaluator. The burden of proof is upon the Attorney General to show beyond a reasonable doubt that the resident’s mental abnormality or personality disorder remains such that the resident is not safe to be at large and, that if released, is likely to commit acts of sexual violence.

Grounds for denial of petition for release

SECTION 11. Section 44-48-130 of the S.C. Code is amended to read:

Section 44-48-130. Nothing in this chapter prohibits a resident from filing a petition for release pursuant to this chapter. However, if a resident has previously filed a petition for release without the approval of the Director of the Department of Mental Health, and the court determined either upon review of the petition or following a hearing that the resident’s petition was frivolous or that the resident’s condition had not changed so that the resident continued to be a threat and, if released, would commit acts of sexual violence, the court must deny the subsequent petition unless the petition contains facts upon which a court could find the condition of the resident had so changed that a hearing was warranted. Upon receipt of a first or subsequent petition from a resident without the director's approval, the court must, whenever possible, review the petition and determine if the petition is based upon frivolous grounds and, if so, must deny the petition without a hearing.

Evidentiary records

SECTION 12. Section 44‑48‑150 of the S.C. Code is amended to read:

Section 44‑48‑150. Psychological reports, drug and alcohol reports, treatment records, reports of the diagnostic center, medical records, or victim impact statements which have been submitted to the court or admitted into evidence under this chapter must be part of the record, but must be sealed and opened only on order of the court. Nothing in this section prohibits the release of records to the Attorney General and the counsel of record for a person.

Registration requirements

SECTION 13. Section 44-48-160 of the S.C. Code is amended to read:

Section 44-48-160. A resident released from commitment pursuant to this chapter must register pursuant to and comply with the requirements of Article 7, Chapter 3 of Title 23.

Reentry supervision

SECTION 14. Section 24-21-32(C) of the S.C. Code is amended to read:

(C) The individual terms and conditions of reentry supervision shall be developed by the department using an evidence-based assessment of the inmate’s needs and risks. An inmate placed on reentry supervision must be supervised by a probation agent of the department. The department shall promulgate regulations for the terms and conditions of reentry supervision. Until such time as regulations are promulgated, the terms and conditions shall be based on guidelines developed by the director. However, if, under the Sexually Violent Predator Act, the multidisciplinary team finds probable cause to believe that an inmate is a sexually violent predator pursuant to Section 44‑48‑50, then the inmate is not eligible for the supervised reentry program until the resolution of the proceedings pursuant to the Sexually Violent Predator Act.

Priority hearing status

SECTION 15. Chapter 48 of Title 44 of the S.C. Code is amended by adding:

Section 44-48-180. All cases pursuant to this chapter shall be given priority status for the purposes of scheduling any hearings or trials.

Time effective

SECTION 16. This act takes effect upon approval by the Governor.

Ratified the 11th day of May, 2023.

Approved the 16th day of May, 2023.

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