WEST VIRGINIA LEGISLATURE

2024 REGULAR SESSION

Introduced

House Bill 5359

By Delegates Kelly, Hott, Hornby, Jeffries, Pinson, Brooks, and Steele

[Introduced January 30, 2024; Referred to the Committee on Jails and Prisons then the Judiciary]

A BILL to amend and reenact §15A-3-10 of the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, relating to recognizing the law-enforcement powers of correctional officers employed by the Division of Corrections and Rehabilitation; providing that such officers are not subject to certain certification requirements; authorizing the commissioner to consult with the Law Enforcement Professional Standards Subcommittee with regard to training; clarifying powers of arrest; and clarifying application of the federal Law Enforcement Officers Safety act to eligible employees.

Be it enacted by the Legislature of West Virginia:

**ARTICLE 3. Division of Corrections and rehabilitation.**

**§15A-3-10. Law-enforcement powers of employees; authority to carry firearms.**

(a) ~~Other than as~~ As outlined in this section, a correctional officer employed by the division is ~~not~~ a law-enforcement officer as that term is defined in §30-29-1 of this code: *Provided*, That such law-enforcement officers who have successfully completed the appropriate training program for correctional officers established by the commissioner pursuant to §15A-3-4 of this code are not subject to the certification requirements set forth in §30-29-1 *et seq.* of this code: *Provided, however*, That the commissioner may consult with the Law Enforcement Professional Standards Subcommittee of the Governor's Committee on Crime, Delinquency and Correction when designing his or her law-enforcement officer training course specifically for correctional officers.

(b) The commissioner is a law-enforcement official, and has the authority to use, and permit and allow or disallow his or her designated employees to use, publicly provided carriage to travel from their residences to their workplace and return: *Provided*, That the usage is subject to the supervision of the commissioner and is directly connected with and required by the nature and in the performance of the official’s or designated employee's duties and responsibilities.

(c) All employees of the division are responsible for enforcing rules and laws necessary for the control and management of correctional units and the maintenance of public safety that is within the scope of responsibilities of the division.

(d) Persons employed by the Division of Corrections and Rehabilitation as correctional officers are authorized and empowered to make arrests of persons already charged with a violation of law who surrender themselves to the correctional officer, to arrest persons already in the custody of the division for violations of law occurring in the officer’s presence, to detain or arrest persons for violations of state law committed on the property of any facility under the jurisdiction of the commissioner, and to conduct investigations, pursue, and apprehend escapees from the custody of a facility of the division.

(e) The commissioner may designate correctional employees as correctional peace officers who have the authority:

(1) To detain persons for violations of state law committed on the property of any state correctional institution;

(2) To conduct investigations regarding criminal activity occurring within a correctional facility;

(3) To execute criminal process or other process in furtherance of these duties; and

(4) To apply for, obtain, and execute search warrants necessary for the completion of his or her duties and responsibilities.

(f) The Corrections Special Operations Team is continued and consists of the Corrections Emergency Response Team, the K9 unit, and the Crisis Negotiations team created under the former Division of Corrections. The Corrections Special Operations Team serves as the first responder necessary for the protection of life, liberty, and property. It has limited law-enforcement authority regarding matters occurring at jails, correctional centers, and juvenile centers, and arrest powers to apprehend escapees, absconders, and in all matters arising on the grounds of a facility under the care and control of the commissioner: *Provided*, That at any time the Corrections Special Operations Team is apprehending an escapee or an absconder outside the confinement of the facility grounds, it does so with the assistance and cooperation of local law enforcement or the West Virginia State Police.

(g) Notwithstanding any provision of this code to the contrary, the commissioner may issue a certificate authorizing any correctional employee who has successfully completed the division’s training program for firearms certification to carry a firearm in the performance of his or her official duties. The training program shall be approved by the commissioner and be equivalent to the training requirements applicable to deputy sheriffs for the use and handling of firearms. Any correctional employee authorized to do so by the commissioner may carry division-issued firearms while in the performance of his or her official duties, which shall include travel to and from work sites. To maintain certification, a correctional employee must successfully complete an annual firearms qualification course equivalent to that required of certified law-enforcement officers as established by the law enforcement professional standards program. The certificate shall be on a form prescribed by the commissioner and shall bear his or her official signature.

(h) The provisions of §30-29-12 of this code shall apply to all correctional officers employed by the division who obtain and maintain his or her certificate issued pursuant to subsection (g) of this section.

NOTE: The purpose of this bill is to recognize the law-enforcement powers of correctional officers employed by the Division of Corrections and Rehabilitation; provide that such officers are not subject to certain certification requirements; authorize the commissioner to consult with the Law Enforcement Professional Standards Subcommittee with regard to training; clarify powers of arrest; and clarify application of the federal Law Enforcement Officers Safety act to eligible employees.

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