

By the Committee on Agriculture; and Senators Grimsley, Montford, and Passidomo

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1                                   A bill to be entitled  
2       An act relating to the Rural Economic Development  
3       Initiative; amending s. 288.0656, F.S.; revising  
4       legislative intent relating to the Rural Economic  
5       Development Initiative; redefining the term "rural  
6       area of opportunity"; revising the duties,  
7       responsibilities, and membership of the Rural Economic  
8       Development Initiative; deleting a provision limiting  
9       the number of rural areas of opportunity that may be  
10      designated; deleting a provision listing the economic  
11      development incentives for which the Governor may  
12      waive criteria requirements or similar provisions;  
13      deleting a requirement that certain catalyst projects  
14      be identified as catalyst projects by Enterprise  
15      Florida, Inc.; revising reporting requirements;  
16      amending ss. 163.3177, 163.3187, 257.193, 288.019,  
17      288.06561, 290.0055, 290.06561, 337.403, 339.2818,  
18      339.2819, 339.63, 479.16, and 627.6699, F.S.;  
19      conforming cross-references; providing an effective  
20      date.

21  
22 Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

23  
24       Section 1. Section 288.0656, Florida Statutes, is amended  
25       to read:

26       288.0656 Rural Economic Development Initiative.—

27       (1)~~(a)~~ Recognizing that rural communities and regions  
28       continue to face extraordinary challenges in their efforts to  
29       significantly improve their quality of life and economies,

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30 specifically in terms of personal income, education,  
31 infrastructure, access to healthcare, and job creation, average  
32 wages, and strong tax bases, it is the intent of the Legislature  
33 to encourage and facilitate:

34 (a) Job creation through the location and expansion of  
35 major economic development projects of significant scale in such  
36 rural communities.

37 (b) Improved community infrastructure, including, but not  
38 limited to, roads, utilities, water and sewer, and  
39 communications.

40 (c) The development and expansion of a skilled workforce.

41 (d) Improved access to healthcare.

42 (2)-(b) The Rural Economic Development Initiative, known as  
43 "REDI," is created within the Department of Economic  
44 Opportunity, and the participation of state and regional  
45 agencies in this initiative is authorized.

46 (3)-(2) As used in this section, the term:

47 (a) "Catalyst project" means a business locating or  
48 expanding in a rural area of opportunity to serve as an economic  
49 generator of regional significance for the growth of a regional  
50 target industry cluster. The project must provide capital  
51 investment on a scale significant enough to affect the entire  
52 region and result in the development of high-wage and high-skill  
53 jobs.

54 (b) "Catalyst site" means a parcel or parcels of land  
55 within a rural area of opportunity that has been prioritized as  
56 a geographic site for economic development through partnerships  
57 with state, regional, and local organizations. The site must be  
58 reviewed by REDI and approved by the department for the purposes

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59 of locating a catalyst project.

60 (c) "Economic distress" means conditions affecting the  
61 fiscal and economic viability of a rural community, including  
62 such factors as low per capita income, low per capita taxable  
63 values, high unemployment, high underemployment, low weekly  
64 earned wages compared to the state average, low housing values  
65 compared to the state average, high percentages of the  
66 population receiving public assistance, high poverty levels  
67 compared to the state average, and a lack of year-round stable  
68 employment opportunities.

69 (d) "Rural area of opportunity" means a rural community, or  
70 a region composed of rural communities, designated by the  
71 Governor, which has been adversely affected by ~~an extraordinary~~  
72 ~~economic event~~, severe or chronic economic distress, and faces  
73 competitive disadvantages such as low labor force participation,  
74 low educational attainment levels, high unemployment, "D" or "F"  
75 district grades pursuant to s. 1008.34, high infant mortality  
76 rates, and high diabetes and obesity rates, and which ~~is a~~  
77 ~~natural disaster or that~~ presents a unique economic development  
78 opportunity of regional impact.

79 (e) "Rural community" means:

- 80 1. A county with a population of 75,000 or fewer.
- 81 2. A county with a population of 125,000 or fewer which is  
82 contiguous to a county with a population of 75,000 or fewer.
- 83 3. A municipality within a county described in subparagraph  
84 1. or subparagraph 2.
- 85 4. An unincorporated federal enterprise community or an  
86 incorporated rural city with a population of 25,000 or fewer and  
87 an employment base focused on traditional agricultural or

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88 resource-based industries, located in a county not defined as  
89 rural, which has at least three or more of the economic distress  
90 factors identified in paragraph (c) and verified by the  
91 department.

92

93 For purposes of this paragraph, population shall be determined  
94 in accordance with the most recent official estimate pursuant to  
95 s. 186.901.

96 (4)~~(3)~~ REDI is ~~shall be~~ responsible for coordinating and  
97 focusing the efforts and resources of state and regional  
98 agencies on the challenges of the state's rural areas of  
99 opportunity and economically distressed rural communities. REDI  
100 shall work ~~problems which affect the fiscal, economic, and~~  
101 ~~community viability of Florida's economically distressed rural~~  
102 ~~communities, working with local governments, community-based~~  
103 ~~organizations, and private organizations that have an interest~~  
104 ~~in the renewed prosperity and competitiveness of growth and~~  
105 ~~development of these communities to find ways to balance~~  
106 ~~environmental and growth management issues with local needs.~~

107 (5)~~(4)~~ REDI shall review and evaluate the impact of  
108 statutes and rules on rural communities and shall work to  
109 minimize any adverse impact and undertake outreach and capacity-  
110 building efforts to improve rural communities' ability to  
111 compete in a global economy.

112 (6)~~(5)~~ REDI shall facilitate better access to state  
113 resources by promoting direct access and referrals to  
114 appropriate state and regional agencies and statewide  
115 organizations. ~~REDI may undertake outreach, capacity-building,~~  
116 ~~and other advocacy efforts to improve conditions in rural~~

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117 ~~communities. These activities may include sponsorship of~~  
118 ~~conferences and achievement awards.~~

119 (7) (a) REDI shall consist of the following members:

120 1. The executive director of the Department of Economic  
121 Opportunity or his or her designee, who shall serve as the  
122 chair.

123 2. The Secretary of Transportation or his or her designee.

124 3. The Secretary of Environmental Protection or his or her  
125 designee.

126 4. The Commissioner of Agriculture or his or her designee.

127 5. The State Surgeon General or his or her designee.

128 6. The Commissioner of Education or his or her designee.

129 7. The President of Enterprise Florida, Inc., or his or her  
130 designee.

131 8. The chair of the board of directors of CareerSource  
132 Florida, Inc., or his or her designee.

133 9. The chair of the board of the regional economic  
134 development organization for each of the rural areas of  
135 opportunity or his or her designee.

136 10. Five members from the private sector, three of whom  
137 shall be appointed by the executive director of the Department  
138 of Economic Opportunity, one of whom shall be appointed by the  
139 President of the Senate, and one of whom shall be appointed by  
140 the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

141 (b) In making their appointments, the executive director,  
142 the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of  
143 Representatives shall ensure that the appointments reflect the  
144 diversity of Florida's business community and are representative  
145 of the economic development goals in subsection (1).

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146 (c) The executive director, the President of the Senate,  
147 and the Speaker of the House of Representatives shall consider  
148 appointees who reflect the state's racial, ethnic, and gender  
149 diversity, and who are from rural communities.

150 (d) Each appointed member shall be appointed to a 2-year  
151 term.

152 (e) Initial appointments shall be made by July 1, 2017.  
153 Member terms shall expire on June 30.

154 (f) A vacancy shall be filled for the remainder of an  
155 unexpired term and filled in the same manner as the original  
156 appointment.

157 (g) An appointed member may be removed by the appointing  
158 officer for cause. Absence of a member from three consecutive  
159 meetings results in automatic removal.

160 (h) The chair may request the head of any state agency or  
161 organization to serve on an ad hoc committee as needed to  
162 address issues or projects relating to rural areas of  
163 opportunity and economically distressed rural communities. The  
164 chair shall consider requesting the following individuals to  
165 serve on an ad hoc committee:

166 1. The executive director of the Fish and Wildlife  
167 Conservation Commission or his or her designee.

168 2. The Secretary of State or his or her designee.

169 3. The Secretary of Children and Families or his or her  
170 designee.

171 4. The Secretary of Corrections or his or her designee.

172 5. The Secretary of Juvenile Justice or his or her  
173 designee.

174 6. The Secretary of Health Care Administration or his or

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175 her designee.

176 7. A board member of the Florida Regional Councils  
177 Association or his or her designee.

178 ~~(6) (a) By August 1 of each year, the head of each of the~~  
179 ~~following agencies and organizations shall designate a deputy~~  
180 ~~secretary or higher level staff person from within the agency or~~  
181 ~~organization to serve as the REDI representative for the agency~~  
182 ~~or organization:~~

- 183 ~~1. The Department of Transportation.~~
- 184 ~~2. The Department of Environmental Protection.~~
- 185 ~~3. The Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.~~
- 186 ~~4. The Department of State.~~
- 187 ~~5. The Department of Health.~~
- 188 ~~6. The Department of Children and Families.~~
- 189 ~~7. The Department of Corrections.~~
- 190 ~~8. The Department of Education.~~
- 191 ~~9. The Department of Juvenile Justice.~~
- 192 ~~10. The Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.~~
- 193 ~~11. Each water management district.~~
- 194 ~~12. Enterprise Florida, Inc.~~
- 195 ~~13. CareerSource Florida, Inc.~~
- 196 ~~14. VISIT Florida.~~
- 197 ~~15. The Florida Regional Planning Council Association.~~
- 198 ~~16. The Agency for Health Care Administration.~~
- 199 ~~17. The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS).~~

200  
201 ~~An alternate for each designee shall also be chosen, and the~~  
202 ~~names of the designees and alternates shall be sent to the~~  
203 ~~executive director of the department.~~

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204        ~~(i)(b)~~ Each REDI member from a state agency or organization  
205 ~~representative must have comprehensive knowledge of his or her~~  
206 ~~agency's functions, both regulatory and service in nature, and~~  
207 ~~of the state's economic goals, policies, and programs. This~~  
208 ~~person~~ shall be the primary point of contact for his or her  
209 agency with REDI on issues and projects relating to rural areas  
210 of opportunity and economically distressed rural communities and  
211 with regard to expediting project review, shall ensure a prompt  
212 effective response to problems arising with regard to rural  
213 issues, and shall work closely with the other REDI members  
214 ~~representatives~~ in the identification of opportunities for  
215 preferential awards of program funds and allowances and waiver  
216 of program requirements when necessary to encourage and  
217 facilitate long-term private capital investment and job  
218 creation. The member shall also ensure that each district office  
219 or facility of his or her agency or organization is informed  
220 about REDI and shall provide assistance throughout the agency in  
221 the implementation of REDI activities.

222        ~~(c) The REDI representatives shall work with REDI in the~~  
223 ~~review and evaluation of statutes and rules for adverse impact~~  
224 ~~on rural communities and the development of alternative~~  
225 ~~proposals to mitigate that impact.~~

226        ~~(d) Each REDI representative shall be responsible for~~  
227 ~~ensuring that each district office or facility of his or her~~  
228 ~~agency is informed about the Rural Economic Development~~  
229 ~~Initiative and for providing assistance throughout the agency in~~  
230 ~~the implementation of REDI activities.~~

231        ~~(8)(7)~~ (a) REDI may recommend to the Governor up to three  
232 ~~rural areas of opportunity.~~ The Governor may by executive order



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233 designate ~~up to three~~ rural areas of opportunity which will  
234 establish these areas as priority assignments for REDI, ~~as well~~  
235 ~~as to allow~~ The Governor may, acting through REDI, ~~to~~ waive  
236 criteria, requirements, or similar provisions of any economic  
237 development incentive. ~~Such incentives shall include, but are~~  
238 ~~not limited to, the Qualified Target Industry Tax Refund Program~~  
239 ~~under s. 288.106, the Quick Response Training Program under s.~~  
240 ~~288.047, the Quick Response Training Program for participants in~~  
241 ~~the welfare transition program under s. 288.047(8),~~  
242 ~~transportation projects under s. 339.2821, the brownfield~~  
243 ~~redevelopment bonus refund under s. 288.107, and the rural job~~  
244 ~~tax credit program under ss. 212.098 and 220.1895.~~

245 (b) Designation as a rural area of opportunity under this  
246 subsection shall be contingent upon the execution of a  
247 memorandum of agreement among the department; the governing body  
248 of the county; and the governing bodies of any municipalities to  
249 be included within a rural area of opportunity. Such agreement  
250 shall specify the terms and conditions of the designation,  
251 including, but not limited to, the duties and responsibilities  
252 of the county and any participating municipalities to take  
253 actions designed to facilitate the retention and expansion of  
254 existing businesses in the area, as well as the recruitment of  
255 new businesses to the area.

256 (c) Each rural area of opportunity may designate catalyst  
257 projects, provided that each catalyst project is specifically  
258 recommended by REDI, ~~identified as a catalyst project by~~  
259 ~~Enterprise Florida, Inc.,~~ and confirmed as a catalyst project by  
260 the department. All state agencies and departments shall use all  
261 available tools and resources to the extent permissible by law

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262 to promote the creation and development of each catalyst project  
263 and the development of catalyst sites.

264 (9)~~(8)~~ Before September 1 of each year, REDI shall submit a  
265 ~~report~~ to the department, the Governor, the President of the  
266 Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives a  
267 complete and detailed report, including, but not limited to ~~on~~  
268 ~~all REDI activities for the previous fiscal year as a supplement~~  
269 ~~to the department's annual report required under s. 20.60. This~~  
270 ~~supplementary report must include:~~

271 (a) A description of the operations of ~~status report on~~ all  
272 projects currently being coordinated through REDI, the number of  
273 preferential awards and allowances made pursuant to this  
274 section, the dollar amount of such awards, ~~and~~ the names of the  
275 recipients, and an evaluation of progress toward achieving  
276 organizational goals and specific performance outcomes, as  
277 established by the department.

278 (b) A description of the accomplishments of REDI and  
279 identification of major trends, initiatives, or developments  
280 affecting the performance of a program or activity coordinated  
281 through REDI.

282 (c) A description of all waivers of program requirements  
283 granted.

284 (d)~~(e)~~ Information as to the economic impact of the  
285 projects coordinated by REDI.

286 (e)~~(d)~~ Recommendations based on the review and evaluation  
287 of statutes and rules having an adverse impact on rural  
288 communities and proposals to mitigate such adverse impacts.

289 Section 2. Paragraph (e) of subsection (7) of section  
290 163.3177, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

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291 163.3177 Required and optional elements of comprehensive  
292 plan; studies and surveys.—

293 (7)

294 (e) This subsection does not confer the status of rural  
295 area of opportunity, or any of the rights or benefits derived  
296 from such status, on any land area not otherwise designated as  
297 such pursuant to s. 288.0656(8) ~~s. 288.0656(7)~~.

298 Section 3. Subsection (3) of section 163.3187, Florida  
299 Statutes, is amended to read:

300 163.3187 Process for adoption of small-scale comprehensive  
301 plan amendment.—

302 (3) If the small scale development amendment involves a  
303 site within a rural area of opportunity as defined under s.  
304 288.0656(3)(d) ~~s. 288.0656(2)(d)~~ for the duration of such  
305 designation, the 10-acre limit listed in subsection (1) shall be  
306 increased by 100 percent to 20 acres. The local government  
307 approving the small scale plan amendment shall certify to the  
308 state land planning agency that the plan amendment furthers the  
309 economic objectives set forth in the executive order issued  
310 under s. 288.0656(8) ~~s. 288.0656(7)~~, and the property subject to  
311 the plan amendment shall undergo public review to ensure that  
312 all concurrency requirements and federal, state, and local  
313 environmental permit requirements are met.

314 Section 4. Subsection (2) of section 257.193, Florida  
315 Statutes, is amended to read:

316 257.193 Community Libraries in Caring Program.—

317 (2) The purpose of the Community Libraries in Caring  
318 Program is to assist libraries in rural communities, as defined  
319 in s. 288.0656(3) ~~s. 288.0656(2)~~ and subject to the provisions

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320 of s. 288.06561, to strengthen their collections and services,  
321 improve literacy in their communities, and improve the economic  
322 viability of their communities.

323 Section 5. Section 288.019, Florida Statutes, is amended to  
324 read:

325 288.019 Rural considerations in grant review and evaluation  
326 processes.—Notwithstanding any other law, and to the fullest  
327 extent possible, the member agencies and organizations of the  
328 Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI) as defined in s.  
329 288.0656(7)(a) ~~s. 288.0656(6)(a)~~ shall review all grant and loan  
330 application evaluation criteria to ensure the fullest access for  
331 rural counties as defined in s. 288.0656(3) ~~s. 288.0656(2)~~ to  
332 resources available throughout the state.

333 (1) Each REDI agency and organization shall review all  
334 evaluation and scoring procedures and develop modifications to  
335 those procedures which minimize the impact of a project within a  
336 rural area.

337 (2) Evaluation criteria and scoring procedures must provide  
338 for an appropriate ranking based on the proportionate impact  
339 that projects have on a rural area when compared with similar  
340 project impacts on an urban area.

341 (3) Evaluation criteria and scoring procedures must  
342 recognize the disparity of available fiscal resources for an  
343 equal level of financial support from an urban county and a  
344 rural county.

345 (a) The evaluation criteria should weight contribution in  
346 proportion to the amount of funding available at the local  
347 level.

348 (b) In-kind match should be allowed and applied as

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349 financial match when a county is experiencing financial distress  
350 through elevated unemployment at a rate in excess of the state's  
351 average by 5 percentage points or because of the loss of its ad  
352 valorem base.

353 (4) For existing programs, the modified evaluation criteria  
354 and scoring procedure must be delivered to the department for  
355 distribution to the REDI agencies and organizations. The REDI  
356 agencies and organizations shall review and make comments.  
357 Future rules, programs, evaluation criteria, and scoring  
358 processes must be brought before a REDI meeting for review,  
359 discussion, and recommendation to allow rural counties fuller  
360 access to the state's resources.

361 Section 6. Section 288.06561, Florida Statutes, is amended  
362 to read:

363 288.06561 Reduction or waiver of financial match  
364 requirements.—Notwithstanding any other law, the member agencies  
365 and organizations of the Rural Economic Development Initiative  
366 (REDI), as defined in s. 288.0656(7)(a) ~~s. 288.0656(6)(a)~~, shall  
367 review the financial match requirements for projects in rural  
368 areas as defined in s. 288.0656(3) ~~s. 288.0656(2)~~.

369 (1) Each agency and organization shall develop a proposal  
370 to waive or reduce the match requirement for rural areas.

371 (2) Agencies and organizations shall ensure that all  
372 proposals are submitted to the department for review by the REDI  
373 agencies.

374 (3) These proposals shall be delivered to the department  
375 for distribution to the REDI agencies and organizations. A  
376 meeting of REDI agencies and organizations must be called within  
377 30 days after receipt of such proposals for REDI comment and

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378 recommendations on each proposal.

379 (4) Waivers and reductions must be requested by the county  
380 or community, and such county or community must have three or  
381 more of the factors identified in s. 288.0656(3)(c) ~~s.~~  
382 ~~288.0656(2)(c)~~.

383 (5) Any other funds available to the project may be used  
384 for financial match of federal programs when there is fiscal  
385 hardship, and the match requirements may not be waived or  
386 reduced.

387 (6) When match requirements are not reduced or eliminated,  
388 donations of land, though usually not recognized as an in-kind  
389 match, may be permitted.

390 (7) To the fullest extent possible, agencies and  
391 organizations shall expedite the rule adoption and amendment  
392 process if necessary to incorporate the reduction in match by  
393 rural areas in fiscal distress.

394 (8) REDI shall include in its annual report an evaluation  
395 on the status of changes to rules, number of awards made with  
396 waivers, and recommendations for future changes.

397 Section 7. Paragraph (d) of subsection (6) of section  
398 290.0055, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

399 290.0055 Local nominating procedure.—

400 (6)

401 (d)1. The governing body of a jurisdiction which has  
402 nominated an application for an enterprise zone that is at least  
403 15 square miles and less than 20 square miles and includes a  
404 portion of the state designated as a rural area of opportunity  
405 under s. 288.0656(8) ~~s. 288.0656(7)~~ may apply to the department  
406 to expand the boundary of the existing enterprise zone by not

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407 more than 3 square miles.

408         2. The governing body of a jurisdiction which has nominated  
409 an application for an enterprise zone that is at least 20 square  
410 miles and includes a portion of the state designated as a rural  
411 area of opportunity under s. 288.0656(8) ~~s. 288.0656(7)~~ may  
412 apply to the department to expand the boundary of the existing  
413 enterprise zone by not more than 5 square miles.

414         3. An application to expand the boundary of an enterprise  
415 zone under this paragraph must be submitted by December 31,  
416 2013.

417         4. Notwithstanding the area limitations specified in  
418 subsection (4), the department may approve the request for a  
419 boundary amendment if the area continues to satisfy the  
420 remaining requirements of this section.

421         5. The department shall establish the initial effective  
422 date of an enterprise zone designated under this paragraph.

423         Section 8. Section 290.06561, Florida Statutes, is amended  
424 to read:

425         290.06561 Designation of rural enterprise zone as catalyst  
426 site.—Notwithstanding s. 290.0065(1), the Department of Economic  
427 Opportunity, upon request of the host county, shall designate as  
428 a rural enterprise zone any catalyst site as defined in s.  
429 288.0656(3)(b) ~~s. 288.0656(2)(b)~~ that was approved before  
430 January 1, 2010, and that is not located in an existing rural  
431 enterprise zone. The request from the host county must include  
432 the legal description of the catalyst site and the name and  
433 contact information for the county development authority  
434 responsible for managing the catalyst site. The designation  
435 shall provide businesses locating within the catalyst site the

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436 same eligibility for economic incentives and other benefits of a  
437 rural enterprise zone designated under s. 290.0065. The  
438 reporting criteria for a catalyst site designated as a rural  
439 enterprise zone under this section are the same as for other  
440 rural enterprise zones. Host county development authorities may  
441 enter into memoranda of agreement, as necessary, to coordinate  
442 their efforts to implement this section.

443 Section 9. Paragraph (h) of subsection (1) of section  
444 337.403, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

445 337.403 Interference caused by utility; expenses.—

446 (1) If a utility that is placed upon, under, over, or  
447 within the right-of-way limits of any public road or publicly  
448 owned rail corridor is found by the authority to be unreasonably  
449 interfering in any way with the convenient, safe, or continuous  
450 use, or the maintenance, improvement, extension, or expansion,  
451 of such public road or publicly owned rail corridor, the utility  
452 owner shall, upon 30 days' written notice to the utility or its  
453 agent by the authority, initiate the work necessary to alleviate  
454 the interference at its own expense except as provided in  
455 paragraphs (a)-(j). The work must be completed within such  
456 reasonable time as stated in the notice or such time as agreed  
457 to by the authority and the utility owner.

458 (h) If a municipally owned utility or county-owned utility  
459 is located in a rural area of opportunity, as defined in s.  
460 288.0656(3) ~~s. 288.0656(2)~~, and the department determines that  
461 the utility is unable, and will not be able within the next 10  
462 years, to pay for the cost of utility work necessitated by a  
463 department project on the State Highway System, the department  
464 may pay, in whole or in part, the cost of such utility work



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465 performed by the department or its contractor.

466 Section 10. Subsection (7) of section 339.2818, Florida  
467 Statutes, is amended to read:

468 339.2818 Small County Outreach Program.—

469 (7) Subject to a specific appropriation in addition to  
470 funds annually appropriated for projects under this section, a  
471 municipality within a rural area of opportunity or a rural area  
472 of opportunity community designated under s. 288.0656(8)(a) ~~s.~~  
473 ~~288.0656(7)(a)~~ may compete for the additional project funding  
474 using the criteria listed in subsection (4) at up to 100 percent  
475 of project costs, excluding capacity improvement projects.

476 Section 11. Paragraph (c) of subsection (4) of section  
477 339.2819, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

478 339.2819 Transportation Regional Incentive Program.—

479 (4)

480 (c) The department shall give priority to projects that:

481 1. Provide connectivity to the Strategic Intermodal System  
482 developed under s. 339.64.

483 2. Support economic development and the movement of goods  
484 in rural areas of opportunity designated under s. 288.0656(8) ~~s.~~  
485 ~~288.0656(7)~~.

486 3. Are subject to a local ordinance that establishes  
487 corridor management techniques, including access management  
488 strategies, right-of-way acquisition and protection measures,  
489 appropriate land use strategies, zoning, and setback  
490 requirements for adjacent land uses.

491 4. Improve connectivity between military installations and  
492 the Strategic Highway Network or the Strategic Rail Corridor  
493 Network.

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495 The department shall also consider the extent to which local  
496 matching funds are available to be committed to the project.

497 Section 12. Paragraph (b) of subsection (5) of section  
498 339.63, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

499 339.63 System facilities designated; additions and  
500 deletions.—

501 (5)

502 (b) A facility designated part of the Strategic Intermodal  
503 System pursuant to paragraph (a) that is within the jurisdiction  
504 of a local government that maintains a transportation  
505 concurrency system shall receive a waiver of transportation  
506 concurrency requirements applicable to Strategic Intermodal  
507 System facilities in order to accommodate any development at the  
508 facility which occurs pursuant to a building permit issued on or  
509 before December 31, 2017, but only if such facility is located:

510 1. Within an area designated pursuant to s. 288.0656(8) ~~s.~~  
511 ~~288.0656(7)~~ as a rural area of opportunity;

512 2. Within a rural enterprise zone as defined in s.  
513 290.004(5); or

514 3. Within 15 miles of the boundary of a rural area of  
515 opportunity or a rural enterprise zone.

516 Section 13. Subsection (16) of section 479.16, Florida  
517 Statutes, is amended to read:

518 479.16 Signs for which permits are not required.—The  
519 following signs are exempt from the requirement that a permit  
520 for a sign be obtained under this chapter but are required to  
521 comply with s. 479.11(4)-(8), and subsections (15)-(20) may not  
522 be implemented or continued if the Federal Government notifies

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523 the department that implementation or continuation will  
524 adversely affect the allocation of federal funds to the  
525 department:

526 (16) Signs placed by a local tourist-oriented business  
527 located within a rural area of opportunity as defined in s.  
528 288.0656(3) ~~s. 288.0656(2)~~ which are:

529 (a) Not more than 8 square feet in size or more than 4 feet  
530 in height;

531 (b) Located only in rural areas on a facility that does not  
532 meet the definition of a limited access facility, as defined in  
533 s. 334.03;

534 (c) Located within 2 miles of the business location and at  
535 least 500 feet apart;

536 (d) Located only in two directions leading to the business;  
537 and

538 (e) Not located within the road right-of-way.  
539

540 A business placing such signs must be at least 4 miles from any  
541 other business using this exemption and may not participate in  
542 any other directional signage program by the department.  
543

544 If the exemptions in subsections (15)-(20) are not implemented  
545 or continued due to notification from the Federal Government  
546 that the allocation of federal funds to the department will be  
547 adversely impacted, the department shall provide notice to the  
548 sign owner that the sign must be removed within 30 days after  
549 receipt of the notice. If the sign is not removed within 30 days  
550 after receipt of the notice by the sign owner, the department  
551 may remove the sign, and the costs incurred in connection with

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552 the sign removal shall be assessed against and collected from  
553 the sign owner.

554 Section 14. Paragraph (d) of subsection (14) of section  
555 627.6699, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

556 627.6699 Employee Health Care Access Act.—

557 (14) SMALL EMPLOYERS ACCESS PROGRAM.—

558 (d) *Eligibility*.—

559 1. Any small employer that is actively engaged in business,  
560 has its principal place of business in this state, employs up to  
561 25 eligible employees on business days during the preceding  
562 calendar year, employs at least 2 employees on the first day of  
563 the plan year, and has had no prior coverage for the last 6  
564 months may participate.

565 2. Any municipality, county, school district, or hospital  
566 employer located in a rural community as defined in s.

567 288.0656(3) ~~s. 288.0656(2)~~ may participate.

568 3. Nursing home employers may participate.

569 4. Each dependent of a person eligible for coverage is also  
570 eligible to participate.

571

572 Any employer participating in the program must do so until the  
573 end of the term for which the carrier providing the coverage is  
574 obligated to provide such coverage to the program. Coverage for  
575 a small employer group that ceases to meet the eligibility  
576 requirements of this section may be terminated at the end of the  
577 policy period for which the necessary premiums have been paid.

578 Section 15. This act shall take effect upon becoming a law.