

Agenda Order

<b>Tab 2</b>	<b>SB 214 by McClain;</b> Identical to H 00273 Special District Funding
<b>Tab 3</b>	<b>CS/SB 694 by JU, Bracy Davis (CO-INTRODUCERS) Smith, Osgood, Berman, Davis, Arrington, Bernard, Leek, Gaetz, Sharief, Mayfield, DiCeglie, Massullo, Rouson, Jones, Simon;</b> Similar to H 06523 Compensation of the Descendants of Charles Greenlee, Walter Irvin, Samuel Shepherd, and Ernest Thomas
<b>Tab 4</b>	<b>CS/SB 1266 by CM, Calatayud;</b> Similar to CS/CS/H 01081 Cybersecurity Internships
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**COMMITTEE MEETING EXPANDED AGENDA****APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION,  
TOURISM, AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT****Senator DiCeglie, Chair**  
**Senator Polsky, Vice Chair****MEETING DATE:** Wednesday, February 4, 2026**TIME:** 1:00—3:15 p.m.**PLACE:** *Toni Jennings Committee Room, 110 Senate Building***MEMBERS:** Senator DiCeglie, Chair; Senator Polsky, Vice Chair; Senators Arrington, Avila, Bernard, Bracy Davis, Grall, Leek, Martin, Mayfield, McClain, Smith, Truenow, and Wright

TAB	BILL NO. and INTRODUCER	BILL DESCRIPTION and SENATE COMMITTEE ACTIONS	COMMITTEE ACTION
1	Review and Discussion of Fiscal Year 2026-2027 Budget Issues Relating to: Department of Commerce Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles Department of Military Affairs Department of State Department of Transportation Division of Emergency Management		
2	<b>SB 214</b> McClain (Identical H 273)	Special District Funding; Revising agency agreements that provide state financial assistance to recipients or subrecipients to include certain special districts as an entity to which such agency may provide for the payment of invoices under specified circumstances; revising the definition of “rural community” to include certain special districts, etc.  CM 01/21/2026 Favorable ATD 02/04/2026 FP	
3	<b>CS/SB 694</b> Judiciary / Bracy Davis (Similar H 6523)	Compensation of the Descendants of Charles Greenlee, Walter Irvin, Samuel Shepherd, and Ernest Thomas; Providing that certain facts are found and declared to be true; providing that a sum is appropriated from the General Revenue Fund to the Department of State for specified relief; requiring that a specified percentage of such relief be provided to certain individuals and estates; providing that specified persons are ineligible for further compensation, etc.  JU 01/27/2026 Fav/CS ATD 02/04/2026 AP	

**COMMITTEE MEETING EXPANDED AGENDA**

Appropriations Committee on Transportation, Tourism, and Economic Development  
Wednesday, February 4, 2026, 1:00—3:15 p.m.

TAB	BILL NO. and INTRODUCER	BILL DESCRIPTION and SENATE COMMITTEE ACTIONS	COMMITTEE ACTION
4	<b>CS/SB 1266</b> Commerce and Tourism / Calatayud (Similar CS/CS/H 1081)	Cybersecurity Internships; Creating the Cybersecurity Experiential Internship and Clearance Readiness Program within the Department of Commerce; requiring the department to enter into an agreement with the Florida Center for Cybersecurity (Cyber Florida) to implement the program in collaboration with specified universities and institutions; requiring the department, using data and analyses provided by Cyber Florida, to submit a report by a specified date and annually thereafter to the Governor and the Legislature, etc.  CM     01/21/2026 Fav/CS ATD    02/04/2026 AP	

Other Related Meeting Documents

*Materials for  
this item to be  
presented at the  
meeting.*

**The Florida Senate**  
**BILL ANALYSIS AND FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT**

(This document is based on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

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Prepared By: The Professional Staff of the Appropriations Committee on Transportation, Tourism, and Economic Development

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BILL: SB 214

INTRODUCER: Senator McClain

SUBJECT: Special District Funding

DATE: February 3, 2026

REVISED: \_\_\_\_\_

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	<u>Renner</u>	<u>McKay</u>	<u>CM</u>	<b>Favorable</b>
2.	<u>Griffin</u>	<u>Nortelus</u>	<u>ATD</u>	<b>Pre-meeting</b>
3.	<u>                    </u>	<u>                    </u>	<u>FP</u>	<u>                    </u>

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**I. Summary:**

SB 214 amends s. 215.971, F.S., to require agency agreements that provide state or federal financial assistance to special districts located in a rural community or rural area of opportunity to include a provision allowing the agency to provide for the payment of invoices for verified and eligible performance that has been completed in accordance with the terms and conditions of the agreement in the same manner as current law authorizes for counties and municipalities in those areas.

The bill amends s. 288.0656, F.S., to revise the definition of “rural community” for the purposes of the Rural Economic Development Initiative to include special districts located in rural counties. This inclusion will allow special districts to participate in state financial assistance programs.

This bill may have an indeterminate impact on state expenditures. See Section V., Fiscal Impact Statement.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2026.

**II. Present Situation:**

**Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI)**

The Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI) was established by the Legislature to encourage and facilitate the location and expansion of major economic development projects of significant scale in rural communities.<sup>1</sup> Today, the REDI operates as a statewide initiative led by the Department of Commerce (FloridaCommerce) to better serve Florida’s rural communities by

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<sup>1</sup> Section 288.0656(1)(a), F.S.

providing a more focused and coordinated effort among state and regional agencies to improve the fiscal, economic, and community viability of these areas.<sup>2</sup>

Specified agencies and organizations<sup>3</sup> are required to designate a high-level staff person to serve as their REDI representative. Each REDI representative is responsible for ensuring that their agency or organization is informed about the REDI and helps to identify opportunities to accommodate or include rural local governments in their agency programs.

The REDI is required to review and evaluate the impact of statutes and rules on rural communities and work to minimize any adverse impact and undertake outreach and capacity-building efforts.<sup>4</sup> Under the REDI statute, a rural community is defined as:

- A county with a population of 75,000 or fewer;
- A county with a population of 125,000 or fewer, if the county is contiguous to a county with a population of 75,000 or fewer;
- Any municipality in a county that meets the above criteria; or
- An unincorporated federal enterprise community or an incorporated rural city with a population of 25,000 or fewer, with an employment base focused on traditional agriculture or resource-based industries, located in a county not defined as rural, and which has at least three or more economic distress factors.<sup>5</sup>

Each REDI member agency is required to review financial match requirements for projects in rural areas and develop a proposal to waive or reduce match requirements, and such proposals must be submitted to the REDI.<sup>6</sup> The REDI must call a meeting within 30 days of receipt of such proposals for comment and recommendation.<sup>7</sup> Waivers and reductions must be requested by the county or community, and to the fullest extent possible member organizations must expedite rule and amendment adoption to incorporate the reduction in match by rural areas in financial distress.<sup>8</sup> The REDI must prepare an annual report as a supplement to Florida Commerce's annual report, which includes an evaluation on the status of changes to rules, the number of awards made with waivers, and recommendations for future changes.<sup>9</sup>

Based on the REDI's recommendations, the Governor may designate up to three rural areas of opportunity (RAOs) by executive order,<sup>10</sup> which establishes certain local governments as a priority for the department. The orders also permit all state agencies and departments to use all available tools and resources to the extent permissible by law to promote the creation and

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<sup>2</sup> Section 288.0656(3), F.S.

<sup>3</sup> The Department of Transportation, Department of Environmental Protection, Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Department of State, Department of Health, Department of Children and Families, Department of Corrections, Department of Education, Department of Juvenile Justice, Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, each water management district, CareerSource Florida, Inc., VISIT Florida, the Florida Regional Planning Council Association, Agency for Health Care Administration, the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS). *See* s. 288.0656(6)(a), F.S.

<sup>4</sup> Section 288.0656(4), F.S.

<sup>5</sup> Section 288.0656(2)(e), F.S.

<sup>6</sup> Section 288.06561, F.S.

<sup>7</sup> Section 288.06561(3), F.S.

<sup>8</sup> Section 288.06561(4) and (7), F.S.

<sup>9</sup> Section 288.06561(8), F.S.

<sup>10</sup> Section 288.0656(7)(a), F.S.

development of projects designated by the RAO that have been recommended by the department.<sup>11</sup>

### ***Rural Area of Opportunity***

A RAO is a rural community,<sup>12</sup> or region comprised of rural communities, designated by the Governor, that has been adversely affected by an extraordinary economic event, severe or chronic distress, or a natural disaster.<sup>13</sup> An area may also be designated as an RAO if it presents a unique economic development opportunity of regional impact.<sup>14</sup> The designation of an RAO must be agreed upon by the Department of Commerce, as well as the county and municipal governments, to be included in the RAO.<sup>15</sup>

This designation establishes these areas as priority assignments for the REDI and allows the Governor, acting through the REDI, to waive criteria, requirements, or similar provisions of any economic development initiative. Such incentives include, but are not limited to, the Quick Response Training Program<sup>16</sup>, the Quick Response Training Program for participants in the welfare transition program<sup>17</sup>, transportation projects,<sup>18</sup> the brownfield redevelopment bonus refund<sup>19</sup>, and the rural job tax credit program.<sup>20</sup>

Currently, there are three designated RAO areas:<sup>21</sup>

- **Northwest RAO:** Calhoun, Franklin, Gadsden, Gulf, Holmes, Jackson, Liberty, Wakulla, and Washington counties, and portions of Bay, Okaloosa, and Walton Counties.
- **South Central RAO:** DeSoto, Glades, Hardee, Hendry, Highlands, and Okeechobee counties, and the communities of Pahokee, Belle Glade, and South Bay in Palm Beach County and Immokalee in Collier County.<sup>22</sup>
- **North Central RAO:** Baker, Bradford, Columbia, Dixie, Gilchrist, Hamilton, Jefferson, Lafayette, Levy, Madison, Putnam, Suwannee, Taylor, and Union counties.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Executive Orders 20-170, 21-149, and 23-132 and 25-141 available at [https://www.flgov.com/eog/sites/default/files/executive-orders/2024/EO\\_20-170.pdf](https://www.flgov.com/eog/sites/default/files/executive-orders/2024/EO_20-170.pdf), [https://www.flgov.com/eog/sites/default/files/executive-orders/2024/EO\\_21-149.pdf](https://www.flgov.com/eog/sites/default/files/executive-orders/2024/EO_21-149.pdf), and <https://www.flgov.com/eog/sites/default/files/executive-orders/2024/EO-23-132.pdf> and <https://www.flgov.com/eog/sites/default/files/executive-orders/2025/EO%2025-141.pdf> (last visited Jan. 20, 2026)

<sup>12</sup> Section 288.0656(2)(e), F.S.

<sup>13</sup> Section 288.0656(2)(d), F.S.

<sup>14</sup> *Id.*

<sup>15</sup> Section 288.0656(7)(b), F.S.

<sup>16</sup> Section 288.047, F.S.

<sup>17</sup> Section 288.047(8), F.S.

<sup>18</sup> Section 339.2821, F.S.

<sup>19</sup> Section 288.107, F.S.

<sup>20</sup> Sections 212.098 and 220.1895, F.S.

<sup>21</sup> Florida Department of Commerce, Office of Rural Initiatives, available at <https://www.floridajobs.org/community-planning-and-development/office-of-rural-initiatives> (last visited Jan. 20, 2026).

<sup>22</sup> The economic development organization for this RAO is Florida's Heartland Regional Economic Development Initiative, Inc. See <https://flaheartland.com/> (last visited Jan. 20, 2026).

<sup>23</sup> The economic development organization for this RAO is the North Florida Economic Development Partnership. See <https://nflp.org/> (last visited Jan. 20, 2026).

### Agreements Funded with Federal or State Assistance

Current law requires an agency agreement that provides state financial assistance to a recipient or subrecipient,<sup>24</sup> or that provides federal financial assistance to a subrecipient, to include the following:

- A provision specifying scope of work that clearly establishes the tasks the recipient or subrecipient is required to perform;
- A provision dividing the agreement into quantifiable units of deliverables that must be received and accepted in writing by the agency before payment. Each deliverable must be directly related to the scope of work and must specify the required minimum level of service to be performed and the criteria for evaluating the successful completion of each deliverable;
- A provision specifying the financial consequences that apply if the recipient or subrecipient fails to perform the minimum level of service required in the agreement. The provision can be excluded in specified situations;
- A provision specifying that a recipient or subrecipient of federal or state financial assistance may expend funds only for allowable costs resulting from obligations incurred during the specified agreement period;
- A provision specifying that any balance of unobligated funds which has been advanced or paid must be refunded to the state agency;
- A provision specifying that any funds paid in excess of the amount to which the recipient or subrecipient is entitled must be refunded to the state agency; and
- Any additional information required pursuant to the Florida Single Audit Act.<sup>25</sup>

Current law prohibits an agency agreement that provides state or federal financial assistance to local government entities within an RAO from requiring those entities to expend funds to be reimbursed. For these local government entities, an agency is authorized to advance funding based on an analysis of estimated costs, to pay service providers and vendors directly, or to pursue other options to meet the requirements of the agreement, allowing local governments in rural areas to be paid without first spending their own capital.<sup>26</sup>

The Chief Financial Officer establishes and disseminates uniform procedures for grant management to ensure that services have been rendered in accordance with agreement terms before the agency processes an invoice for payment.<sup>27</sup> The procedures include, but are not limited to, monitoring and documenting recipient performance, reviewing and documenting deliverables for payment requested by recipients, and providing written certification by the grant manager of the agency's receipt of goods and services.<sup>28</sup> The grant manager must reconcile and verify all funds received against all funds expended during the grant agreement period and produce a final report that identifies any funds paid in excess by the recipient.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Section 215.97(2)(y), F.S., defines a "subrecipient" as a nonstate entity that receives state financial assistance through another nonstate entity.

<sup>25</sup> Section 215.971(1)(a)-(g), F.S.

<sup>26</sup> Section 215.971(1) (h) F.S.

<sup>27</sup> Section 215.971(2)(b), F.S.

<sup>28</sup> *Id.*

<sup>29</sup> Section 214.971(2)(c), F.S.



## Special Districts

A “special district” is a unit of local government created for a particular purpose, with jurisdiction to operate within a limited geographic boundary.<sup>30</sup> Special districts are created by general law, special act, local ordinance, or rule of the Governor and Cabinet.<sup>31</sup> A special district has only those powers expressly provided by, or reasonably implied from, the authority provided in the district’s charter. Special districts provide specific municipal services in addition to, or in place of, those provided by a municipality or county.<sup>32</sup> Special districts are funded through the imposition of ad valorem taxes, fees, or charges on the users of those services authorized by law.<sup>33</sup>

Special districts may be classified as dependent or independent based on their relationship with local general-purpose governments. A special district is classified as “dependent” if the governing body of a single county or municipality:

- Serves as governing body of the district;
- Appoints the governing body of the district;
- May remove members of the district’s governing body at-will during their unexpired terms; or
- Approves or can veto the budget of the district.<sup>34</sup>

A district is classified as “independent” if it does not meet any of the above criteria or is located in more than one county, unless the district lies entirely within the boundaries of a single municipality.<sup>35</sup>

Currently, there are 103 special districts within the Northwest RAO counties, 44 within the North Central RAO counties, and 57 within the South Central RAO counties.<sup>36</sup>

### III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

This bill SB 214 amends s. 215.971, F.S., to require agency agreements that provide state or federal financial assistance to special districts located, in whole or in part, in a rural community or RAO to include a provision allowing the agency to provide for the payment of invoices for verified and eligible performance that has been completed in accordance with the terms and conditions of the agreement.

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<sup>30</sup> See *Halifax Hospital Medical Center v. State of Fla., et al.*, 278 So. 3d 545, 547 (Fla. 2019).

<sup>31</sup> See ss. 189.02, 189.031(3), and 190.005(1), F.S. See generally s. 189.012(6), F.S.

<sup>32</sup> Florida House of Representatives, Intergovernmental Affairs Subcommittee, *Local Government Formation Manual*, pg. 56, available at <https://www.flhouse.gov/Sections/Documents/loaddoc.aspx?PublicationType=Committees&CommitteeId=3304&Session=2025&DocumentType=General+Publications&FileName=Local+Government+Formation+Manual+%5b2024-2026%5d.pdf> (last visited Jan. 20, 2026).

<sup>33</sup> The method of financing a district must be stated in its charter. Sections 189.02(4)(g) and 189.031(3), F.S.

<sup>34</sup> Section 189.012(2), F.S.

<sup>35</sup> Section 189.012(3), F.S.

<sup>36</sup> See Florida Department of Commerce, Official List of Special Districts, <https://www.floridajobs.org/community-planning-and-development/special-districts/special-district-accountability-program/official-list-of-special-districts> (last visited Jan. 20, 2026). Some of these districts may lie outside of the portions of counties listed in the Northwest RAO and the South Central RAO.

The bill amends s. 288.0656, F.S., to revise the definition of “rural community” for the REDI to include special districts located in rural counties. This inclusion will allow special districts to participate in state financial assistance programs.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2026.

**A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:**

None.

**B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:**

None.

**C. Trust Funds Restrictions:**

None.

**D. State Tax or Fee Increases:**

None.

**E. Other Constitutional Issues:**

None identified.

**IV. Fiscal Impact Statement:**

**A. Tax/Fee Issues:**

None.

**B. Private Sector Impact:**

None.

**C. Government Sector Impact:**

Expanding the eligibility for invoice payments to include special districts may have an indeterminate negative fiscal impact on agencies administering financial assistance programs. Similarly, expanding the definition of rural community to include special districts may alter which projects located in an RAO receive economic development funding.

**V. Technical Deficiencies:**

None.

**VI. Related Issues:**

None.

**VII. Statutes Affected:**

This bill substantially amends the following sections of the Florida Statutes: 215.971 and 288.0656.

**VIII. Additional Information:****A. Committee Substitute – Statement of Changes:**

(Summarizing differences between the Committee Substitute and the prior version of the bill.)

None.

**B. Amendments:**

None.

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This Senate Bill Analysis does not reflect the intent or official position of the bill's introducer or the Florida Senate.

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By Senator McClain

9-00354-26

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A bill to be entitled  
An act relating to special district funding; amending  
s. 215.971, F.S.; revising agency agreements that  
provide state financial assistance to recipients or  
subrecipients to include certain special districts as  
an entity to which such agency may provide for the  
payment of invoices under specified circumstances;  
providing construction; amending s. 288.0656, F.S.;  
revising the definition of "rural community" to  
include certain special districts; providing an  
effective date.

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

Section 1. Paragraph (h) of subsection (1) of section  
215.971, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

215.971 Agreements funded with federal or state  
assistance.—

(1) An agency agreement that provides state financial  
assistance to a recipient or subrecipient, as those terms are  
defined in s. 215.97, or that provides federal financial  
assistance to a subrecipient, as defined by applicable United  
States Office of Management and Budget circulars, must include  
all of the following:

(h) If the agency agreement provides federal or state  
financial assistance to a county or municipality that is a rural  
community or rural area of opportunity as those terms are  
defined in s. 288.0656(2) or a special district whose geographic  
area, in whole or in part, is located in such county or

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30 municipality, a provision allowing the agency to provide for the  
31 payment of invoices to the county, municipality, ~~or~~ rural area  
32 of opportunity as that term is defined in s. 288.0656(2), or  
33 special district, for verified and eligible performance that has  
34 been completed in accordance with the terms and conditions set  
35 forth in the agreement. This provision is included to alleviate  
36 the financial hardships that such ~~certain~~ rural counties, and  
37 municipalities, or special districts encounter when  
38 administering agreements, and must be exercised by the agency if  
39 ~~when~~ a county, ~~or~~ municipality, or special district whose  
40 geographic area, in whole or in part, is located in such county  
41 or municipality demonstrates financial hardship, to the extent  
42 that federal or state law, rule, or other regulation allows such  
43 payments. This paragraph may not be construed to alter or limit  
44 any other provisions of federal or state law, rule, or other  
45 regulation.

46 Section 2. Paragraph (e) of subsection (2) of section  
47 288.0656, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

48 288.0656 Rural Economic Development Initiative.—

49 (2) As used in this section, the term:

50 (e) "Rural community" means:

- 51 1. A county with a population of 75,000 or fewer.
- 52 2. A county with a population of 125,000 or fewer which is  
53 contiguous to a county with a population of 75,000 or fewer.
- 54 3. A municipality or special district within a county  
55 described in subparagraph 1. or subparagraph 2.
- 56 4. An unincorporated federal enterprise community or an  
57 incorporated rural city with a population of 25,000 or fewer and  
58 an employment base focused on traditional agricultural or

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

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

Section 3. This act shall take effect July 1, 2026.

**The Florida Senate**  
**BILL ANALYSIS AND FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT**

(This document is based on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

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Prepared By: The Professional Staff of the Appropriations Committee on Transportation, Tourism, and Economic Development

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**BILL:** CS/SB 694

**INTRODUCER:** Judiciary Committee and Senator Bracy Davis and others

**SUBJECT:** Compensation of the Descendants of Charles Greenlee, Walter Irvin, Samuel Shepherd, and Ernest Thomas

**DATE:** February 4, 2026      **REVISED:** \_\_\_\_\_

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	<u>Bond</u>	<u>Cibula</u>	<u>JU</u>	<b>Fav/CS</b>
2.	<u>Wells</u>	<u>Nortelus</u>	<u>ATD</u>	<b>Pre-meeting</b>
3.	<u>                    </u>	<u>                    </u>	<u>AP</u>	<u>                    </u>

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**Please see Section IX. for Additional Information:**

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE - Substantial Changes

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**I. Summary:**

CS/SB 694 provides that the Legislature may appropriate monies to pay compensation to the descendants of the Groveland Four. That term refers to the four black men who were wrongfully accused of raping a white woman in 1949 in Groveland, Florida. All four are now deceased. A prior legislature passed a concurrent resolution apologizing and acknowledging that the men “were the victims of gross injustices.” The trial court subsequently set aside the convictions and the state has issued a posthumous pardon to each of the men.

The bill does not specify a total sum to be appropriated. The bill divides the appropriation into four equal shares, names two survivors entitled to a share, and pays the other two shares to the estates of the individuals. The Department of State is the administrative agency that is responsible for making payments to the descendants of the Groveland Four.

The bill is subject to appropriation in the General Appropriations Act and, therefore, does not have a fiscal impact on state revenues or expenditures. See Section V., Fiscal Impact Statement.

The bill is effective upon becoming law.

**II. Present Situation:**

The bill addresses the Groveland Four incident of 1949.

## The Initial Incident

In July of 1949 a white married couple were travelling through Lake County, Florida when their car broke down near Okahumpka, a small town near Groveland, in Lake County, Florida. They claimed that four black men approached the car, hit the husband, stole the man's wallet, and raped the wife.<sup>1</sup>

Local law enforcement officers named four young black men as suspects in the felony sexual battery. A mob gathered, houses were burned, shots fired, the National Guard was called up.<sup>2</sup> Many of Groveland's black population fled, some never returned.<sup>3</sup> Three men were arrested, a fourth was killed days later in a distant county. Those men became known as the "Groveland Four." They are:

- Charles Greenlee who was 16 years old at the time of the incident. He was paroled in 1962 and lived peacefully until his death in 2012 (age 78). Greenlee far outlived the other three men.
- Walter Irvin who was 22 years old at the time. He was convicted for the rape and sentenced to death. The sentence was overturned on appeal to the United States Supreme Court. He was tried and sentenced to death again. The Governor commuted the sentence to life imprisonment. He was granted parole in 1968. Irvin was found dead in his car in 1970 while visiting Lake County.
- Samuel Shepherd who was also 22 years old. He was convicted for the rape and sentenced to death. The sentence was overturned on appeal to the United States Supreme Court. In 1951 he was shot and killed while awaiting retrial.
- Ernest Thomas who was 26 at the time, was killed in 1949 by law enforcement officers participating in an armed posse looking for him. The officers found Thomas in Madison County, Florida,<sup>4</sup> where he died of gunshot wounds.<sup>5</sup>

## Summary of Key Events Regarding the Groveland Four

In July of 1949, a travelling couple reported to law enforcement in Lake County, Florida that four black men attacked them and raped the wife. Shortly thereafter, Greenlee and Irvin were arrested. They were taken to the basement of the Lake County Jail and severely beaten.<sup>6</sup> Greenlee, Irvin, and Shepherd were found guilty of sexual battery. At that time, Florida law provided that sexual battery was a capital offense. The two adults (Irvin and Shepherd) were sentenced to death, the third, a minor (Greenlee) was sentenced to life imprisonment.

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<sup>1</sup> Norma Padgett was 17 years old at the time of the incident. She was married to Willie Padgett. She never recanted the rape allegation. She died in Georgia in 2024 (age 92).

<sup>2</sup> *Shepherd v. State of Florida*, 341 U.S. 50, 53 (1951) (concurrence by J. Jackson).

<sup>3</sup> EJI.org, *White Mob Brutally Lynches Ernest Thomas, Member of the So-Called Groveland Four*, <https://calendar.eji.org/racial-injustice/jul/26> (last visited Jan. 21, 2026).

<sup>4</sup> Lake County is in Central Florida. Madison County is in the Panhandle region and is approximately 190 miles from Lake County.

<sup>5</sup> Some news reports claim that he died of 400 gunshot wounds, although that many seems implausible.

<sup>6</sup> Statement of Walter Irvin, at [https://www-tc.pbs.org/harrymoore/terror/images/irvin1\\_lg.gif](https://www-tc.pbs.org/harrymoore/terror/images/irvin1_lg.gif).



The NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund assumed the defense of the men convicted to death. The Fund employed Thurgood Marshall to file the appeal and argue the case before the United States Supreme Court.<sup>7</sup> The convictions were overturned by the Supreme Court in April of 1951.<sup>8</sup>

Of course, overturning a conviction does not automatically lead to release in most instances. Instead, the defendant is held over for a new trial. In November of 1951, Lake County Sheriff Willis McCall was transporting Irvin and Shepherd from the Florida State Prison at Raiford to Lake County for a pretrial hearing. He stopped the car on a dirt road in Umatilla,<sup>9</sup> supposedly to deal with a flat tire. The Sheriff claimed that Irvin and Shepherd attacked him in an attempt to escape. The men were shot by the Sheriff who claimed self-defense. Shepherd died, but Irvin survived the shooting.

Irvin was retried in Lake County, and once again was convicted and sentenced to death.<sup>10</sup> In 1954, Governor Leroy Collins commuted the sentence to life.<sup>11</sup>

The story of the Groveland Four was the subject of a 2012 nonfiction book by Gilbert King entitled *Devil in the Grove: Thurgood Marshall, the Groveland Boys, and the Dawn of a New America*. The author of the book was awarded the 2013 Pulitzer Prize for General Nonfiction.<sup>12</sup>

The 2017 Legislature passed a concurrent resolution acknowledging that the Groveland Four “were the victims of gross injustices and that their abhorrent treatment by the criminal justice system is a shameful chapter in this state’s history.”<sup>13</sup> The resolution urged the Governor and Cabinet to expedite review of the matter.

A petition was filed with the Florida Clemency Board seeking to overturn the convictions and sentences. With the concurrence of the Florida Clemency Board, the Governor issued full pardons on January 11, 2019.<sup>14</sup>

In November of 2021, the Circuit Court of Lake County Florida entered a final order that dismissed all of the indictments and set aside all judgments and sentences imposed against the Groveland Four related to the July 1949 incident.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> King, *Devil in the Grove: Thurgood Marshall, the Groveland Boys, and the Dawn of a New America* (2012).

<sup>8</sup> *Shepherd v. State of Florida*, 341 U.S. 50 (1951).

<sup>9</sup> The drive from the prison to Lake County would have been a little over 100 miles. This was long before the Interstate Highway System, and they would have likely driven much of the trip on State Highway 19. Umatilla is in Lake County, is on Hwy 19, and is a little more than 10 miles from the county seat Tavares, where the jail and the courthouse were located.

<sup>10</sup> See *Verdict of Jury*, In the Fifth Judicial Circuit in and for Lake County, Florida, Case Nos. 1949-CF-1369 (Feb. 14, 1952) which is accessible through the case search option at <https://courtrecords.lakecountyclerk.org/> and then selecting docket number 101.

<sup>11</sup> CS/HCR 631 (2017), lines 95-100.

<sup>12</sup> The Pulitzer Prizes, Gilbert King, the 2013 Pulitzer Prize Winner in General Nonfiction, <https://www.pulitzer.org/prize-winners-by-year/2013> (last visited Jan. 21, 2026).

<sup>13</sup> CS/HCR 631 (2017).

<sup>14</sup> *Governor Ron DeSantis Pardons Groveland Four with Unanimous Executive Clemency Board Approval*, January 11, 2019, at <https://www.flgov.com/eog/news/press/2019/governor-ron-desantis-pardons-groveland-four-unanimous-executive-clemency-board>.

<sup>15</sup> *Order Dismissing the Indictments of Ernest Thomas and Samuel Shepherd; Granting the State’s Motion to Set Aside Judgment and Sentence of Charles Greenlee and Walter Irvin; and Granting the State’s Motion to Correct the Record with*

### III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

CS/SB 694 declares the facts stated in the preamble to be true. The bill states that a sum will be appropriated from the General Revenue Fund to the Department of State for the relief of the descendants of the Groveland Four. The bill also declares that the descendants are ineligible for any further compensation.

The bill divides the appropriation into 4 equal shares:

- Carol Greenlee Crawlee, the daughter of Charles Greenlee.<sup>16</sup>
- The Estate of Walter Irvin.
- The Estate of Samuel Shepherd.
- Ruby Lee Jones, the surviving spouse of Ernest Thomas.<sup>17</sup>

In general, current law provides that the any funds payable to “the estate of \_\_\_\_ “ are payable to an estate that can be created for the benefit of the heirs of that person. The estate would have the duty to conduct research to look for a will. If no will exists, the estate would then have the duty to determine the lawful heirs under intestacy law. If no qualifying heirs can be found, the remaining fund would escheat to the state.<sup>18</sup>

The bill takes effect upon becoming a law.

### IV. Constitutional Issues:

#### A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

#### B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

#### C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

#### D. State Tax or Fee Increases:

None.

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*Newly Discovered Evidence*, In the Fifth Judicial Circuit in and for Lake County, Florida, Case Nos. 1949-CF-1369 A, B, C and D (Nov. 22, 2021) which is accessible through the case search option at <https://courtrecords.lakecountyclerk.org/> and then selecting docket number 178.

<sup>16</sup> This designation appears to presume that Carol Greenlee Crawlee is currently alive and would otherwise qualify as the only heir of Charles Greenlee under Florida law.

<sup>17</sup> This designation appears to presume that Ruby Lee Jones is currently alive and would otherwise qualify as the only heir of Ernest Thomas under Florida law.

<sup>18</sup> See generally, chapters 731-733, F.S.

E. Other Constitutional Issues:

None.

**V. Fiscal Impact Statement:**

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

None.

C. Government Sector Impact:

The bill is subject to appropriation in the General Appropriations Act and, therefore, does not have a fiscal impact on state revenues or expenditures.

**VI. Technical Deficiencies:**

None.

**VII. Related Issues:**

None.

**VIII. Statutes Affected:**

None.

**IX. Additional Information:**

A. Committee Substitute – Statement of Substantial Changes:

(Summarizing differences between the Committee Substitute and the prior version of the bill.)

**CS by Judiciary on January 27, 2026:**

The amendment specifies that the families of each of the Groveland Four is entitled to an equal 25 percent share. Also, two heirs are named.

B. Amendments:

None.

**By** the Committee on Judiciary; and Senators Bracy Davis, Smith, Osgood, Berman, Davis, Arrington, Bernard, Leek, Gaetz, Sharief, Mayfield, DiCeglie, Massullo, and Rouson

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A bill to be entitled

An act relating to compensation of the descendants of Charles Greenlee, Walter Irvin, Samuel Shepherd, and Ernest Thomas; providing that certain facts are found and declared to be true; providing that a sum is appropriated from the General Revenue Fund to the Department of State for specified relief; requiring that a specified percentage of such relief be provided to certain individuals and estates; providing that specified persons are ineligible for further compensation; providing an effective date.

WHEREAS, on July 16, 1949, a 17-year-old white woman and her estranged husband reported to police that they had been attacked and that she had been raped by four black men after the car that she and her husband were riding in broke down on a rural road outside Groveland, in Lake County, and

WHEREAS, despite the lack of physical evidence in the case and the established alibis of the accused, Charles Greenlee, Walter Irvin, Samuel Shepherd, and Ernest Thomas, the four men were presumed guilty, and

WHEREAS, Mr. Irvin and Mr. Shepherd, both World War II veterans, acknowledged that they had stopped by the broken-down vehicle to see if they could assist the couple, but denied any involvement in the alleged rape, and

WHEREAS, Mr. Greenlee, who was only 16 years old at the time, and Mr. Thomas denied ever meeting the alleged victim and her estranged husband, and

WHEREAS, after their arrest that evening, Mr. Greenlee, Mr.

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Irvin, and Mr. Shepherd were severely beaten in the basement of the county jail, and Mr. Greenlee and Mr. Shepherd were coerced into confessing to the crime, while Mr. Irvin refused to admit guilt, and

WHEREAS, Mr. Thomas, who fled the county, was shot to death several days later in Madison County by members of a deputized posse of armed men, resulting in more than 400 gunshot wounds, and

WHEREAS, the three surviving men, Mr. Greenlee, Mr. Irvin, and Mr. Shepherd, were tried and convicted in the case, with Mr. Greenlee sentenced to life imprisonment due to his age and Mr. Irvin and Mr. Shepherd sentenced to death, and

WHEREAS, Thurgood Marshall, then executive director of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, appealed the convictions of Mr. Irvin and Mr. Shepherd to the United States Supreme Court, which unanimously overturned the judgments on April 9, 1951, and ordered a retrial, and

WHEREAS, seven months later, in November 1951, while transporting Mr. Irvin and Mr. Shepherd from Florida State Prison in Raiford to Tavares State Prison for a pretrial hearing, Lake County Sheriff Willis McCall and Deputy Sheriff James L. Yates shot both men on a dirt road leading into Umatilla, claiming that they had shot the handcuffed men in self-defense when the two tried to escape, and

WHEREAS, Mr. Shepherd died at the scene as a result of his wounds, but Mr. Irvin, who pretended to be dead, survived and accused the sheriff and his deputy of attempted murder, but no charges were ever brought against the officers, and

WHEREAS, despite Mr. Irvin having been retried and

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convicted a second time of the crime and sentenced to death, his sentence was commuted to life in prison in 1954 by then-Governor LeRoy Collins, who was not convinced of Mr. Irvin's guilt, and

WHEREAS, in 1970, while visiting Lake County, Mr. Irvin, who had been paroled 2 years earlier by then-Governor Claude Kirk, was found dead in his car, and, while Mr. Irvin's death was officially attributed to natural causes, Thurgood Marshall reportedly doubted the circumstances surrounding Mr. Irvin's death, and

WHEREAS, Mr. Greenlee, who was paroled in 1962 after serving 12 years in prison, died in April 2012 at the age of 78, and

WHEREAS, in 2017, the Legislature unanimously adopted House Concurrent Resolution 631 acknowledging the grave injustices perpetrated against Mr. Greenlee, Mr. Irvin, Mr. Shepherd, and Mr. Thomas, apologizing to each of them and their families, and urging the Governor and the Cabinet to perform an expedited clemency review of their cases for the purpose of granting the men full pardons, and

WHEREAS, on January 11, 2019, Governor DeSantis issued full pardons, which were unanimously approved by the Board of Executive Clemency, to Mr. Greenlee, Mr. Irvin, Mr. Shepherd, and Mr. Thomas, and

WHEREAS, on November 22, 2021, the State Attorney's Office of Lake County filed a motion in the Circuit Court of the Fifth Judicial Circuit to dismiss the indictments of Mr. Shepherd and Mr. Thomas and to set aside the convictions and sentences of Mr. Greenlee and Mr. Irvin, which motion was granted, and

WHEREAS, the State of Florida recognizes an obligation to

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equitably redress the injuries, damages, infringement of civil rights, and loss of life that Mr. Greenlee, Mr. Irvin, Mr. Shepherd, Mr. Thomas, and their families sustained as a result of the events that transpired in Lake County, NOW, THEREFORE,

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

Section 1. The facts stated in the preamble to this act are found and declared to be true.

Section 2. (1) A sum as specified in the General Appropriations Act is appropriated from the General Revenue Fund to the Department of State for the relief of the descendants of Charles Greenlee, Walter Irvin, Samuel Shepherd, and Ernest Thomas.

(2) Twenty-five percent of the sum appropriated under subsection (1) must be provided to each of the following individuals and estates:

(a) Carol Greenlee Crawlee, the daughter of Charles Greenlee.

(b) The Estate of Walter Irvin.

(c) The Estate of Samuel Shepherd.

(d) Ruby Lee Jones, the surviving spouse of Ernest Thomas.

Section 3. A person compensated under this act is ineligible for any further compensation related to the factual situation described in this act.

Section 4. This act shall take effect upon becoming a law.

**The Florida Senate**  
**BILL ANALYSIS AND FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT**

(This document is based on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

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Prepared By: The Professional Staff of the Appropriations Committee on Transportation, Tourism, and Economic Development

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BILL: CS/SB 1266

INTRODUCER: Commerce and Tourism Committee and Senator Calatayud

SUBJECT: Cybersecurity Internships

DATE: February 3, 2026

REVISED: \_\_\_\_\_

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	<u>Dike</u>	<u>McKay</u>	<u>CM</u>	<u>Fav/CS</u>
2.	<u>Griffin</u>	<u>Nortelus</u>	<u>ATD</u>	<u>Pre-meeting</u>
3.	<u>                    </u>	<u>                    </u>	<u>AP</u>	<u>                    </u>

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**Please see Section IX. for Additional Information:**

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE - Substantial Changes

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**I. Summary:**

CS/SB 1266 creates the Cybersecurity Experiential Internship and Clearance Readiness Program within the Department of Commerce (department). Under the bill, the department must partner with the University of South Florida (USF) to expand its Florida Center for Cybersecurity program (Cyber Florida) to other universities and institutions in the state to increase the state's cybersecurity workforce. The bill outlines annual reporting requirements and provides sunset provisions for the Legislature's sustenance of the Cybersecurity Experiential Internship and Clearance Readiness Program.

This bill may have an indeterminate impact on the department and institutions of higher education. See Section V., Fiscal Impact Statement.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2026.

**II. Present Situation:**

**NCAE-C Programs**

The National Security Agency (NSA) launched the National Centers of Academic Excellence in 1999 to promote education and research in cybersecurity, produce professionals with cyber expertise[to] expand the cybersecurity workforce, and reduce vulnerabilities in national



infrastructure.<sup>1</sup> The National Centers of Academic Excellence in Cybersecurity (NCAE-C) program is managed by the NSA's National Cryptologic School, alongside other federal partners.<sup>2</sup> To receive a designation under this program, institutions must complete validation of their programs of study.<sup>3</sup>

Academic institutions may choose from three designations under the NCAE:

- The cyber defense (CAE-CD) designation is awarded to regionally accredited schools offering cybersecurity degrees and certificates.
- The cyber research (CAE-R) designation is awarded to Department of Defense schools, military academies with PhD programs, and other institutions with specific doctoral programs.
- The cyber operations (CAE-CO) designation applies to technical higher education programs focused on computer science, computer engineering, and/or electrical engineering.<sup>4</sup>

As of February 2024, NCAE had over “480 designated institutions across 48 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. There are 153 associate programs and degrees, 243 Cyber Defense bachelors and graduate programs, 20 Cyber Operations bachelors and graduate programs, and 80 institutions hold the Research designation.”<sup>5</sup>

The following Florida institutions hold one of the three designations:

- Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University.
- Florida Atlantic University.
- Florida Memorial University.
- Florida State University.
- Eastern Florida State College.
- University of Central Florida.
- University of Florida.
- University of North Florida.
- University of South Florida.
- University of West Florida (UWF).
- Florida Institute of Technology.
- Florida International University.
- Jacksonville University.
- Miami Dade College.
- Nova Southeastern University.
- Pensacola State College.
- St. Petersburg College.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Nat'l Ctr. of Acad. Excellence in Cybersecurity, *Program Book*, available at [https://www.caecommunity.org/\\_files/ugd/fd9f4b\\_4248a3dadedf84805adcc9d1a3bf78fd4.pdf](https://www.caecommunity.org/_files/ugd/fd9f4b_4248a3dadedf84805adcc9d1a3bf78fd4.pdf) (last visited Jan. 21, 2026).

<sup>2</sup> Nat'l Sec. Agency, *National Centers of Academic Excellence in Cybersecurity*, available at <https://www.nsa.gov/Academics/Centers-of-Academic-Excellence/> (last visited Jan. 21, 2026).

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> Nat'l Ctr. of Acad. Excellence in Cybersecurity, *supra* note 1.

<sup>6</sup> *Id.*

## CompTIA Security+ Certification

The Computing Technology Industry Association (CompTIA) is one of the biggest providers of IT certifications worldwide.<sup>7</sup> A CompTIA Security+ certification is “a global certification exam that validates the baseline skills you need to perform core security functions and pursue an IT career.”<sup>8</sup> The program focuses on preventing cyber-attacks, understanding organizational security, using cryptographic standards and products, configuring security technologies, understanding wireless and remote access security, identifying coding vulnerabilities, and more.<sup>9</sup>

## Cyber Florida Pilot Program

In 2014, the Legislature created Cyber Florida in s. 1004.444, F.S., within USF to make Florida a national leader in cybersecurity and expand the state cybersecurity workforce. The goals of Cyber Florida include creating jobs in the state’s cybersecurity industry, facilitating research and development initiatives with, forming partnerships with major military installations, attracting cybersecurity companies to Florida, and sharing cybersecurity knowledge, resources, and training.<sup>10</sup>

In 2024, the Legislature updated s. 1004.444, F.S., allowing Cyber Florida to assist any state-funded initiatives that relate to: (1) cybersecurity training, professional development, and education for state and local government employees; and (2) increasing the cybersecurity effectiveness of the state and local government technology platforms and infrastructure.

As part of this pilot at USF, Cyber Florida hosts:

- The Aligned Realistic Cyberattack Simulation (ARCS) Range, which provides cyber and IT training for Florida public sector employees.<sup>11</sup>
- Firstline, which provides public sector training in cybersecurity.<sup>12</sup>
- The Critical Infrastructure Program, which provides free access to cybersecurity risk assessments and resources for specific organizations.<sup>13</sup>
- Operation K12, to include cybersecurity education in K-12 classrooms across the state with lesson plans, labs, and more.<sup>14</sup>
- CyberWorks, to provide cybersecurity training with a focus on transitioning veterans, military spouses, first responders, and career-changers.<sup>15</sup>
- CyberHub, an online platform with free tools and education resources, including a protected online laboratory for students and researchers to investigate software without compromising the security of other devices.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> CompTIA, *What Is CompTIA Security+ Certification?*, available at <https://www.comptia.org/en-us/blog/what-is-comptia-security-certification/> (last visited Jan. 21, 2026).

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*

<sup>9</sup> *Id.*

<sup>10</sup> Cyber Florida, *Our Mission*, available at <https://cyberflorida.org/about/> (last visited Jan. 21, 2026).

<sup>11</sup> Cyber Florida, *The ARCS Range*, available at <https://cyberflorida.org/arcs-range/> (last visited Jan. 21, 2026).

<sup>12</sup> Cyber Florida, *Firstline*, available at <https://cyberflorida.org/firstline/> (last visited Jan. 21, 2026).

<sup>13</sup> Cyber Florida, *Critical Infrastructure Program*, available at <https://cyberflorida.org/cip/> (last visited Jan. 21, 2026).

<sup>14</sup> Cyber Florida, *Operation K12*, available at <https://cyberflorida.org/opk12/> (last visited Jan. 21, 2026).

<sup>15</sup> Cyber Florida, *CyberWorks*, available at <https://cyberflorida.org/cyberworks/> (last visited Jan. 21, 2026).

<sup>16</sup> Cyber Florida, *CyberHub*, available at <https://cyberflorida.org/florida-cyberhub/> (last visited Jan. 21, 2026).

- The Security Operations Center Apprentice Program (SOCAP), which is a paid internship program for USF students studying cybersecurity.<sup>17</sup>
- PhaseZero, which fills critical gaps in funding for cybersecurity entrepreneurs and fosters research partnerships.<sup>18</sup>
- The Cybersecurity and Information Technology Pathways Program, partnered with the Florida Department of Education, to fund projects which prepared students for cybersecurity and IT jobs.<sup>19</sup>
- The NIST Ramps Program, which partners with organizations and laboratories to provide students with hands-on training.<sup>20</sup>

At UWF, the pilot program hosts workforce development and community outreach programs, including:

- The National Cybersecurity Workforce Development Program, CyberSkills2Work, which provides free education and career development for eligible transitioning military, first responders, veterans, military spouses, and government personnel.<sup>21</sup>
- The UWF Florida Cybersecurity Training Program, which provides free training for eligible university, college, K-12, state, county, and city employees.<sup>22</sup>
- The UWF Cyber Skills Exercise, an intensive cybersecurity one-day training program eligible transitioning military members, first responders, veterans, military spouses, and State, Local, Tribal, and Territorial (SLTT) government personnel.<sup>23</sup>
- The Cybersecurity Education in Critical Infrastructure Protection (CECIP) Project, which develops training courses with hands-on, laboratory experiences to offer workforce development certificates.<sup>24</sup>
- GenCyber Experience Camps, which provide K-12 students and teachers with introductory cybersecurity education.<sup>25</sup>
- Cybersecurity Ambassadors, which sends UWF students to K-12 schools in Northwest Florida to teach cybersecurity expertise and awareness.<sup>26</sup>
- CyberPatriot, which is a cybersecurity competition for middle and high school students.<sup>27</sup>
- The 502 Project, partnered with other Florida higher education institutions, which connects high school students with professional mentors and teaches them new cybersecurity skills.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Cyber Florida, *SOCAP*, available at <https://cyberflorida.org/socap/> (last visited Jan. 21, 2026).

<sup>18</sup> Cyber Florida, *phaseZero*, available at <https://cyberflorida.org/phasezero/> (last visited Jan. 21, 2026).

<sup>19</sup> Cyber Florida, *Cyber/IT Pathways*, available at <https://cyberflorida.org/pathways/> (last visited Jan. 21, 2026).

<sup>20</sup> Cyber Florida, *NIST Ramps Program*, available at <https://cyberflorida.org/nist-ramps-program/> (last visited Jan. 21, 2026).

<sup>21</sup> UWF, *Center for Cybersecurity*, available at <https://uwf.edu/centers/center-for-cybersecurity/> (last visited Jan. 21, 2026) (“The University of West Florida Center for Cybersecurity has been awarded a \$9.6 million grant from the U.S. Department of War CIO Cyber Academic Engagement Office to expand the National Cybersecurity Workforce Development Program. The program will prepare over 4,688 professionals over the next two years for 24 industry certifications and 41 emerging cybersecurity and AI work roles through 62 new educational pathways.”).

<sup>22</sup> *Id.*

<sup>23</sup> *Id.* (“These exercises are part of the National Cybersecurity Workforce Development Program, CyberSkills2Work®, and funded by the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA)”).

<sup>24</sup> *Id.*

<sup>25</sup> UWF Center for Cybersecurity, *Community Outreach*, available at <https://uwf.edu/centers/center-for-cybersecurity/community-outreach/> (last visited Jan. 21, 2026).

<sup>26</sup> *Id.*

<sup>27</sup> *Id.*

<sup>28</sup> *Id.*

- ITEN Wired, which is a cybersecurity and IT conference for industry leaders, educators, entrepreneurs.<sup>29</sup>
- Women in CyberSecurity, which is a Florida affiliate group supporting the recruitment, retention, and advancement of women in cybersecurity.<sup>30</sup>

### III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

#### Findings

**Section 1** creates s. 1004.0983, F.S., explaining that two successful pilot programs at USF and the University of West Florida demonstrated the feasibility and effectiveness of combining cybersecurity internships, federal security clearance readiness, and CompTIA Security+ certification as critical elements of workforce development for students.

#### Cybersecurity Program

In subsection (3), the bill creates the Cybersecurity Experiential Internship and Clearance Readiness Program (program) within the department. The department must enter into an agreement with Cyber Florida to implement the program with all NCAE-C-designated state universities and Florida College system institutions.

Under subsection (4) of the bill, the program must:

- Increase the number of experiential cyber risk analyst internships statewide;
- Provide intern-supporting organizations with prioritized analytics, reporting, and risk mitigation action plans to enhance cyber resilience;
- Implement a federal security clearance readiness curriculum;
- Provide CompTIA Security+ certification training and examination;
- Coordinate with government and private sector partners to place graduates in high-demand cybersecurity roles; and
- Provide access to datasets for statewide cyber assessments, research, and development.

Beginning in the 2026-2027 academic year, the bill mandates the program must be available at all current NCAE-C-designated state universities and institutions. The bill states that its provisions expire on October 1, 2031.

#### Reporting

Beginning January 1, 2027, and each subsequent year through 2032, the department must submit a report to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives. The report must include:

- The number of students participating at each institution;
- The number of students who earned CompTIA Security+ certification;
- The number of students who have completed internship and clearance readiness milestones;

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<sup>29</sup> *Id.*

<sup>30</sup> *Id.*

- The number of students who subsequently entered federal, state, or private sector cybersecurity jobs requiring federal public trust or national security clearance;
- Available data on the aforementioned jobs; and
- Recommendations for program improvements, including potential integration with other state workforce initiatives.

**Effective Date**

The bill sets forth an effective date of July 1, 2026.

**IV. Constitutional Issues:****A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:**

None.

**B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:**

None.

**C. Trust Funds Restrictions:**

None.

**D. State Tax or Fee Increases:**

None.

**E. Other Constitutional Issues:**

None identified.

**V. Fiscal Impact Statement:****A. Tax/Fee Issues:**

None.

**B. Private Sector Impact:**

None.

**C. Government Sector Impact:**

The creation of the Cybersecurity Experiential Internship and Clearance Readiness Program within the Department of Commerce will have a significant, negative yet indeterminate impact on the department. Additionally, there may be increased costs for institutions of higher education to implement this bill.

**VI. Technical Deficiencies:**

None.

**VII. Related Issues:**

None.

**VIII. Statutes Affected:**

This bill creates section 1004.0983 of the Florida Statutes.

**IX. Additional Information:**

- A. **Committee Substitute – Statement of Substantial Changes:**  
(Summarizing differences between the Committee Substitute and the prior version of the bill.)

**CS by Commerce and Tourism Committee on January 21, 2026:**

The amendment removes the section appropriating \$11.9 million to the Department of Commerce to implement the bill.

- B. **Amendments:**

None.



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LEGISLATIVE ACTION

Senate

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House

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The Appropriations Committee on Transportation, Tourism, and  
Economic Development (Calatayud) recommended the following:

**Senate Amendment (with title amendment)**

Delete everything after the enacting clause  
and insert:

Section 1. Section 1004.0983, Florida Statutes, is created  
to read:

1004.0983 Cybersecurity Experiential Learning Program.—

(1)(a) The Legislature finds that this state's  
cybersecurity workforce is essential to state and national  
security, multi-sector state economic resilience, and the



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protection of critical infrastructure. The Legislature also finds that this state has a persistent shortfall in its supply of qualified cybersecurity professionals relative to the workforce demand, and that the growing integration of digital technologies in all economic sectors will exacerbate this workforce gap in the future.

(b) The Legislature further finds that there are examples of successful cybersecurity experiential learning opportunities across the state university system, including an experiential cyber program at the University of South Florida, and a combined security clearance readiness and cyber certification program at the University of West Florida. Both institutions are designated as National Security Agency National Centers of Academic Excellence in Cybersecurity (NCAE-C).

(c) The Legislature further finds that expansion of experiential learning opportunities in cybersecurity for students at state universities and Florida College System institutions is likely to accelerate the development of a highly qualified cybersecurity workforce. This expanded capacity to develop a more qualified cybersecurity workforce is necessary to close existing gaps and keep pace with the growth in demand for cybersecurity talent within this state.

(2)(a) Subject to legislative appropriation, the Department of Commerce shall create and operate the Cybersecurity Experiential Learning Program in the 2026-2027 fiscal year.

(b) The Department of Commerce must use 10 percent of the appropriated funds in the 2026-2027 fiscal year to enter into an agreement with Cyber Florida within the University of South Florida to collaborate in designing the program for





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implementation at a minimum of one state university or Florida College System institution during the 2026-2027 school year, and to plan for the expansion of the program to additional sites and additional national security-focused workforces in future years.

(3) Cyber Florida shall determine and report back to the department on the following:

(a) The specific internship opportunities and experiential learning opportunities that the United States Department of Commerce's National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) believes will be the most impactful on a student's job placement in high-demand cybersecurity roles in the state, including an assessment of when completing a federal security clearance readiness program will assist certain students in job placement in this state.

(b) A review of best practices for cybersecurity experiential learning opportunities in place at other NCAE-C-designated institutions within and outside of this state which can be replicated at institutions across this state.

(c) A recommendation for the minimum qualifications a student should possess or meet prior to enrolling in an experiential learning program.

(d) A listing of the state universities and Florida College System institutions that wish to participate in the program, along with an expected number of students to be served by the program at each participating institution during the fiscal year. Cyber Florida shall make a recommendation to the department for the disbursement of available funds for the program to maximize statewide impact, improve students' job placement, and support economic growth in this state's defense



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industry.

(e) A listing of employers in this state with openings or anticipated openings in cybersecurity roles or other industries that perform work that requires a security clearance.

(4) (a) In each fiscal year in which funds are appropriated to the program, or where an unspent balance for the program remains from a prior year's appropriation which can continue to support the program's operations, the Department of Commerce may:

1. Implement the program and directly disburse the funds to participating institutions. Such funds may be used to cover the cost of students going through the security clearance process;  
or

2. Enter into a mutually agreed upon multi-year contract with Cyber Florida to administer the program statewide and disburse the available funding to participating institutions.

(b) Any disbursement of funds under this subsection is subject to approval by the department.

(5) Beginning January 15, 2028, and on each January 15 following the completion of a fiscal year in which the program operates, the Department of Commerce shall submit a report to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives which includes all the following:

(a) The number of students participating in experiential learning opportunities at each participating institution and a listing of the specific outcomes, skills, or credentials, including security clearances, earned by students through the program which contributed to job placement.

(b) The number of students who completed an experiential



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learning opportunity through the program who subsequently  
reported entering federal, state, or private sector  
cybersecurity positions in the state, and the number of students  
provided security clearance preparation training for other  
fields.

(c) Recommendations for program improvements, including  
potential integration with other state workforce initiatives and  
potentially expanding the program to workforces supporting  
national security such as defense manufacturing and aerospace  
related engineering fields.

(6) This section expires on July 1, 2032.

Section 2. This act shall take effect July 1, 2026.

===== T I T L E   A M E N D M E N T =====

And the title is amended as follows:

Delete everything before the enacting clause  
and insert:

A bill to be entitled

An act relating to cybersecurity internships; creating  
s. 1004.0983, F.S.; providing legislative findings;  
requiring the Department of Commerce to create the  
Cybersecurity Experiential Learning Program in a  
specified fiscal year, subject to legislative  
appropriation; requiring the department use a certain  
percentage of appropriated funds in a specified fiscal  
year to enter into an agreement with Cyber Florida at  
the University of South Florida to collaborate in  
designing the program for implementation and plan for  
expansion of the program; requiring Cyber Florida to



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127        report specified information to the department;  
128        providing the department with authorized uses of  
129        unspent funds; requiring that disbursement of funds is  
130        subject to department approval; requiring the  
131        department to submit an annual report by a specified  
132        date to the Governor and the Legislature; providing  
133        requirements for the report; providing for the  
134        expiration of the program; providing an effective  
135        date.

By the Committee on Commerce and Tourism; and Senator Calatayud

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A bill to be entitled

An act relating to cybersecurity internships; creating s. 1004.0983, F.S.; providing legislative findings; providing legislative intent; creating the Cybersecurity Experiential Internship and Clearance Readiness Program within the Department of Commerce; requiring the department to enter into an agreement with the Florida Center for Cybersecurity (Cyber Florida) to implement the program in collaboration with specified universities and institutions; requiring that the program include specified components; requiring that the program be available at specified universities and institutions beginning in a specified academic year; requiring the department, using data and analyses provided by Cyber Florida, to submit a report by a specified date and annually thereafter to the Governor and the Legislature; providing requirements for the report; providing for expiration of the program; providing an effective date.

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

Section 1. Section 1004.0983, Florida Statutes, is created to read:

1004.0983 Cybersecurity Experiential Internship and Clearance Readiness Program.—

(1)(a) The Legislature finds that this state's cybersecurity workforce is essential to state and national

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30 security, multi-sector state economic resilience, and the  
31 protection of critical infrastructure. The Legislature also  
32 finds that this state has a persistent shortfall in its supply  
33 of qualified cybersecurity professionals relative to the  
34 workforce demand and that the growing integration of digital  
35 technologies in all economic sectors will exacerbate this  
36 workforce gap in the future.

37 (b) The Legislature further finds that the elements of the  
38 program described in this section were successfully tested and  
39 refined in two pilot programs: an experiential cyber internship  
40 program with the University of South Florida and a combined  
41 security clearance readiness and cyber certification program  
42 with the University of West Florida. Both schools are designated  
43 as National Security Agency National Centers of Academic  
44 Excellence in Cybersecurity (NCAE-C). The successful pilot  
45 programs demonstrated the feasibility and effectiveness of  
46 combining cybersecurity experiential internships, federal  
47 security clearance readiness preparation, and CompTIA Security+  
48 certification for students as critical elements of workforce  
49 development.

50 (c) The Legislature further finds that expansion of this  
51 program statewide to all NCAE-C-designated state universities  
52 and Florida College System institutions will accelerate the  
53 development of a highly qualified, clearance-ready cybersecurity  
54 workforce. This expanded capacity to develop a more qualified  
55 cybersecurity workforce is necessary to both close existing gaps  
56 and keep pace with the growth in demand for cybersecurity talent  
57 within this state.

58 (2) (a) The Legislature intends to establish the

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59 Cybersecurity Experiential Internship and Clearance Readiness  
60 Program across all NCAE-C-designated state universities and  
61 Florida College System institutions, beginning with the 2026-  
62 2027 academic year.

63 (b) The Legislature further intends to sustain the program  
64 through the 2030-2031 academic year and establish clear metrics  
65 and reporting requirements to measure the impact on this state's  
66 workforce and national security posture.

67 (3) The Cybersecurity Experiential Internship and Clearance  
68 Readiness Program is created within the Department of Commerce.  
69 The department shall enter into an agreement with the Florida  
70 Center for Cybersecurity (Cyber Florida) at the University of  
71 South Florida, to implement the program in collaboration with  
72 all NCAE-C-designated state universities and Florida College  
73 System institutions.

74 (4) The program shall include all of the following  
75 components:

76 (a) Increasing the number of experiential cyber risk  
77 analyst internships statewide by using an instrumented platform  
78 of automated assessments with employers based in this state in  
79 the defense, finance, health care, transportation, utility, and  
80 critical infrastructure sectors.

81 (b) Providing intern-supporting organizations with  
82 actionable, prioritized analytics, reporting, and risk  
83 mitigation action plans to enhance cyber resilience across this  
84 state.

85 (c) Delivering a federal security clearance readiness  
86 curriculum, including comprehensive background checks  
87 preparation, national security information and protection

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88 training, clearance application preparation and vetting, and  
89 mentoring for selected participants.

90 (d) Providing CompTIA Security+ certification training and  
91 examination for selected participants.

92 (e) Coordinating with state, federal, and private sector  
93 partners to facilitate placement of graduates in high-demand  
94 cybersecurity roles.

95 (f) Providing access to datasets for statewide cyber  
96 assessments, research, and development.

97 (5) Beginning in the 2026-2027 academic year, the program  
98 must be available at all currently NCAE-C-designated state  
99 universities and Florida College System institutions.

100 (6) (a) Beginning January 1, 2027, and annually thereafter  
101 through January 1, 2032, the department, using data and analyses  
102 provided by Cyber Florida as required by the agreement under  
103 subsection (3), shall submit a report to the Governor, the  
104 President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of  
105 Representatives.

106 (b) The report must include all of the following:

107 1. The number of students participating in internships,  
108 clearance readiness preparation, and CompTIA Security+  
109 certification programs at each institution.

110 2. The number of students who have earned CompTIA Security+  
111 certification and the number of students who have completed  
112 internship and clearance readiness milestones.

113 3. The number of students who subsequently reported  
114 entering federal, state, or private sector cybersecurity  
115 positions requiring a federal public trust or national security  
116 clearance, and any available data on those positions.



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117        4. Recommendations for program improvements, including  
118 potential integration with other state workforce initiatives.

119        (7) This section expires October 1, 2031.

120        Section 2. This act shall take effect July 1, 2026.