

Tab 1		SB 110 by Simon; Similar to H 01427 Rural Communities					
406258	D	S	RCS	FP, Simon	Delete everything after	03/13 10:24 AM	

Tab 2		SB 7012 by CF; Similar to H 01127 Child Welfare					
912172	A	S	RCS	FP, Grall	Delete L.74 - 76:	03/13 10:25 AM	
119236	A	S	RCS	FP, Grall	btw L.281 - 282:	03/13 10:25 AM	

The Florida Senate
COMMITTEE MEETING EXPANDED AGENDA

FISCAL POLICY
Senator Gruters, Chair
Senator Osgood, Vice Chair

MEETING DATE: Thursday, March 13, 2025

TIME: 8:30—11:30 a.m.

PLACE: Pat Thomas Committee Room, 412 Knott Building

MEMBERS: Senator Gruters, Chair; Senator Osgood, Vice Chair; Senators Arrington, Avila, Bernard, Boyd, Bradley, Burton, Calatayud, Davis, Gaetz, Ingoglia, Jones, Leek, Passidomo, Rodriguez, Simon, Truenow, and Yarborough

TAB	BILL NO. and INTRODUCER	BILL DESCRIPTION and SENATE COMMITTEE ACTIONS	COMMITTEE ACTION
1	SB 110 Simon (Similar H 1427, Compare H 1397, S 1662)	Rural Communities; Requiring the state land planning agency to give preference for technical assistance funding to local governments located in a rural area of opportunity; authorizing eligible counties to receive a distribution of sales and use tax revenue; creating the Office of Rural Prosperity within the Department of Commerce; creating the Public Infrastructure Smart Technology Grant Program within the Office of Rural Prosperity; requiring, rather than authorizing, that certain funds received from the State Transportation Trust Fund be used for the Small County Road Assistance Program, etc. CA 03/03/2025 Favorable FP 03/13/2025 Fav/CS	Fav/CS Yeas 19 Nays 0
2	SB 7012 Children, Families, and Elder Affairs (Similar H 1127)	Child Welfare; Requiring the Department of Children and Families to provide specified assessment data to the Legislature as part of a certain annual report relating to the commercial sexual exploitation of children; requiring the department to develop a child protective investigator and case manager recruitment program for a specified purpose; subject to an appropriation and beginning on a specified date, requiring the department to develop a 4-year pilot program for treatment foster care, etc. FP 03/13/2025 Fav/CS	Fav/CS Yeas 18 Nays 0

Other Related Meeting Documents

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.)

Prepared By: The Professional Staff of the Committee on Fiscal Policy

BILL: CS/SB 110

INTRODUCER: Fiscal Policy Committee and Senator Simon

SUBJECT: Rural Communities

DATE: March 14, 2025

REVISED: 3/17/25

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	<u>Fleming</u>	<u>Fleming</u>	<u>CA</u>	Favorable
2.	<u>Fleming</u>	<u>Siples</u>	<u>FP</u>	Fav/CS

Please see Section IX. for Additional Information:

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE - Substantial Changes

I. Summary:

CS/SB 110 addresses a number of issues for the benefit of rural communities in the state. Namely, the bill creates a statewide office to coordinate the advancement of rural communities and opportunity therein, and to that aim amends a swathe of programs and regulations across various departments and policy areas.

Regarding the Department of Commerce (department), the bill creates the Office of Rural Prosperity (office) within the department to serve as the state's dedicated office for rural local governments. The bill transfers administration of existing rural community grant programs currently administered by the department, to the newly established office, and creates two new grant programs benefitting rural communities: the Renaissance Grant Program and the Public Infrastructure Smart Technology Grant Program.

Among other directives, the office is responsible for:

- Providing training and technical assistance to rural local governments;
- Creating an online Rural Resource Directory for rural local governments to navigate available state and federal resources and funding opportunities; and
- Establishing a network of seven regional rural community liaison centers across the state to provide in-person state support to rural communities to enhance communication and increase access to state and federal resources for rural areas of the state.

The bill also:

- Enhances the Rural Economic Development Initiative to promote rural local government participation in state grant and other program opportunities and evaluate opportunities to waive certain grant program requirements for rural governments;
- Directs OPPAGA to routinely evaluate the effectiveness of the office and also study strategies implemented by other states to support and enhance rural communities; and
- Directs OPPAGA and the Office of Economic and Demographic Research to jointly review the impact of Florida Statutes on rural communities and evaluate whether appropriate metrics are applied in current law to define rural areas and communities.

To further healthcare access in rural communities, the bill:

- Creates the Stroke, Cardiac, and Obstetric Response and Education (SCORE) Grant Program within the Department of Health (DOH) to implement training, purchase equipment, establish telehealth capabilities, and develop quality improvement programs with the goal of improving patient outcomes and increasing access to high-quality stroke, cardiac, and obstetric care in rural communities;
- Creates the Rural Access to Primary and Preventative Care Grant Program (RAPP-C) program within the DOH to provide incentive funding for primary care physicians, physician assistants, and autonomous Advanced Practice Registered Nurses to open new practice locations in rural and underserved areas of the state; and
- Expands the existing Rural Hospital Capital Improvement Grant Program (RHCI) to allow rural hospitals to use grant funds to establish mobile care units to provide primary care services, behavioral health services, or obstetric and gynecological services in rural health professional shortage areas (HPSA) or to establish telehealth kiosks to provide urgent care services in rural HPSAs.

Regarding the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), the bill:

- Creates the Florida Arterial Road Modernization (FARM) program to provide investment in rural arterial roads to enhance the safety, reliability and resiliency for critical state facilities;
- Provides additional annual funds to the FDOT to enhance the Small County Road Assistance Program (SCRAP) and revises Small County Outreach Program (SCOP) funding eligibility requirements; and
- Improves connectivity between rural agricultural areas and market distribution centers

Regarding the Department of Education, the bill:

- Expands authorized services under regional consortium service organizations (regional consortia), increases to \$150,000 the per member funding for such regional consortia, and authorizes all revenue to be carried forward for specified purposes;
- Creates the Regional Consortia Service Organization Supplemental Services Program to provide additional financial resources for regional consortia to provide specified programs and services to school districts and consortia members;
- Establishes the Rural Incentive for Professional Educators program to provide a student loan repayment of up to \$15,000 for teachers and administrators to live and work at a public or private school in rural areas of opportunity;

- Removes the requirement that school districts receiving funds under the Special Facility Construction Account (SFCA) budget toward the project the value of 1 mill from its discretionary ad valorem levy; and
- Modifies the calculation for the deducted amount from total tax revenue that must be shared with district charter schools for future projects under the SFCA.

Regarding affordable housing, the bill:

- Provides funding for and directs the Florida Housing Finance Corporation to issue competitive requests for application to preserve multifamily housing funded through U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) loans in rural areas;
- Authorizes local governments to utilize a certain percentage of State Housing Initiatives Program (SHIP) funds on projects to preserve USDA-financed multifamily housing in rural areas; and
- Increases the minimum SHIP allocation from \$350,000 to \$1 million for counties and eligible municipalities.

Regarding fiscally constrained counties, the bill:

- Amends the criteria for being designated as a fiscally constrained county;
- Changes the revenue source for the fiscally constrained counties distribution from the direct-to-home satellite service tax to sales tax;
- Provides to fiscally constrained counties a distribution from sales tax in an amount equal to no less than \$50 million each fiscal year; and
- Makes several changes to the fiscally constrained counties distribution, including changing distribution factors for allocating revenue among counties and creating spending requirements.

The bill makes several appropriations to the Department of Commerce (\$16.8 million recurring general revenue, \$74.7 million nonrecurring general revenue, and \$750,000 recurring trust fund); the Department of Education (\$35.6 million recurring general revenue); and the Department of Health (\$7.7 million recurring general revenue, \$55 million nonrecurring general revenue, and \$10.3 million recurring trust fund). The bill redirects funds to the Department of Transportation for specific purposes, but requires the department to submit budget amendments to receive the funds. The bill also provides for an increased share of state tax revenues for fiscally constrained counties. See Section V. Fiscal Impact Statement.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2025.

II. Present Situation:

The present situation for each issue is described below in Section III, Effect of Proposed Changes.

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

Present Situation:

The Department of Commerce

The Department of Commerce (department) is Florida's lead agency for working with the Legislature, state agencies, business leaders, and economic development professionals to formulate and implement coherent and consistent policies and strategies designed to promote economic opportunities for all Floridians.¹ The department is also the state's chief agency for business recruitment and expansion.² The department must also promote viable, sustainable communities by providing technical assistance and guidance on growth and development issues, grants, and other assistance to local communities.³

The head of the department is the Secretary of Commerce, who is appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate.⁴ The secretary may create offices within the Office of the Secretary and within the divisions to promote efficient and effective operation of the department.⁵ The department must also ensure that the state's goals and policies relating to economic development, workforce development, community planning and development, and affordable housing are fully integrated with appropriate implementation strategies.⁶

To achieve these goals, the Legislature established seven divisions and offices within the department:

- Economic Development
- Community Development
- Workforce Services
- Finance and Administration
- Information Technology
- Office of the Secretary
- Office of Economic Accountability and Transparency⁷

The agency is charged with managing the activities of public-private partnerships and state agencies in order to avoid duplication and promote coordinated and consistent implementation of programs including among other things, rural community development.⁸ This includes stimulation of economic development and job creation in rural areas, including strategies for rural marketing and the development of infrastructure in rural areas.⁹ Additionally, the department runs a number of financial and grant programs aimed at helping small rural communities in Florida.

¹ Section 20.60(4), F.S.

² *Id.*

³ Section 20.60(4)(c), F.S.

⁴ Section 20.60(2), F.S.

⁵ Section 20.60(3)(b), F.S.

⁶ Section 20.60(3), F.S.

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ Section 20.60(4)(e), F.S.

⁹ Section 20.60(5)(a)4.c., F.S.

*Effect of Proposed Changes:***Office of Rural Prosperity**

The bill creates the Office of Rural Prosperity (office) within the department for the purpose of supporting rural communities, helping navigate available state and federal resources, and representing rural interests across state government. The office will serve as the state point of contact for rural local governments and will administer various rural-focused grant programs currently administered by the department, as well as new programs created in the bill.

Section 1 amends s. 20.60, F.S., to formally designate the office as one of eight permanent offices or divisions under the department.

Section 11 creates s. 288.013, F.S., to establish the framework and responsibilities of the office. The office will be led by a director, who will be appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate.

The bill directs the office to provide training and technical assistance to rural local governments on various community and economic development topics. Offered either in person or online, the training and technical assistance must, at a minimum, address the following:

- Accessing state and federal resources;
- Best practices relating to comprehensive planning, economic development, and land development in rural communities;
- Strategies to address management and administrative capacity challenges for rural local governments; and
- Requirements or recent changes to the Community Planning Act and other state and federal laws affecting rural local governments.

Rural Resource Directory

The bill directs the office to create and maintain an online Rural Resource Directory to serve as an interactive tool to help rural local governments navigate state and federal resources, tools, and services available to them. The directory must allow users to search by various indicators and receive notifications when new or modified resources are available. Each state agency must provide information and updates to the office for inclusion in the directory and, to the greatest extent possible, the directory must include information on local financial match requirements for state and federal grant programs.

Regional Rural Community Liaison Centers

By October 1, 2025, the office must establish and staff 7 regional rural community liaison centers across the state for the purpose of providing in-person state support to rural local governments. The office must by rule divide the state into 7 regions and assign a liaison center to each region. Each liaison center will be staffed with at least two full-time department personnel

who will be responsive to the rural local governments within the respective region. Specifically, liaison centers are required, at a minimum, to do the following:

- Work with local governments to plan and achieve goals for local or regional growth, economic development, and rural prosperity;
- Facilitate access to state and federal resources, such as grants, loans, and other aid or resources;
- Advise on waivers for rural local governments for certain requirements for state and federal programs, such as local financial match waivers;
- Coordinate technical assistance needs with the department and other state or federal agencies;
- Promote model ordinances, policies, and strategies related to economic development;
- Regularly engage with the Rural Economic Development Initiative; and
- Assist local governments with regulatory and reporting compliance.

Annual Report

By December 1, 2025, and each year thereafter, the office director must submit to the President of the Senate, the Speaker of the House of Representative, and the Administration Commission a written report describing the office's operations and accomplishments for the preceding year. The report must also be presented by the office director in-person at a meeting of the Administration Commission and posted to the office website. In preparing the report, the office must consult with the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services on recommendations for policies, programs, and funding to further support the needs of rural communities.

OPPAGA Reports

The bill directs OPPAGA to produce the following revolving reports relating to the office and rural communities in Florida:

- By December 15, 2026, and every year thereafter until 2028, OPPAGA must review the effectiveness of the office and submit a report of its findings to the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives. Beginning in 2029, the frequency of the review is reduced to every 3 years.
- By December 15, 2027, and every 3 years thereafter, OPPAGA must review strategies implemented by other states on rural community preservation, enhancement, and revitalization and report on their effectiveness and potential for implementation in Florida. The report must be submitted to the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives.
- By December 15, 2026, OPPAGA must review each state-funded or state-administered grant and loan program for local governments for local financial match requirements and evaluate whether waivers for rural local governments may be appropriate. The review must also evaluate application evaluation criteria for such program and whether special accommodations or preferences for rural local governments may be appropriate. The report must be submitted to the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

Section 46 appropriates \$1,827,591 in recurring funds and \$652,327 in nonrecurring funds from the General Revenue Fund to the to the Department of Commerce for the staffing and operation of the Office of Rural Prosperity, which includes funding for 17 full-time equivalent positions for the office.

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.¹⁰ Today, the REDI operates as a statewide initiative led by the Department of Commerce (department) to better serve Florida's rural communities by providing a more focused and coordinated effort among state and regional agencies to improve the fiscal, economic, and community viability of these areas.¹¹

Specified agencies and organizations¹² 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 REDI and helps to identify opportunities to accommodate or include rural local governments in their agency programs.

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.¹³ 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.¹⁴

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 REDI.¹⁵ REDI must call a meeting within 30 days of receipt of such proposals for comment and recommendation.¹⁶ Waivers and reductions must be requested by the

¹⁰ Section 288.0656(1)(a), F.S.

¹¹ Section 288.0656(3), F.S.

¹² 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.

¹³ Section 288.0656(4), F.S.

¹⁴ Section 288.0656(2)(e), F.S.

¹⁵ Section 288.06561, F.S.

¹⁶ Section 288.06561(3), F.S.

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.¹⁷ REDI must prepare an annual report as a supplement to the Department of Commerce's annual report which includes in an evaluation on the status of changes to rules, number of awards made with waivers, and recommendations for future changes.¹⁸

Based on recommendations of the REDI, the Governor may designate up to three rural areas of opportunity (RAOs) by executive order,¹⁹ 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 development of projects designated by the RAO that has been recommended by the department.²⁰

Rural Area of Opportunity

A RAO is a rural community,²¹ 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.²² An area may also be designated as an RAO if it presents a unique economic development opportunity of regional impact.²³ 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.²⁴

This designation establishes these areas as priority assignments for REDI and allows the Governor, acting through 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 Program²⁵, the Quick Response Training Program for participants in the welfare transition program²⁶, transportation projects,²⁷ the brownfield redevelopment bonus refund²⁸, and the rural job tax credit program.²⁹

¹⁷ Section 288.06561(4) and (7), F.S.

¹⁸ Section 288.06561(8), F.S.

¹⁹ Section 288.0656(7)(a), F.S.

²⁰ Executive Orders 20-170, 21-149, and 23-132 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_21-149.pdf, and <https://www.flgov.com/eog/sites/default/files/executive-orders/2024/EO-23-132.pdf> (last visited Feb. 25, 2025)

²¹ Section 288.0656(2)(e), F.S.

²² Section 288.0656(2)(d), F.S.

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ Section 288.0656(7)(b), F.S.

²⁵ Section 288.047, F.S.

²⁶ Section 288.047(8), F.S.

²⁷ Section 339.2821, F.S.

²⁸ Section 288.107, F.S.

²⁹ Sections 212.098 and 220.1895, F.S.

Currently, there are three designated RAO areas:

- Northwest RAO: Calhoun, Franklin, Gadsden, Gulf, Holmes, Jackson, Liberty, Wakulla, and Washington counties, and portions of Walton County (the City of Freeport and lands north of the Choctawhatchee Bay and intercoastal waterway).
- South Central RAO: DeSoto, Glades, Hardee, Hendry, Highlands, and Okeechobee counties, and the cities of Pahokee, Belle Glade, and South Bay in Palm Beach County and the city of Immokalee in Collier County.
- North Central RAO: Baker, Bradford, Columbia, Dixie, Gilchrist, Hamilton, Jefferson, Lafayette, Levy, Madison, Putnam, Suwannee, Taylor, and Union counties.³⁰

Effect of Proposed Changes:

Section 19 amends s. 288.0656, F.S., to modernize the REDI statute to enhance the visibility and effectiveness of the program. Specifically, the bill:

- Moves creation of the REDI from within the department generally, to the Office of Rural Prosperity;
- Requires REDI to meet at least monthly and requires the REDI representative or his or her designee to be physically present or available electronically;
- Provides a legislative finding that rural communities are the essential conduits for the economy's distribution, manufacturing, and food supply;
- Removes a reference to "economically distressed" rural communities to broaden REDI's reach to all rural communities;
- Requires enhanced reporting on projects being coordinated by REDI and enhanced reporting on program requirement waivers granted to rural communities;
- Requires REDI to provide legislative recommendations for statutory waivers or reductions for economic development programs for rural applicants; and
- Repeals obsolete language regarding rural enterprise zones, catalyst projects, and catalyst sites.

Section 15 amends s. 288.019, F.S., to enhance rural considerations in grant review and evaluation processes. The bill requires REDI member agencies and organizations to review grant and loan application evaluation criteria and scoring procedures to ensure full access for rural communities. Each agency must develop a proposal to modify evaluation and scoring procedures to accommodate rural communities, including opportunities to waive or reduce required financial match requirements.

Section 16 amend s. 288.021, F.S., to require that when practicable, the staff member appointed as the economic development liaison of a state agency shall also serve as the agency representative for the REDI.

³⁰ Department of Commerce, *Rural Areas of Opportunity*, available at <https://floridajobs.org/community-planning-and-development/rural-community-programs/rural-areas-of-opportunity> (last visited Feb. 25, 2025). The economic development organizations for these RAOs are named Opportunity Florida, Florida's Heartland Regional Economic Development Initiative, and the North Florida Economic Development Partnership, respectively.

Section 20 repeals s. 288.06561, F.S., pertaining to reduction or waivers of financial match requirements. The general substance of this statute is incorporated into the revisions of section 15 of the bill.

Section 25 repeals s. 290.06561, which is a remnant statute from the repealed Enterprise Zone program.

Effect of Proposed Changes:

Renaissance Grant Program

Section 12 creates s. 288.014, F.S., to establish the Renaissance Grant Program to be administered by the Office of Rural Prosperity (office). Under the program, the office will provide \$1 million block grants to counties which are “growth-impaired,” meaning a county has had a declining population over the last ten years, as certified by the Office of Economic and Demographic Research (EDR). By October 1, 2025, the EDR must certify to the office which counties are growth-impaired. After the initial certification, the EDR shall annually certify whether each participating county remains growth-impaired, until the county has three consecutive years of population growth.

Participating counties must enter into an agreement with the office to receive the \$1 million block grant and have broad authority to design a specific plan to achieve population growth within the specified parameters.

Participating counties must design a plan to make targeted investments in the community to achieve population growth and increase the economic vitality of the community. The plan must incorporate the following key features:

- Technology centers with extended hours located within schools and administered by the local school boards;
- Facilities that co-locate adult day care with childcare facilities; and
- Technology labs managed by Florida College System institutions or career centers.

Each participating county must hire a renaissance coordinator who is responsible for overseeing the use of funds, coordinating with other entities, and complying with reporting requirements. Upon request, the regional rural community liaison center staff must provide training and assistance to the renaissance coordinator.

The bill directs the Auditor General to conduct an operational audit of each participating county’s grant program every two years, beginning in 2026. Additionally, on December 31, 2026, and each year thereafter, the EDR must submit an annual report of grant recipients by county to the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

The Renaissance Grant Program expires in 2040.

Section 47 appropriates \$8 million in recurring funds from the General Revenue Fund to the Office of Rural Prosperity for the Renaissance Grant Program. No funds may be used by the state for administrative costs.

*Effect of Proposed Changes:***Public Infrastructure Smart Technology Grants**

Sections 13 creates s. 288.0175, F.S., to establish the Public Infrastructure Smart Technology Grant Program to be administered by the Office of Rural Prosperity (office). The program is created to fund and support infrastructure projects in rural communities that utilize smart technology to increase efficiency, enhance public services, and promote sustainable development.

The bill directs the office to contract with one or more not-for-profit entities (lead organization) that specializes in smart regional planning to provide grants to counties and municipalities within a rural area of opportunity for public infrastructure smart technology projects. The bill defines “public infrastructure smart technology” as systems and applications that use connectivity, data analytics, automation to improve public infrastructure by increasing efficiency, enhancing public services, and promoting sustainable development.

The office contract must require a lead organization to:

- Collaborate with rural counties and municipalities to identify opportunities to institute cost-effective smart technology, and provide technical assistance; and
- Assist such counties and municipalities in connecting with other communities, companies, and other entities to leverage the impact of each public infrastructure smart technology project.

The office must include in its annual report a description of the projects funded under this program.

Section 48 appropriates \$500,000 in recurring funds from the Grants and Donations Trust Fund to the Office of Rural Prosperity for the Smart Technology Grant Program.

*Present Situation:***Florida Office of Broadband**

The Office of Broadband (office) is an office created within the Division of Community Development³¹ in the Department of Commerce (department) for the purpose of providing broadband internet service to residents of Florida including: libraries, schools, colleges and universities, health care providers, and community organizations.³² Under the office, the department may apply for and accept federal funds, enter into contracts, and establish any committee or workgroups to administer the program.³³

³¹ Section 288.9961(4), F.S.

³² Section 288.9961(1), F.S.

³³ Section 288.9961(5), F.S.

Effect of Proposed Changes:

Section 24 amends s. 288.9961, F.S., to:

- Require the Office of Broadband to consult with regional rural community liaisons centers to assist with providing feedback from rural communities in applying for federal grants for broadband internet services.
- Require annual and quarterly reports be submitted to Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives detailing broadband implementation in rural, unserved, and underserved communities, as well as operations and accomplishments of the office.

*Present Situation:***Regional Rural Development Grants Program**

The Regional Rural Development Grants Program was established to provide funding, through matching grants, to build the professional capacity of regionally based economic development organizations located in rural communities. The concept of building the professional capacity of an economic development organization includes hiring professional staff to develop, deliver, and provide economic development professional services. Professional services includes technical assistance, education and leadership development, marketing, and project recruitment.³⁴

Applications submitted to the Department of Commerce (department) for funding through this program must provide proof:³⁵

- Of official commitments of support from each of the units of local government represented by the regional organization;
- That the regional organization is in existence and actively involved in economic development activities serving the region; and
- Of the manner in which the organization coordinates its efforts with those other local and state organizations.

A contract or agreement that involves the expenditure of grant funds must include:³⁶

- The purpose of the contract or agreement.
- Specific performance standards and responsibilities for each entity under the contract or agreement.
- A detailed project or contract budget, if applicable.
- The value of any services provided.
- The projected travel expenses for employees and board members, if applicable.

An organization may receive up to \$50,000 a year or \$250,000 for any three regional economic development organizations that serve an entire RAO.³⁷ The department is authorized to spend up

³⁴ Section 288.018(1)(b), F.S.

³⁵ Section 288.018(2), F.S.

³⁶ Section 288.018(3)(a), F.S.

³⁷ Section 288.018(1)(c), F.S.

to \$750,000 each fiscal year from funds appropriated to the Rural Community Development Revolving Loan Fund to carry out this program.³⁸

Effect of Proposed Changes:

Section 14 amends s. 288.018, F.S., to move administration of the program from the Department of Commerce generally, to the Office of Rural Prosperity.

Present Situation:

Rural Infrastructure Fund

The Rural Infrastructure Fund is a grant program created to facilitate the planning, preparing, and financing of infrastructure projects in rural communities.³⁹ The program provides access to federal and state infrastructure funding programs, including, but not limited to, those offered by the United States Departments of Agriculture and Commerce and including those offered by Rural Economic Development Initiative agencies.⁴⁰ The program funds total infrastructure project grants, infrastructure feasibility grants, and preclearance review grants.

The Department of Commerce (department) may award grants for up to 75 percent of the total infrastructure cost, or up to 100 percent of the total infrastructure project cost for a project that is located in a rural community that is also located in a fiscally constrained county⁴¹ or a RAO.⁴² Additionally, projects may include improving any inadequate infrastructure that has resulted in regulatory action that prohibits economic or community growth or reducing the costs to community users of proposed infrastructure improvements that exceed such costs in comparable communities.

Eligible uses of funds include improvements to public infrastructure for industrial or commercial sites and upgrades to or development of public tourism infrastructure.⁴³ Infrastructure can include public or public-private partnership facilities, like storm water systems, telecommunication, roads or other remedies to transportation impediments, nature-based tourism facilities and physical requirements necessary to facilitate tourism, trade, and economic development activities.⁴⁴ The department may award grants of up to \$300,000 for infrastructure feasibility studies, design and engineering activities, or other infrastructure planning and preparation activities.⁴⁵ The total project participation grant may be used in conjunction with the infrastructure feasibility grant.

³⁸ Section 288.018(4), F.S.

³⁹ See s. 288.0655, F.S.

⁴⁰ Section 288.0655(2)(b), F.S.

⁴¹ A fiscally constrained country is any county that is entirely within a rural area of opportunity as designated by the Governor pursuant to s. 288.0656, F.S., or each county for which the value of a mill will raise no more than \$5 million in revenue, based on the taxable value certified pursuant to s. 1011.62(4)(a)1.a., F.S., from the previous July 1. Section 218.67(1), F.S.

⁴² Section 288.0655(2)(b), F.S.

⁴³ *Id.*

⁴⁴ Broadband internet service must be provided in partnership with one or more dealers of communications services. Section 288.0655(2)(b), F.S.

⁴⁵ Section 288.0655(2)(c), F.S.

To enable local governments to access the resources the department may award grants for surveys, feasibility studies, and other activities related to the identification and preclearance review of suitable land.⁴⁶ Authorized grants under program may not exceed \$75,000 each, except in the case of a project in a rural area of opportunity, in which case the grant may not exceed \$300,000.⁴⁷

Effect of Proposed Changes:

Sections 18 amends s. 288.0655, F.S., to:

- Move administration of the program from the Department of Commerce generally, to the Office of Rural Prosperity.
- Specifically provide that grant funds may be awarded to a unit of local government within a rural community or a RAO; or to a regional economic development organization, a unit of local government, or certain economic development organizations for an infrastructure project located within an unincorporated area that has a population of 15,000 or less, has been in existence for 100 years or more, is contiguous to a rural community, and has been adversely affected by a natural disaster or presents a unique economic development opportunity of regional impact.
- Clarify that grant funds may be awarded for “site readiness” expenses, which may include clearing title, surveys, permitting, environmental studies, and regulatory compliance costs.
- Require the Office of Rural Prosperity to consult with the Department of Transportation instead of Visit Florida when reviewing applications for funding.
- Require enhanced annual reporting of the program.

Section 50 appropriates \$40 million in nonrecurring funds and \$5 million in recurring funds from the General Revenue Fund to the Office of Rural Prosperity for the Rural Infrastructure Fund.

Present Situation:

Rural Community Development Revolving Loan Fund

The Rural Community Development Revolving Loan Fund Program is administered by the Department of Commerce to facilitate the use of existing federal, state, and local financial resources by providing local governments with financial assistance to further promote the economic viability of rural communities.⁴⁸

The program provides for long-term loans, loan guarantees, and loan loss reserves to units of local governments, or economic development organizations in counties with populations of 75,000 or fewer, or within any county with a population of 125,000 or fewer which is contiguous to a county with a population of 75,000 or fewer.⁴⁹ Loans must be made pursuant to agreements specifying the terms and conditions agreed to between the applicant and the department, and

⁴⁶ Section 288.0655(2)(e), F.S.

⁴⁷ *Id.*

⁴⁸ Section 288.065, (1) F.S.

⁴⁹ Section 288.065, (2)(a) F.S.

loans are the legal obligations of the applicant.⁵⁰ All repayments of principal and interest must be returned to the loan fund and made available for loans to other applicants.

However, in a rural area of opportunity, repayments of principal and interest may be retained by the applicant if repayments are dedicated and matched to fund regionally based economic development organizations representing the rural area of opportunity.⁵¹

Effect of Proposed Changes:

Section 17 amends s. 288.065, F.S., to:

- Move administration of program from the Department of Commerce generally, to the Office of Rural Prosperity.
- Require the Office of Rural Prosperity to include in its annual report detailed information about the fund, including loans made during the previous fiscal year, loans active, loans repaid, and unobligated funds.

Section 49 appropriates \$4 million in nonrecurring funds and \$1 million in recurring funds from General Revenue to the Office of Rural Prosperity for the Rural Community Development Revolving Loan Fund.

Present Situation:

Community Planning Technical Assistance Grants

The Department of Commerce's (department) Community Planning office is charged with providing technical assistance and guidance on growth and development issues, grants, and other assistance to local communities to promote viable, sustainable communities.⁵² Community Planning Technical Assistance (CPTA) Grant Program is administered by the department to provide counties, municipalities and regional planning councils the opportunity to create innovative plans and development strategies to promote a diverse economy, vibrant rural and suburban areas and meet statutory requirements for planning, while also protecting environmentally sensitive areas.⁵³ CPTA grants may also be used to assist with disaster recovery, resiliency and economic development planning.⁵⁴

Projects should relate to community planning and economic development strategies that implement the requirements in the Community Planning Act, as well as workforce development, and workforce housing opportunities.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Section 288.065 (2)(b), F.S.

⁵¹ Section 288.065 (2)(c), F.S.

⁵² Section 20.60 (4)(c), F.S.

⁵³ Department of Commerce, Community Planning Technical Assistance Grants, State Fiscal Year 2024-2025, available at <https://floridajobs.org/community-planning-and-development/programs/community-planning-table-of-contents/technical-assistance/community-planning-technical-assistance-grant> (last viewed January 21, 2025)

⁵⁴ *Id.*

⁵⁵ *Id.*

Effect of Proposed Changes:

Section 2 amends s. 163.3168, F.S., to:

- Require preference to be given to local government applicants located in a rural area of opportunity.
- Require the department to consult with the Office of Rural Prosperity when awarding funding for these grants.

*Present Situation:***Florida Rural Economic Development Strategy Grants**

The Department of Commerce (department), under s. 288.0657, F.S., accepts and administers money which is appropriated to the department for providing grants to assist rural communities in developing and implementing strategic economic development plans.⁵⁶ The rural community must be counties with populations of 75,000 or fewer, or within any county with a population of 125,000 or fewer which is contiguous to a county with a population of 75,000 or fewer, or a municipality therein.⁵⁷ The department must establish criteria for reviewing grant applications under this section. These criteria include, but are not limited to, the degree of participation and commitment by the local community and the application's consistency with local comprehensive planning.⁵⁸

Effect of Proposed Changes:

Section 21 amends s. 288.0657, F.S., to:

- Move administration of the program from the Department of Commerce generally, to the Office of Rural Prosperity.
- Specify that grants may be provided to assist with costs associated with marketing sites to potential businesses for an economic development project;
- Require the regional rural community liaison centers within the Office of Rural Prosperity to provide assistance to those applying for grants.
- Provide that marketing grants may include funding to deploy materials through advertising campaigns and costs associated with marketing, site preparation, meetings, trade missions, and professional development.

Section 51 appropriates \$250,000 in recurring funds from the Grants and Donations Trust Fund to the Office of Rural Prosperity for the Rural Economic Development Strategy Grants.

*Present Situation:***Inventory of Communities Seeking to Recruit Businesses**

Each year by September 30 of each year, a county or municipality that has a population of at least 25,000 or its local economic development organization must submit to the Department of Commerce (department) a brief overview of the strengths, services, and economic development

⁵⁶ Section 288.0657 (2), F.S.

⁵⁷ Section 288.0657 (1), F.S.

⁵⁸ Section 288.0657(4), F.S.

incentives that its community offers.⁵⁹ The local government or its local economic development organization also must identify any industries that it is encouraging to locate or relocate to its area.⁶⁰ Such local governments and organizations seeking to recruit businesses may submit information and may participate in any activity or initiative resulting from the collection, analysis, and reporting of the information to the department.⁶¹

Effect of Proposed Changes:

Section 10 amends s. 288.007, F.S., to require each local government within a rural area of opportunity or its local economic development organization to submit the required information the Department of Commerce to be included in the inventory of communities seeking to recruit businesses.

Present Situation:

Agreements Funded with Federal or State Assistance

Current law requires an agency agreement that provides state financial assistance to a recipient or subrecipient,⁶² 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.⁶³

Current law prohibits an agency agreement that provides state or federal financial assistance to local government entities within an RAO from requiring the local government entity to expend funds in order 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

⁵⁹ Section 288.007, F.S.

⁶⁰ *Id.*

⁶¹ *Id.*

⁶² Section 215.97, F.S., defines a “subrecipient” as a nonstate entity that receives state financial assistance through another nonstate entity.

⁶³ Section 215.971(1)(a)-(g), F.S.

directly, or to undertake other options to meet the requirements of the agreement, allowing local governments in rural areas to be paid without spending their own capital first.⁶⁴

Effect of Proposed Changes:

Section 6 amends s. 215.971, F.S., to:

- Clarify provisions regarding the payment of invoices due and require agencies to expedite such payment requests for local governments.
- Require each state agency to annually report to the Office of Rural Prosperity (office), by August 1, a summary of the implementation of this provision for the previous fiscal year, which shall be incorporated in the office annual report.

Present Situation:

The Florida Small Business Development Center Network

Established in 2008, the Florida Small Business Development Center Network (SBDC) is the principal business assistance organization for small businesses in the state. The purpose of the network is to serve emerging and established for-profit, privately held businesses that maintain a place of business in the state.⁶⁵ The network is a consortium of regional small business development centers throughout the state that offer current and prospective small businesses consulting services, training opportunities, and access to other resources and information.⁶⁶ Regional centers are based at several of Florida's colleges and universities.⁶⁷ The SBDC is run by network's statewide director in consultation with a 19 member statewide advisory board.⁶⁸

The network is funded in part by the U.S. Small Business Administration, Department of Defense, State of Florida through appropriations, and other private and public partners, with the University of West Florida serving as the Network's designated lead host institution.⁶⁹ Half of any state funds received directly by a host institution which are specifically designated for the network are distributed for the following purposes:

- Ensuring that support services are available statewide, especially in underserved and rural areas of the state, to assist eligible businesses;
- Enhancing participation in the network among state universities and colleges; and
- Facilitating the adoption of innovative small business assistance best practices by the regional small business development centers.

⁶⁴ Section 215.971, F.S. (h) F.S.

⁶⁵ Ch. 2008-149, L.O.F., codified as s. 288.001, F.S.

⁶⁶ America's SBDC Florida, *Consulting Services*, available at <https://floridasbdc.org/> (last visited Jan. 26, 2025)

⁶⁷ America's SBDC Florida, *Our Network*, available at <https://floridasbdc.org/> (last visited Jan. 26, 2025)

⁶⁸ Section 288.001 (3)-(4), F.S.

⁶⁹ America's SBDC Florida, *About Funding*, available at <https://floridasbdc.org/about/> (last visited Jan. 26, 2025)

Effect of Proposed Changes:

Section 9 amends s. 288.001, F.S., to:

- Require the SBDC Network to use certain funds for the specific purpose of expanding service in rural communities, including developing an activity plan focused on network consultants and resources in rural communities.
- Increase staffing for “circuit riders” who work with local governments and communities of their region to bring services, including access to capital, technical assistance, and other small business services to the region.

Section 45 appropriates \$1 million in recurring funds from the General Revenue Fund to the Office of Rural Prosperity to implement the requirements of the rural-focused Florida SBDC Network activity.

Visit Florida*Present Situation:*

Visit Florida is the fictitious name for the Florida Tourism Industry Marketing Corporation, a nonprofit corporation established by the Legislature to serve as Florida’s statewide destination marketing organization and represent the state’s tourism industry.⁷⁰ Visit Florida is required to develop a four-year marketing plan for the state that addresses issues such as continuation of tourism growth in Florida, expansion to new or underrepresented markets, coordination with local and private sector partners on tourism advertising, and addressing emergency responses to disasters from a marketing standpoint.⁷¹

In 2017,⁷² the Legislature directed Visit Florida to administer, in partnership with the Department of Commerce, the Targeted Marketing Assistance Program to enhance the tourism business marketing of small, minority, rural, and agritourism businesses in the state.⁷³ The program provides marketing plans, marketing assistance, promotional support, media development, technical expertise, marketing advice, technology training, social marketing support, and other assistance to small independently owned and operated businesses or non-profit organizations.⁷⁴

Effect of Proposed Changes:

Section 22 amends s. 288.1226, F.S., to direct Visit Florida to incorporate into its four-year marketing plan the provision of appropriate marketing assistance resources to small, rural and agritourism businesses in the state. Such resources may include, but are not limited to, marketing plans, marketing assistance, promotional support, media development, technical expertise, marketing advice, technology training, and social marketing support.

⁷⁰ Section 288.1226, F.S.

⁷¹ Section 288.1226(13), F.S.

⁷² Chapter 2017-233, Laws of Fla.

⁷³ Section 288.12266, F.S.

⁷⁴ Section 288.12266(1), F.S.

Section 23 repeals the Targeted Marketing Assistance Program in s. 288.12266, F.S. However, section 22 of the bill incorporates the general goals of the program into Visit Florida’s four-year marketing program.

Present Situation:

Fiscally Constrained Counties

Fiscally constrained counties are counties entirely within an RAO or where a 1-mill levy would raise no more than \$5 million in annual tax revenue.⁷⁵ A “rural area of opportunity” is a rural community, or a region composed of rural communities, designated by the Governor, which has been adversely affected by an extraordinary economic event, severe or chronic distress, or a natural disaster. A rural area of opportunity may also be a community or communities that present a unique economic development opportunity of regional impact.⁷⁶

There are 29 counties that currently meet these conditions; Baker, Bradford, Calhoun, Columbia, Desoto, Dixie, Franklin, Gadsden, Gilchrist, Glades, Gulf, Hamilton, Hardee, Hendry, Highlands, Holmes, Jackson, Jefferson, Lafayette, Levy, Liberty, Madison, Okeechobee, Putnam, Suwannee, Taylor, Union, Wakulla, and Washington.⁷⁷ Although each of the counties is designated by the Governor as a rural area of opportunity,⁷⁸ Highlands’ and Putnam’s 1-mill levy currently surpass the \$5 million threshold.

Direct-to-Home Satellite Service Tax Distribution

Retail sales of direct-to-home satellite service received in Florida are subject to the communications service tax at the rate of 9.07 percent and the gross receipts tax at the rate of 2.37 percent.⁷⁹

From communications services tax receipts, 55.9 percent is distributed through the state’s “standard” sales tax distribution formula.⁸⁰ The remaining 44.1 percent is transferred to the local government half-cent sales tax trust fund.⁸¹

Seventy percent of the transfer is distributed formulaically to all counties within the state. The remaining 30 percent is distributed to fiscally constrained counties that are eligible to participate in the local government half-cent sales tax distribution.⁸² Fiscally constrained counties may use the funds from this distribution for any public purpose, except for debt service.⁸³

⁷⁵ Section 218.67(1), F.S.

⁷⁶ Section 288.0656, F.S.

⁷⁷ Florida Department of Revenue, *Fiscally Constrained Counties*, available at https://www.floridarevenue.com/property/Documents/fcc_map.pdf (last visited Feb. 6, 2025).

⁷⁸ Executive Office of the Governor, see Executive Orders 20-170, 21-149, and 23-132, available at <https://www.flgov.com/eog/news/executive-orders> (last visited Feb. 6, 2025).

⁷⁹ Sections 202.12(1)(b) and 203.01(1)(b)2., F.S.

⁸⁰ Section 202.18(2)(b), F.S. See also: s. 212.20(6)(d), F.S. Gross receipts tax revenues are distributed to the Public Education Capital Outlay (PECO) and Debt Service Trust Fund in accordance with section 9 of Article XII of the State Constitution.

⁸¹ Section 202.18(2)(c)1., F.S.

⁸² *Id.*

⁸³ Section 218.67(5), F.S.

The collections from the tax on direct-to-home satellite service have declined in recent years; decreasing from \$18.1 million in Fiscal Year 2018-2019 to \$10.1 million in Fiscal Year 2023-2024.⁸⁴

Distribution Factors

Each fiscally constrained county receives a portion of the total direct-to-home satellite service distribution. At the beginning of each fiscal year, the Department of Revenue determines the amount to be distributed to each fiscally constrained county using the prior fiscal year's certified school taxable value, county millage rate, and latest April 1 county population, excluding prisoners.⁸⁵ The following factors are created by the department to determine each county's relative share of the total distribution available for the coming fiscal year:⁸⁶

- The relative revenue-raising-capacity factor is based on a county's certified school taxable value and population and referred to in law as the ability of a county to generate property tax revenues from 1 mill on a per capita basis.⁸⁷ Counties that generate less per capita revenue receive a higher factor. For example, a county that raises \$25 or less per capita receives a factor value of 1; whereas a county that raises more than \$50 per capita receives a factor value of 0. In Fiscal Year 2024-2025, only three fiscally constrained counties were eligible for this factor.⁸⁸
- The local-effort factor is based on a county's millage rate and referred to in law as a measure of the relative level of local effort of a county as indicated by the millage rate levied for the prior fiscal year.⁸⁹ This factor guarantees that each county receives a portion of the total distribution. It uses the most recently adopted countywide operating millage rate for each eligible county and multiplies that millage rate by 0.1. For example, a county with a countywide operating millage rate of 6.73 would receive a factor value of 0.673.

Sales and Use Tax

Florida levies a 6 percent tax on the sale or rental of most items of tangible personal property,⁹⁰ admissions,⁹¹ transient rentals,⁹² and a limited number of services, as well as a 2 percent tax on commercial leases.⁹³ Sales tax is added to the price of the taxable good or service and collected from the purchaser at the time of sale.⁹⁴ Counties are authorized to impose local discretionary sales surtaxes in addition to the state sales tax.⁹⁵

⁸⁴ Florida Office of Economic and Demographic Research, *Ordinary, Emergency, Supplemental, and Fiscally-Constrained Distributions by County: SFY 1987-2024*, available at <https://edr.state.fl.us/Content/local-government/data/data-a-to-z/g-l.cfm> (last visited Feb. 6, 2025).

⁸⁵ Section 186.901, F.S.

⁸⁶ Section 218.67(3)(a), F.S.

⁸⁷ *Id.*

⁸⁸ Email correspondence with staff at the Department of Revenue, Feb. 6, 2025 (on file with the Committee on Finance and Tax).

⁸⁹ Section 218.67(3)(b), F.S.

⁹⁰ Section 212.05(1)(a)1.a., F.S.

⁹¹ Section 212.04(1)(b), F.S.

⁹² Section 212.03(1)(a), F.S.

⁹³ Section 212.031, F.S.

⁹⁴ Section 212.07(2), F.S.

⁹⁵ Section 212.055, F.S.

A portion of Florida's state sales and use tax collections are distributed to all eligible counties and municipalities through the County and Municipal Revenue Sharing programs and the Local Government Half-Cent Sales Tax program. These programs distributed to fiscally constrained counties, including municipalities within the counties, approximately \$363.0 million in Fiscal Year 2023-2024.⁹⁶

In contrast to the tax on direct-to-home satellite service, collections from sales tax have increased from \$28.5 billion in Fiscal Year 2018-2019 to \$41.1 billion in Fiscal Year 2023-2024.⁹⁷ Additionally, sales tax collections are based on sales of a wide variety of goods and some services and change with the state's economic cycles.

Effect of Proposed Changes:

Section 4 amends s. 202.18, F.S., to redirect the entire remainder of direct-to-home satellite service tax to the Local Government Half-cent Sales Tax Trust Fund. This effectively ends the 30 percent distribution for fiscally constrained counties, which is replaced by a new distribution as described below.

Section 5 amends s. 212.20, F.S., to create a new sales tax distribution for fiscally constrained counties. The new distribution is the greater of \$50 million or 0.1438 percent of available sales tax proceeds.

Section 7 amends s. 218.67, F.S., to replace the fiscally constrained county distribution factors discussed in the present situation with:

- The contribution-to-revenue factor. This factor is calculated by dividing the county's population by the sales tax collections attributable to the county and then multiplying by 100.
- The personal-income factor. This factor is calculated by dividing the median per capita personal income of participating counties by the county's per capita personal income.

Each county's proportional allocation of the newly created sales tax distribution must be the same proportion as the sum of the county's two new factors is to the sum of the two factors for all eligible counties. The bill also adds a requirement that the proportional rate computation must be carried to the fifth decimal place, and the amount to distribute to each county must be rounded to the next whole dollar amount.

The money distributed pursuant to this section must be allocated as follows: 50 percent of the distribution may be used for public safety, including for salaries for law enforcement, correctional officers, firefighters, emergency medical technicians, or paramedics, 30 percent may be used for infrastructure, and 20 percent may be used for any public purpose. Debt service is not allowed.

⁹⁶ Florida Department of Revenue, Office of Tax Research, General Tax Distributions, Forms 5 and 6, available at <https://floridarevenue.com/DataPortal/Pages/TaxResearch.aspx> (last visited Feb. 6, 2025).

⁹⁷ Florida Office of Economic and Demographic Research, *2023 and 2024 Florida Tax Handbooks*, available at <https://edr.state.fl.us/content/revenues/reports/tax-handbook/> (last visited Feb. 6, 2025).

The bill removes the provision for a county to be classified as fiscally constrained if the county is entirely within a rural area of opportunity. It also increases the revenue qualification from where a 1-mill levy would raise no more than \$10 million, which is an increase from \$5 million.

Effect of Proposed Changes:

Rural Communities Report

Section 8 amends s. 288.0001, F.S., to require OPPAGA and the Office of Economic and Demographic Research (EDR) to prepare a report on the impact of Florida Statutes on rural communities. Specifically, the two entities must review definitions in the Florida Statutes of terms such as “rural community,” “rural area of opportunity,” and similar terms used to define rural areas of the state to assess whether the current definitions are appropriate, whether appropriate metrics are used to describe these communities and if statutory changes are needed. OPPAGA and the EDR must also survey rural local governments to evaluate the statutory advantages of qualifying as rural local government and assess perceived unmet needs in the implementation of current statutory provisions designed to support rural communities.

OPPAGA and the EDR must submit a report and recommendations to President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives by December 31, 2025. These provisions expire on July 1, 2026.

Present Situation:

State Housing Initiatives Partnership (SHIP) Program

The SHIP Program was created in 1992⁹⁸ to provide funds to local governments as an incentive to create partnerships that produce and preserve affordable homeownership and multifamily housing. The SHIP program provides funds to all 67 counties and 52 Community Development Block Grant⁹⁹ entitlement cities on a population-based formula to finance and preserve affordable housing based on locally adopted housing plans.¹⁰⁰ The program was designed to serve very-low, low-, and moderate-income families and is administered by Florida Housing Finance Corporation (FHFC). SHIP funds may be used to pay for emergency repairs, rehabilitation, down payment and closing cost assistance, impact fees, construction and gap financing, mortgage buydowns, acquisition of property for affordable housing, matching dollars for federal housing grants and programs, and homeownership counseling.¹⁰¹

Funds are expended per each local government’s adopted Local Housing Assistance Plan (LHAP), which details the housing strategies it will use.¹⁰² Local governments submit their LHAPs to the FHFC for review to ensure that they meet the broad statutory guidelines and the

⁹⁸ Chapter 92-317, Laws of Fla.

⁹⁹ The CDBG program is a federal program created in 1974 that provides funding for housing and community development activities.

¹⁰⁰ See ss. 420.907-420.9089, F.S.

¹⁰¹ Section 420.9072(7), F.S.

¹⁰² Section 420.9075, F.S. Section 420.9075(3), F.S., outlines a list of strategies LHAPs are encouraged to employ, such as helping those affected by mobile home park closures, encouraging innovative housing design to reduce long-term housing costs, preserving assisted housing, and reducing homelessness.

requirements of the program rules. The guaranteed minimum allocation amount that will be disbursed on a quarterly or more frequent basis by the FHFC to local governments is \$350,000.¹⁰³

Certain statutory requirements restrict a local government's use of funds made available under the SHIP program (excluding amounts set aside for administrative costs):

- At least 75 percent of SHIP funds must be reserved for construction, rehabilitation, or emergency repair of affordable, eligible housing;¹⁰⁴ and
- Up to 25 percent of SHIP funds may be reserved for allowed rental services.¹⁰⁵

Within those distributions by local governments, additional requirements must be met:

- At least 65 percent of SHIP funds must be reserved for home ownership for eligible persons;¹⁰⁶
- At least 20 percent of SHIP funds must serve persons with special needs;¹⁰⁷
- Up to 20 percent of SHIP funds may be used for manufactured housing;¹⁰⁸ and
- At least 30 percent of SHIP funds must be used for awards to very-low-income persons or eligible sponsors serving very-low-income persons, and another 30 percent must be used for awards for low-income-persons or eligible sponsors serving low-income persons.¹⁰⁹

Effect of Proposed Changes:

Section 38 amends s. 420.9073, F.S., to increase the minimum SHIP allocation from \$350,000 to \$1 million.

Present Situation:

USDA Section 515 Rural Affordable Housing

The United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Section 515 program, which has existed since the 1960s, is a part of the national Rural Rental Housing program. Many of rural America's 65 million residents experience acute housing problems with nearly 30 percent of rural households experience at least one major housing problem, such as high cost, physical deficiencies, or overcrowding.¹¹⁰

¹⁰³ Section 420.9073 (3)(a-b) F.S.

¹⁰⁴ Section 420.9075(5)(c), F.S.

¹⁰⁵ Section 420.9075(5)(b), F.S. However, a local government may not expend money distributed to it to provide ongoing rent subsidies, except for: security and utility deposit assistance; eviction prevention not to exceed six months' rent; or a rent subsidy program for very-low-income households with at least one adult who is a person with special needs or is homeless, not to exceed 12 months' rental assistance.

¹⁰⁶ Section 420.9075(5)(a), F.S. "Eligible person" or "eligible household" means one or more natural persons or a family determined by the county or eligible municipality to be of very low income, low income, or moderate income based upon the annual gross income of the household.

¹⁰⁷ Section 420.9075(5)(d), F.S.

¹⁰⁸ Section 420.9075(5)(e), F.S.

¹⁰⁹ Section 420.9075(5)(g)2., F.S.

¹¹⁰ National Low Income Housing Coalition, *USDA Rural Rental Housing Programs*, available at https://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/AG-2019/04-13_USDA-Rural-Rental-Housing-Programs.pdf (last visited Jan. 27, 2025)

Under the Section 515 program, USDA Rural Development makes direct loans to developers to finance affordable multifamily rental housing for very low-income, low-income, and moderate-income families, for elderly people, and for persons with disabilities. Section 515 loans have an interest rate of 1 percent, amortized over 50 years, to finance modest rental or cooperatively-owned housing.¹¹¹

Section 515 funds can be used for any new construction and for the rehabilitation of existing rural properties. Funding can also be used to buy or improve land, and to provide critical infrastructure for properties such as water and waste disposal systems. However, no new rental properties have been developed under Section 515 since 2011.¹¹²

Effect of Proposed Changes:

Section 39 amends s. 420.9075, F.S., to supersede statutory restrictions on the use of SHIP funds to allow counties and municipalities to use up to 25 percent of their SHIP funds to preserve existing multifamily affordable rental housing financed with USDA loans. This provision expires on June 30, 2031.

Section 52 appropriates \$30 million in nonrecurring funds from the General Revenue Fund to the Florida Housing Finance Corporation (FHFC) to preserve affordable multifamily rental housing funded through USDA loans. Funds must be used to issue competitive requests for application for the rehabilitation or acquisition of such properties to ensure continued affordability.

By October 1, 2026, the FHFC must submit a report to the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives on projects funded pursuant to this section. The report must include the number of units preserved and the financing portfolio for each project.

Present Situation:

FDOT Support to Local Governments

The FDOT provides funding and support to Florida's cities and counties through a variety of local programs. For example, the Local Agency Program provides local governments with federal funds to develop, design, and construct transportation facilities.¹¹³ The FDOT administers these funds on behalf of the Federal Highway Administration. There are also a number of state-sponsored programs designed to assist local governments, including:

- County Incentive Grant Program which provides grants to counties to improve transportation facilities located on the State Highway System or that relieve traffic congestion on the State Highway System;¹¹⁴
- Transportation Regional Incentive Program which provides funds to improve regionally significant transportation facilities in certain regional transportation areas;¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ *Id.*

¹¹² *Id.*

¹¹³ Section 339.28201, F.S.

¹¹⁴ Section 339.2817, F.S.

¹¹⁵ Section 339.2819, F.S.

- Small County Road Assistance Program which assists small county governments in resurfacing or reconstructing county roads;¹¹⁶ and
- Small County Outreach Program which assists small county governments in repairing or rehabilitating county bridges, paving unpaved roads, addressing road-related drainage improvements, resurfacing or reconstructing county roads.¹¹⁷

Additionally, FDOT coordinates directly with Florida's non-metropolitan, rural local governments, those located outside of a designated metropolitan planning area, to address their transportation planning and programming needs.

Small County Road Programs

Small County Road Assistance Program (SCRAP)

The FDOT administers the SCRAP to assist small county governments in resurfacing or reconstructing county roads that were part of the county road system on June 10, 1995.¹¹⁸ Counties eligible to compete for funding based on population include those with a population of 75,000 or less according to the 1990 federal census. Under this criteria there are currently 33 counties eligible to receive funding through the program. Capacity improvements on county roads are not eligible for the SCRAP funding, except where the FDOT determines that widening existing lanes as part of a resurfacing or reconstruction project is necessary to address safety concerns.¹¹⁹

Currently, up to \$25 million annually from the State Transportation Trust Fund may be used to fund the SCRAP.¹²⁰ Available funds are allocated to the FDOT districts based on the number of counties eligible for funding under the criteria in s. 339.2816, F.S. The table below summarizes the SCRAP funding in the fiscal year 2025/2026 – 2029/2030 FDOT work program.

SCRAP Funding – FY 2025-2029¹²¹					
2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	Total
\$26,854,023	\$25,000,001	\$25,000,001	\$25,000,001	\$25,000,001	\$126, 854,027

Small County Outreach Program (SCOP)

The SCOP assists small counties in repairing or rehabilitating county bridges, paving unpaved roads, addressing road-related drainage improvements, resurfacing or reconstructing county roads, or constructing capacity or safety improvements to county roads. Small counties eligible to compete for project funding include those with a population of 200,000 or less as determined by the most recent official estimate of the Office of Economic and Demographic Research.¹²² Similar to the SCRAP, available funds are allocated to the FDOT districts based on the number

¹¹⁶ Section 339.2816, F.S.

¹¹⁷ Section 339.2818, F.S.

¹¹⁸ Section 339.2816(4), F.S.

¹¹⁹ FDOT, *Work Program Instructions FY 25/26-29/30*, September 6, 2024, at p. 394, available at <https://fdotewp1.dot.state.fl.us/fmsupportapps/Documents/development/WorkProgramInstructions.pdf>

¹²⁰ Section 339.2816(3), F.S.

¹²¹ FDOT, *County Programs FY 2025-2030*, available...

¹²² Section 339.2818, F.S.

of counties eligible for funding under the criteria in s. 339.2818, F.S. The table below summarizes the SCOP funding in the fiscal year 2025/2026 – 2029/2030 FDOT work program.

SCOP Funding – FY 2025 to FY 2029 ¹²³					
2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	Total
\$95,741,476	\$80,852,739	\$79,674,999	\$79,560,002	\$79,345,001	\$415,174,217

The FDOT is required to fund 75 percent of the cost of projects on county roads selected for funding under the program and the county must provide 25 percent of such costs.¹²⁴ Rural counties qualifying under the Rural Economic Development Initiative¹²⁵ may apply for a waiver or reduction of the required 25 percent local match.¹²⁶ Subject to specific appropriation, municipalities within a rural area of opportunity may also compete for funding at up to 100 percent of the project costs.¹²⁷

In 2024, the SCOP was amended to incorporate additional eligibility provisions. Specifically, subject to a specific appropriation, a local government either wholly or partially within the Everglades Agricultural Area, the Peace River Basin, or the Suwannee River Basin may compete for additional funding at up to 100 percent of project costs on state or county roads used primarily as farm-to-market connections between rural agricultural areas and market distribution centers, excluding capacity improvement projects.¹²⁸

Effect of Proposed Changes:

Section 27 amends s. 334. 044, F.S., relating to the powers and duties of the FDOT, to specifically authorize the department to provide technical assistance and support to counties that are not located in a metropolitan planning organization created pursuant to s. 339.175. F.S.

Section 28 amends s. 339.0801, F.S., to provide that certain funds that result from the increased revenue to the State Transportation Trust Fund derived pursuant to s. 319.32(5), F.S.,¹²⁹ must be used annually, beginning in the fiscal year 2025-2026, to support the Small County Road Assistance Program (SCRAP). This provision effectively increases funding for the SCRAP by approximately \$35 million annually.

Sections 29 and 33 amends ss. 339.2816, F.S., and creates an undesignated section of Florida law, respectively, to provide that FDOT must fund \$25 million annually for the SCRAP.¹³⁰ The bill directs the FDOT, beginning in fiscal year 2025-2026, to utilize the additional revenues allocated by s. 339.0801, F.S., for the SCRAP. Finally, the bill codifies current provisions in the FDOT work program instructions which prohibit the use of funds for capacity improvements

¹²³ FDOT, *County Programs FY 2025-2030*, available...

¹²⁴ Section 339.2818(4)(a), F.S.

¹²⁵ See s. 288.056, F.S., for a full description of the Rural Economic Development Initiative.

¹²⁶ *Supra* note 119 at page 384.

¹²⁷ Section 339.2818(7), F.S.

¹²⁸ Section 339.2818(8), F.S.

¹²⁹ Chapter 2012-128, Laws of Fla., amended s. 319.32(5), F.S., to redirect motor vehicle title fee revenues from general revenue to the State Transportation Trust Fund.

¹³⁰ Section 339.2816(3), F.S., currently provides that "...up to \$25 million annually from the State Transportation Trust Fund may be used for purposes of funding the Small County Road Assistance Program."

unless a safety issue exists or FDOT finds it necessary to widen existing lanes as part of a resurfacing or reconstruction project.

Section 31 amends s. 339.2818, F.S., relating to the Small County Outreach Program (SCOP) to remove obsolete statutory provisions and correct cross-references. Similarly, the bill revises the SCOP funding eligibility requirements to repeal an existing category for certain local governments located within the Everglades Agricultural Area or designated river basins.

Present Situation:

Arterial Roads

Under Florida's Transportation Code "arterial road" means a route providing service which is relatively continuous and of relatively high traffic volume, long average trip length, high operating speed, and high mobility importance.¹³¹ Arterials include U.S. numbered highways and principal state roads that connect cities and towns. The FDOT's Functional Classification system distinguishes between urban and rural designations for arterial roads.¹³² The FDOT routinely manages and improves arterial roads to increase capacity and facilitate traffic throughput, while at the same time achieving the paramount goal of improving safety.

In 2021, the Legislature repealed the Multi-use Corridors of Regional Economic Significance (M-CORES) program and created several new initiatives related to arterial highway projects.¹³³ For example, the FDOT is required to identify and include in the work program projects to increase capacity by widening existing two-lane arterial rural roads to four lanes. To be included in a work program project, the road must be classified as an arterial rural road, and truck traffic using the road must amount to at least 15 percent of all such traffic, as determined by the department. The FDOT is required to fund at least \$20 million annually for such projects.¹³⁴

Effect of Proposed Changes:

Sections 3 and 32 amend ss. 201.15 and 339.68, F.S., respectively, to repeal the current provisions relating to arterial roads and create the Florida Arterial Road Modernization (FARM) Program. The purpose of the program is to make capacity and safety improvements to two-lane arterial roads located in rural communities.¹³⁵ Beginning in fiscal year 2025-2026, the FDOT is directed to allocate from the State Transportation Trust Fund a minimum of \$50 million annually to fund the program. This includes an additional \$30 million redirected by the bill from documentary stamp taxes revenues into the State Transportation Trust Fund¹³⁶ and the \$20 million currently required to be allocated to the existing rural arterial road program.

The FDOT is directed to use the following criteria to prioritize projects for funding under the program:

¹³¹ Section 334.03(1), F.S.

¹³² FDOT, *2020 Urban Area Boundary and Functional Classification Handbook*, available at https://fdotwww.blob.core.windows.net/sitefinity/docs/default-source/statistics/docs/urbanfunclass.pdf?sfvrsn=84c718c4_15

¹³³ Chapter 2021-161, Laws of Fla.

¹³⁴ Section 339.68, F.S.

¹³⁵ For purposes of the program "rural community" has the same meaning as provided in s. 288.0656, F.S.

¹³⁶ The bill amends s. 201.15, F.S., to specify that \$30 million in documentary stamp taxes must be paid to the credit of the State Transportation Trust Fund and used exclusively for the FARM Program.

- Whether the road has documented safety concerns or requires additional safety and design improvements. This may be evidenced by the number of fatalities or crashes per vehicle mile traveled.
- Whether the road has or is projected to have a significant amount of truck tractor traffic as determined by FDOT.
- Whether the road is used to transport agricultural products and commodities from the farm to the market or other sale or distribution point.
- Whether the road is used to transport goods to or from warehouses, distribution centers, or intermodal logistics centers.
- Whether the road is used as an evacuation route.
- Whether the physical condition of the road meets department standards.
- Whether the road has, or is projected to have within the next five years, a level of service of D, E, or F.
- Any other criteria related to the impact of a project on the public road system or on the state or local economy as determined by FDOT.

Beginning January 1, 2027, and every two years thereafter, the FDOT must issue a report to the Governor, the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives evaluating the condition of arterial roads in rural communities and the implementation of the FARM Program.

Present Situation:

County Incentive Grant Program (CIGP)

The FDOT administers the CIGP for the purpose of providing grants to counties, to improve a transportation facility which is located on the State Highway System or which relieves traffic congestion on the State Highway System.¹³⁷ To be eligible for consideration, projects must be consistent, to the maximum extent feasible, with local metropolitan planning organization plans and local government comprehensive plans.¹³⁸ The FDOT must consider, but is not limited to, the following criteria for evaluation of projects:

- The extent to which the project will encourage, enhance, or create economic benefits;
- The likelihood that assistance would enable the project to proceed at an earlier date than the project could otherwise proceed;
- The extent to which assistance would foster innovative public-private partnerships and attract private debt or equity investment;
- The extent to which the project uses new technologies, including intelligent transportation systems, which enhance the efficiency of the project;
- The extent to which the project helps to maintain or protect the environment; and
- The extent to which the project includes transportation benefits for improving intermodalism and safety.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Section 339.2817(1), F.S.

¹³⁸ Section 339.2817(2), F.S.

¹³⁹ Section 339.2817(3), F.S.

The FDOT must provide 50 percent of project costs for eligible projects.¹⁴⁰ A municipality may apply to the county in which the municipality is located for consideration by the county for CIGP funding of any project or project phase of a transportation facility which is located on the State Highway System or which is demonstrated to relieve congestion on the State Highway System. The county must evaluate all municipal applications using the above-described criteria. If a municipality's proposed project is rejected by the county for funding, or if the county's proposed project adversely affects a municipality within the county, the municipality may request mediation to resolve any concerns of the municipality and the county.¹⁴¹

Effect of Proposed Changes:

Section 30 amends s. 339.2817, F.S., relating to CIGP, to provide additional eligibility criteria. Specifically, the bill provides that in evaluating projects the FDOT must consider the extent to which the project enhances connectivity between rural agricultural areas and market distribution centers. In addition, the bill provides that a county located either wholly or partially within the Everglades Agricultural Area may request 100 percent of project costs for eligible projects that meet this new criteria.

Present Situation:

Rural Health Care

Data on Patient Outcomes

Studies continue to highlight health disparities between patient outcomes in rural and non-rural areas. Recent data indicates that rural Americans are at 30 percent higher risk of stroke, 40 percent more likely to develop heart disease, and live an average of three years fewer than urban counterparts.¹⁴²

A study published by the CDC in 2021 indicated a stroke treatment disparity in Florida, favoring urban counties with more primary stroke centers than rural counties.¹⁴³ Stroke death rates appear to be in correlation.¹⁴⁴ The study recommended the use of telemedicine for stroke treatment to reduce the disparity, listing availability and affordability as a potential constraint.¹⁴⁵

A review of the CDC Pregnancy Mortality Surveillance System found pregnancy-related mortality ratios from 2011 to 2016 were highest in rural areas (19.5-24.4 deaths per 100,000), as compared to urban areas (15.7-17.9 deaths per 100,000). In the year following a hospital's closure of a labor and delivery unit in rural and urban-adjacent counties, out-of-hospital births

¹⁴⁰ Section 339.2817(4), F.S.

¹⁴¹ Section 339.2817(5), F.S.

¹⁴² American Heart Association, *Rural Health Initiative*, available <https://www.heart.org/en/professional/quality-improvement/rural-healthcare-outcomes-accelerator> (last visited Feb. 24, 2025). Marinacci, L, Zheng, Z, Mein, S. et al. Rural-Urban Differences in Cardiovascular Mortality in the United States, 2010-2022. *JACC*. 2025 Jan, 85 (1) 93–97, available at <https://www.jacc.org/doi/full/10.1016/j.jacc.2024.09.1215> (last visited Feb. 24, 2025).

¹⁴³ Centers for Disease Control, *Examining Stroke Disparities in Florida: Relationships Among County Classification, Age-Adjusted Stroke Mortality Rates, and the Presence of Primary Stroke Centers*, June 10, 2021, available at https://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2021/20_0561.htm#References (last visited Feb. 24, 2025).

¹⁴⁴ *Id.*

¹⁴⁵ *Id.*

and preterm births increase, putting more pressure on rural emergency management system (EMS) staff and volunteers to be prepared for obstetrical emergencies.¹⁴⁶

Effect of Proposed Changes:

Section 36 creates s. 381.9856, F.S., to establish the Stroke, Cardiac, and Obstetric Response and Education (SCORE) Grant Program within the Department of Health (DOH) for the purpose of improving patient outcomes and the coordination of emergency medical care in rural communities. The DOH is required to award grants, in amounts of no more than \$100,000 per year, to high risk providers¹⁴⁷ serving rural communities to:

- Implement a blended learning training program for health care providers in stroke care protocols and best practices.
- Purchase simulation equipment and technology for training.
- Establish telehealth capabilities between pre-hospital providers, such as paramedics or emergency medical technicians, and in-hospital providers, such as neurologists, to expedite emergency stroke care, emergency cardiac care, or emergency obstetric care.
- Develop quality improvement programs in one or more of the following specialty areas: emergency stroke care, emergency cardiac care, or emergency obstetric care.

The DOH must give priority to SCORE proposals that demonstrate collaboration between pre-hospital and in-hospital providers or show potential for significant improvement in patient outcomes in rural communities. Grant recipients must submit quarterly reports to the DOH, which must include program activities, expenditures, and outcomes. The DOH is also tasked with monitoring implementation and outcomes. The DOH must submit an annual report to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives by December 1 of each year. The DOH may adopt rules to implement the grant program. The grant program may be implemented only to the extent that it is specifically funded. The program stands repealed on July 1, 2030, unless reviewed and saved from repeal through enactment by the Legislature.

Present Situation:

Rural Health Disparities

Access to timely health care services has been a long-standing issue for rural communities. There are many barriers to care that make access difficult in rural communities, including health care workforce shortages, higher poverty rates and lower insurance coverage rates, and longer distances to health care facilities compared to urban residents.¹⁴⁸ One major issue in providing sufficient care in rural communities is a lack of providers. A report from the United States

¹⁴⁶ National Rural Health Association, *Maternal Health in Rural America White Paper*, February 2024, available at [https://www.ruralhealth.us/nationalruralhealth/media/documents/maternal-health-in-rural-america-white-paper-final-\(1\).pdf](https://www.ruralhealth.us/nationalruralhealth/media/documents/maternal-health-in-rural-america-white-paper-final-(1).pdf) (last visited Feb. 24, 2025). Kozhimannil, K. B., Hung, P., Henning-Smith, C., Casey, M. M., & Prasad, S. (2018). Association Between Loss of Hospital-Based Obstetric Services and Birth Outcomes in Rural Counties in the United States. *JAMA*, 319(12), 1239–1247, available at <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29522161/> (last visited Feb. 24, 2025).

¹⁴⁷ The bill defines the term “high-risk care provider” as a licensed health care facility or licensed ambulance service that regularly provides emergency or ongoing care to patients experiencing a stroke, heart attack, or pregnancy-related emergency.

¹⁴⁸ Access to Specialty Care for Medicare Beneficiaries in Rural Communities, Lahr, Megan et. al., University of Minnesota Rural Health Research Center, 2019, available at https://rhrc.umn.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/UMN-Access-to-Specialty-Care_12.4.pdf (last visited Feb. 24, 2025).

Department of Health and Human Services: Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) shows fewer health care providers in rural areas over multiple license types.¹⁴⁹ For example, at the time of the study there were 13.1 physicians/surgeons per 10k residents in rural areas compared with 31.2 in urban areas, 3 psychologists per 10k residents in rural areas compared with 6.8 in urban areas, 2.3 physician assistants per 10k residents in rural areas compared with 3.4 in urban areas, and 85.3 registered nurses per 10k residents in rural areas compared with 93.5 in urban areas.¹⁵⁰

About 20 percent of Americans live in rural areas, but barely one-tenth of physicians practice there. The federal government projects a shortage of over 20,000 primary care physicians in rural areas by 2025. Primary care physicians in rural areas often do not have the support of sub-specialists, hospitalists, or emergency physicians, and thus treat a wider range of conditions with limited access to sophisticated technology. Most are required to admit and take care of patients in community-based hospitals, many of which are gravitating toward an emergency room and short-stay models of care, moving more complex patients to larger medical centers.¹⁵¹ A lack of primary care has been shown to have a direct impact on mortality rates with an increase in 10 primary care physicians per 100,000 population correlating with an 51.5-day increase in life expectancy.¹⁵²

Another barrier to accessing health care in rural areas is lack of reliable transportation and the need to travel long distances to find practitioners. Rural areas can also lack public transportation options and have poor road conditions which make it more difficult to travel to find health care.¹⁵³ Rural populations most likely to need transportation services to maintain their health and well-being include:

- Older adults;
- People with disabilities;
- Low-income individuals and families;
- Veterans; and
- People with special healthcare needs, who often must travel long distances to access care.¹⁵⁴

Effect of Proposed Changes:

Section 35 creates s. 381.403, F.S., to establish the Rural Access to Primary and Preventive Care (RAPP-C) Grant Program. The bill provides legislative findings that primary and preventative

¹⁴⁹ Distribution of U.S. Health Care Providers Residing in Rural and Urban Areas, United States Department of Health and Human Services: Health Resources and Services Administration, available at United States Department of Health and Human Services: Health Resources and Services Administration, (last visited Feb. 24, 2025).

¹⁵⁰ *Id.* p. 2

¹⁵¹ Nielsen M, D'Agostino D, Gregory P. Addressing Rural Health Challenges Head On. *Mo Med.* 2017 Sep-Oct;114(5):363-366. PMID: 30228634; PMCID: PMC6140198, available at https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6140198/#b3-ms114_p0363 (last visited Feb. 25, 2025).

¹⁵² Basu S, Berkowitz SA, Phillips RL, Bitton A, Landon BE, Phillips RS. Association of Primary Care Physician Supply With Population Mortality in the United States, 2005-2015. *JAMA Intern Med.* 2019;179(4):506-514. doi:10.1001/jamainternmed.2018.7624, available at <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamainternalmedicine/fullarticle/2724393> (last visited Feb. 25, 2025).

¹⁵³ Rural Health Disparities, Rural Health Information Hub, available at <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/topics/rural-health-disparities#causes>, (last visited Feb. 25, 2025).

¹⁵⁴ Transportation to Support Rural Healthcare, Rural Health Information Hub, available at <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/topics/transportation>, (last visited Feb. 25, 2025).

care is critical for the well-being of the residents of Florida and that rural areas have significantly fewer physicians, physician assistants, and autonomous ARNPs. The bill defines the terms:

- “Autonomous advanced practice registered nurse” to mean an advanced practice registered nurse who is registered under s. 464.0123, F.S., to engage in autonomous practice.
- “Majority ownership” to mean ownership of more than 50 percent of the interests in a private practice.
- “Physician” to mean a physician licensed under chs. 458 or 459, F.S.
- “Physician assistant” to mean a physician assistant licensed under chs. 458 or 459, F.S., to perform medical services delegated by a supervising physician.
- “Preventive care” to mean routine health care services designed to prevent illness. The term includes, but is not limited to, general physical examinations provided on an annual basis, screenings for acute or chronic illnesses, and patient counseling to promote overall wellness and avoid the need for emergency services.
- “Primary care” to mean health care services focused primarily on preventive care, wellness care, and treatment for common illnesses. The term may include the health care provider serving as a patient’s entry point into the overall health care system and coordinating a patient’s care among specialists or acute care settings. The term does not include elective services provided solely for cosmetic purposes.
- “Program” to mean the RAPP-C grant program.
- “Qualifying rural area” to mean a rural community as defined in s. 288.0657, F.S. in this state which is also designated as a health professional shortage area by the HRSA.

The bill requires the DOH to award grants under the RAPP-C to physicians, physician assistants, and autonomous ARNPs who intend to open a new private practice in a qualifying rural area or to open a new location within a qualifying rural area that is in a different county from their current practice. In order to qualify, the practice must:

- Have majority ownership by physicians, physician assistants, or autonomous ARNPs.
- Be physically located in a qualifying rural area and serve patients who live in that qualifying rural area or in other nearby qualifying rural areas. The practice may also serve patients who reside outside of a qualifying rural area. While the practice may use telehealth to supplement the services provided at the location, the majority of services provided by the practice must be provided at the physical location.
- Accept Medicaid patients.
 - Provide services solely in primary care or preventative care, except that a physician, or a physician assistant or APRN supervised by a physician, may provide services that are within the practitioner’s scope of practice based on the physician’s board-certified specialty in . obstetrics, gynecology, general and family practice, geriatrics, internal medicine, pediatrics, or psychiatry.

Additionally, the owners of the practice must commit to providing deidentified patient encounter data and a detailed report of the use of grant funds to the DOH on an annual basis.

By March 1, 2026, the DOH is required to create an application process for the RAPP-C which requires the applicant to provide a detailed budget of the anticipated use of grant funds and how the practice will meet the above requirements. The DOH is required to establish a ranking system

to determine which applicants will be awarded grants if there are more applicants for the program than can be awarded grants with appropriated funds.

Subject to appropriation, the DOH may award up to \$250,000 to eligible applicants which may be used for the following expenses:

- Facility construction, acquisition, renovation, or lease.
- Purchasing medical equipment.
- Purchasing or implementing information technology equipment or services.
- Purchasing or implementing telehealth technology.
- Training on the use of medical equipment, information technology, or telehealth technology implemented under paragraph (b), paragraph (c), or paragraph (d), respectively.

The bill specifies that grant funds may not be used for:

- Salaries.
- Utilities.
- Internet or telecommunications services other than those necessary for implementing telehealth technology.
- Insurance.
- Incidental maintenance and repairs.
- Disposable medical supplies.
- Medicines or vaccines.
- Licensing or certification fees, including costs for continuing education other than training specified above.

Only one grant may be awarded per practice and the bill requires the DOH to enter into a contract with each grant recipient which details the requirements for the expenditure of grant funds for that recipient and must include:

- The purpose of the contract.
- Specific performance standards and responsibilities for the recipient under the contract, including penalties for not meeting such performance standards and responsibilities.

Section 53 appropriates \$25 million in nonrecurring funds from the General Revenue Fund to the DOH to implement the RAPP-C grant program. Grant funds will be awarded over a 5-year period.

Present Situation:

Rural Hospital Capital Improvement (RHCI) Grant Program

Section 395.6061, F.S., establishes the RHCI grant program. The program is available to rural hospitals¹⁵⁵ that apply and guarantee, subject to appropriation, at least \$100,000 per hospital to

¹⁵⁵ A rural hospital is defined in s. 395.602, F.S., to include an acute care hospital licensed under this chapter, having 100 or fewer licensed beds and an emergency room, which is: the sole provider within a county with a population density of up to 100 persons per square mile; an acute care hospital, in a county with a population density of up to 100 persons per square mile, which is at least 30 minutes of travel time, on normally traveled roads under normal traffic conditions, from any other acute care hospital within the same county; a hospital supported by a tax district or subdistrict whose boundaries encompass a population of up to 100 persons per square mile; a hospital classified as a sole community hospital under 42 C.F.R. s. 412.92,

fund projects to acquire, repair, improve, or upgrade systems, facilities and equipment. Between fiscal years 2023-2025 the grant program has helped to fund numerous improvement projects at rural hospitals including, but not limited to:

- Adding a third chiller at AdventHealth Palm Coast;
- Purchasing a leased building which houses a rural health clinic by AdventHealth Wachula;
- Replacing nuclear medicine camera equipment and upgrading and refreshing patient rooms and air conditioning at Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast;
- Replacing the air conditioning system at Doctors' Memorial Hospital in Bonifay; and
- Renovating emergency department space at Doctors' Memorial Hospital in Perry and Ed Fraser Memorial Hospital in Mcclenny.¹⁵⁶

Effect of Proposed Changes:

Section 37 amends s. 395.6061, F.S., to expand the RHCI grant program to allow rural hospitals to use grant funds to establish mobile care units to provide primary care, behavioral health, or obstetric and gynecologic services in a rural health professional shortage area; or to establish telehealth kiosks to provide urgent and primary care services remotely in rural health professional shortage areas. The bill defines:

- “Preventive care” to mean routine health care services designed to prevent illness. The term includes, but is not limited to, general physical examinations provided on an annual basis, screenings for acute or chronic illnesses, and patient counseling to promote overall wellness and avoid the need for emergency services.
- “Primary care” to mean health care services focused primarily on preventive care, wellness care, and treatment for common illnesses. The term may include the health care provider serving as a patient’s entry point into the overall health care system and coordinating a patient’s care among specialists or acute care settings. The term does not include elective services provided solely for cosmetic purposes.
- “Rural health professional shortage area” to mean a rural community as defined in s. 288.0657, F.S., which is also designated as a health professional shortage area by the HRSA.

Section 55 appropriates \$25 million in nonrecurring funds from the General Revenue Fund are appropriated in fixed capital outlay to DOH for the purpose of implementing the rural hospital capital improvement grant program.

Present Situation:

Florida Reimbursement Assistance for Medical Education Program

Section 381.402, F.S., establishes the Florida Reimbursement Assistance for Medical Education Program (FRAME). The FRAME program offers student loan reimbursement to various health care practitioners to offset their loans and educational expenses to entice them to practice in

regardless of the number of licensed beds; a hospital with a service area that has a population of up to 100 persons per square mile; or a hospital designated as a critical access hospital, as defined in s. 408.07. According to Florida Health Finder, there are 24 rural hospitals in Florida.

¹⁵⁶ A full list of all projects is on file with Senate Health Policy Committee staff.

underserved locations where there are shortages of such practitioners. The DOH is authorized to reimburse over a four-year period as follows:

- Up to \$150,000 for medical and osteopathic doctors with primary care specialties;¹⁵⁷
- Up to \$90,000 for autonomous advanced practice registered nurses (APRN) who are practicing autonomously;
- Up to \$75,000 for APRNs, physician assistants, and mental health professionals;¹⁵⁸ and
- Up to \$45,000 for licensed practical nurses (LPN) and registered nurses (RN).

To be eligible for the FRAME program, a practitioner must:

- Provide proof of primary care practice in a rural hospital or an underserved area. The section specifies that, for practitioners other than physicians, serving in a non-primary care setting, such as a nursing home, is allowed so long as the setting is in an underserved area, serve residents or patients in that underserved area, and provide Medicaid services.
- Provide 25 hours of volunteer primary care services annually in a free clinic or through another specified volunteer program.

Effect of Proposed Changes:

Section 34 amends s. 381.402, F.S., to provide that medical doctors or doctors of osteopathic medicine who are board certified in emergency medicine and employed by or under contract with a rural hospital or a rural emergency hospital to provide medical care in the hospital's emergency department are eligible to participate in the FRAME program.

Present Situation:

Regional Educational Consortia

School districts with 20,000 or fewer students, developmental research (laboratory) schools, and the Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind may enter into cooperative agreements to form a regional consortium service organization (regional consortium).¹⁵⁹ Regional consortium service organizations (regional consortia) are intended to provide programs and services to small school districts to save money, increase student achievement, and improve organizational efficiency via economies of scale and collaboration.¹⁶⁰

There are three regional consortia: the Heartland Educational Consortium (HEC),¹⁶¹ the North East Regional Consortium (NEFEC),¹⁶² and the Panhandle Area Educational Consortium

¹⁵⁷ Primary care specialties for physicians are defined as obstetrics, gynecology, general and family practice, internal medicine, pediatrics, and other specialties which may be identified by the DOH.

¹⁵⁸ Mental health professionals include licensed clinical social workers, licensed marriage and family therapists, licensed mental health counselors, and licensed psychologists.

¹⁵⁹ Section 1001.451(1), F.S.

¹⁶⁰ Heartland Educational Consortium, North East Florida Educational Consortium, Panhandle Area Educational Consortium, *Florida's Regional Consortia*, Presentation to the Florida Senate Committee on Education Pre-K - 12 (Feb. 4, 2025), available at (https://www.flsenate.gov/Committees/Show/ED/MeetingPacket/6290/10954_MeetingPacket_6290_2.pdf), at 6.

¹⁶¹ HEC serves six member districts: DeSoto, Glades, Hardee, Hendry, Highlands, and Okeechobee.

¹⁶² NEFEC serves 13 member districts: Baker, Bradford, Columbia, Dixie, Flagler, Gilchrist, Hamilton, Lafayette, Levy, Nassau, Putnam, Suwannee, and Union. NEFEC also serves the Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind and the P.K. Yonge Developmental Research School.

(PAEC).¹⁶³ Florida's Regional Consortia members include 36 school districts, 430 schools, 12,000 teachers, and 160,000 students.¹⁶⁴

Each regional consortium must provide, at a minimum, three of the following services: exceptional student education; teacher education centers; environmental education; federal grant procurement and coordination; data processing; health insurance; risk management insurance; staff development; purchasing; or planning and accountability.¹⁶⁵ Each regional consortium receives an incentive grant of \$50,000 per school district and eligible member to be used for the delivery of services within the participating school districts. The determination of services and use of such funds is determined by the board of directors of the regional consortium.¹⁶⁶

The board of directors of a regional consortium may use various means to generate revenue in support of its activities, which may include patents, copyrights, and trademarks and licenses. Such funds must be used to support the organization's marketing and research and development activities in order to improve and increase services to its member districts.¹⁶⁷

Effect of Proposed Changes:

Sections 40 amends s. 1001.451, F.S., to expand services, incentive grants, and authority over the use of funds by regional consortium service organizations (regional consortia). The bill authorizes the regional consortia boards of directors to determine the number of services to offer, and adds to those services safe schools support; state grant procurement; professional learning; college, career, and workforce development; and business and operational services.

The bill increases the allocation to the regional consortia from \$50,000 per member to \$150,000 per member. Each regional consortium must submit quarterly financial reports to members, and an annual report to the Department of Education regarding the use of funds for consortia services. Of the allocation, the bill specifies that unexpended amounts must be carried forward into the approved operating budget for the following year.

The bill codifies current practice that a member district must serve as the fiscal agent for regional consortium contractual and reporting purposes. The bill specifies compensation to the fiscal agent and to each regional consortium for activities. Employees of the regional consortium are employees of the fiscal agent district; the regional consortium recommends appointments to the fiscal agent and recommends a salary schedule and job description for its personnel. However, the bill authorizes the regional consortium to purchase or lease property and facilities independent of the fiscal agent district.

¹⁶³ PAEC serves 13 member districts: Calhoun, Franklin, Gadsden, Gulf, Holmes, Jackson, Jefferson, Liberty, Madison, Taylor, Wakulla, Walton, Washington. PAEC also serves the FSU Collegiate School and FAMU Developmental Research School.

¹⁶⁴ Heartland Educational Consortium, North East Florida Educational Consortium, Panhandle Area Educational Consortium, *Florida's Regional Consortia*, Presentation to the Florida Senate Committee on Education Pre-K - 12 (Feb. 4, 2025), available at https://www.flsenate.gov/Committees/Show/ED/MeetingPacket/6290/10954_MeetingPacket_6290_2.pdf, at 6.

¹⁶⁵ Section 1001.451(1), F.S.

¹⁶⁶ Section 1001.451(2), F.S.

¹⁶⁷ Section 1001.451(5), F.S.

The bill increases the alternate revenue sources for a regional consortium board of directors to include contracting for services to nonmember school districts. Of these additional funds, the bill removes the requirement that all such additional funds be used for development and marketing; the bill authorizes the board of directors to determine fund use. These funds may be carried forward for maintaining or expanding services, facilities maintenance, terminal pay, and other liabilities.

Finally, the bill authorizes each regional consortium to administer the Regional Consortia Service Organization Supplemental Services Program.

Section 58 appropriates \$3.6 million in recurring funds from the General Revenue Fund to DOE to fund the increased grant allocations for regional consortia, pursuant to section 40 of the bill.

Section 41 creates s. 1001.4511, F.S., to establish the Regional Consortia Service Organization Supplemental Services Program (supplemental services) to provide additional resources to regional consortium service organizations for programs and services offered to members. The supplemental services funds may be used for transportation; district finance personnel services; property insurance, including property insurance obtained from any source; cybersecurity support; school safety; college, career, and workforce development; academic support; and behavior support within exceptional student education services. Each board of directors will determine the use of supplemental services funds through cooperative agreements with regional consortium members.

The bill authorizes the regional consortium to carry forward unused supplemental services funds for up to five years. The regional consortium must annually report to the Legislature on the distribution of funds and member services provided.

Section 59 appropriates \$25 million in recurring funds from the General Revenue Fund to DOE to be distributed to regional consortium service organizations as follows:

- \$5,555,149 to the Heartland Educational Consortium;
- \$11,912,923 to the North East Florida Educational Consortium; and
- \$7,531,928 to the Panhandle Area Educational Consortium.

The funds must be distributed to each regional consortium service organization no later than 30 days following the release of the funds to the department.

Present Situation:

Instructional Personnel in Rural Districts

Schools, especially those with inadequate resources, can experience difficulty hiring teachers and high turnover. These issues are linked with the availability of new teachers, salaries, and working conditions.¹⁶⁸ For example, rural schools may have limited instructional staff, which necessitates recruiting teachers with multiple subject endorsements. Staff members may teach multiple subjects, multiple grades, and sometimes multi-age students within the same classroom. More-

¹⁶⁸ National Center for Education Statistics, *Difficulty Hiring Teachers in Rural Areas*, available at <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/llc> (last visited Feb. 25, 2025).

rural schools face higher transportation costs that can siphon resources away from other budget items, such as teacher salaries. Housing shortages and limited access to hospitals, banks, stores, cultural facilities, and higher education institutions may also negatively impact teacher recruitment in rural areas.¹⁶⁹ Rural communities face challenges related to competition from higher urban compensation schedules, housing shortages, and a lack of support resources commonly found in urban areas.¹⁷⁰

In 2020–21, a higher percentage of schools in rural areas than of schools in cities and suburban areas found it very difficult or not possible to fill teaching vacancies in foreign languages, English or language arts, social studies, mathematics, biology or life sciences, music or art, and physical education or health.¹⁷¹

Also in 2020–21, more than 20 percent of private schools in rural areas that had teaching vacancies in specific fields found it very difficult to fill or were not able to fill vacancies in the physical education or health, special education, computer science, mathematics, foreign languages, physical sciences, and biology or life sciences.¹⁷²

Effect of Proposed Changes:

Section 42 creates s. 1009.635, F.S., to establish the Rural Incentive for Professional Educators (RIPE) program within the Office of Student Financial Assistance in the Department of Education (DOE). In order to support the recruitment and retention of qualified instructional personnel in rural communities, the RIPE program provides up to \$15,000 in total student loan repayment assistance over 5 years, disbursed in annual payments up to \$3,000 per year.

To be eligible for the RIPE program, an individual must:

- Establish permanent residency on or after July 1, 2025, in a rural area of opportunity. The address on a state-issued identification card or driver license is evidence of residence.
- Secure full-time employment as a teacher or administrator in a public or private school in the same district of residence.
- Hold an associate degree, bachelor’s degree, postgraduate degree, or certificate from an accredited institution earned before establishing residency.
- Have an active student loan balance incurred for the completion of the qualifying degree or certificate.

Before disbursement of an award, the DOE must verify that the participant has maintained continuous enrollment in the school district in an instructional or administrative role, has an

¹⁶⁹ Principal’s Research Review, *Recruiting and Retaining Rural Educators: Challenges and Strategies* (v. 7, Issue 6, Nov. 2012) available at <https://nisnresourcehub.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Recruiting-and-Retaining-Rural-Educators-Challenges-and-Strategies.pdf>, at 2.

¹⁷⁰ EdSource, *Rural counties far from universities struggle to recruit teachers*, available at <https://edsources.org/2024/rural-counties-far-from-universities-struggle-to-recruit-teachers/710566#:~:text=Rural%20teachers%20scarce,candidates%2C%20according%20to%20the%20study> (last visited Feb. 26, 2025).

¹⁷¹ National Center for Education Statistics, *Difficulty Hiring Teachers in Rural Areas*, available at <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/llc> (last visited Feb. 25, 2025).

¹⁷² *Id.*

evaluation rating of effective or highly effective, and has not been subject to specified disciplinary actions.

The DOE must develop application procedures requiring documentation, including proof of residency, verification of employment, official academic transcripts, and details of outstanding student loans. The bill requires the State Board of Education to adopt rules no later than January 31, 2026, to administer the RIPE program.

Section 60 appropriates \$7 million in recurring funds from General Revenue Fund to the DOE for the RIPE Program.

Present Situation:

Special Facility Construction Accounts

The Special Facility Construction Account (SFCA) within the Department of Education is used to provide necessary construction funds to school districts that have urgent construction needs but lack sufficient resources, and cannot reasonably anticipate sufficient resources within the next 3 years.¹⁷³ These projects typically are located in rural school districts that have an insufficient tax base to fund large construction projects. The state's smaller school districts, which serve 20,000 or fewer students, generally raise considerably less through local discretionary property taxes than larger Florida school districts. As a result, small school districts may have a difficult time raising the local funds needed to pay for new schools.¹⁷⁴ In 2023, rural school districts that were members of regional consortium service organizations occupied ranks 36-67 in taxable values and values of the 1.5 mill discretionary levy.¹⁷⁵

A district that receives funds under the SFCA must, for three years prior to submitting an application for funds, and for a continuing period necessary to meet its participation requirement, levy the maximum millage against the district's nonexempt assessed property value as authorized under s. 1011.71(2) or raise an equivalent amount of revenue from the school capital outlay surtax authorized under s. 212.055(6). In addition, a district must budget the value of 1 mill per year to the project until the participation requirement¹⁷⁶ related to the discretionary capital improvement levy or capital outlay surtax is satisfied.¹⁷⁷ A district may not receive funding for more than one approved project in any 3-year period or while any portion of the district's participation requirement is outstanding.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷³ Section 1013.64(2)(a), F.S.

¹⁷⁴ Office of Program Policy Analysis & Government Accountability, *Special Facility Construction Projects Appear Needed, but Have Excess Capacity* (Report 11-02, Jan. 2011) available at <https://oppaga.fl.gov/Documents/Reports/11-02.pdf>, at 1-2.

¹⁷⁵ Heartland Educational Consortium, North East Florida Educational Consortium, Panhandle Area Educational Consortium, *Florida's Regional Consortia*, Presentation to the Florida Senate Committee on Education Pre-K - 12 (Feb. 4, 2025), available at https://www.flsenate.gov/Committees/Show/ED/MeetingPacket/6290/10954_MeetingPacket_6290_2.pdf, at 10.

¹⁷⁶ The participation requirement is unencumbered and future revenue from school bonds under Art. XII, s. 9(d), Fla. Const., the discretionary capital improvement levy under s. 1011.71(2), and the amounts from the Public Education Capital Outlay and Debt Service Trust Fund in the year of the initial appropriation and for the 2 years immediately following the initial appropriation. Section 1013.64(2)(a)11., F.S.

¹⁷⁷ Section 1013.64(2)(a)8., F.S.

¹⁷⁸ Section 1013.64(2)(a), F.S.

Since 2014-2015, 16 school districts have received a total of \$1,080,133,481 from the SFCA.¹⁷⁹

Effect of Proposed Changes:

Section 44 amends s. 1013.64, F.S., to modify the participation requirement in s. 1013.64, F.S., for a school district that receives funds under the Special Facility Construction Account (SFCA).

The bill specifies that, for new construction projects under the SFCA, beginning in the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the district is not required to budget the value of 1 mill per year toward the project, but must use those funds toward authorized capital purchases specified in law. However, the bill maintains a requirement that the district levies the maximum 1.5 mills ad valorem tax or raise an equivalent revenue from the school capital outlay surtax for the three years prior to the application for funds, and for the initial year of appropriation plus two additional years.

Eleven school districts that have received funds since 2020-2021 under the SFCA have an outstanding participation requirement of \$111,254,828;¹⁸⁰ these districts would be required to complete the terms of the participation agreement. However, under the bill such districts with existing projects more than three years old would be eligible to apply for funds for an additional project.

Present Situation:

Charter School Capital Outlay Funding

Charter school capital outlay funding consists of state funds when such funds are appropriated in the General Appropriations Act and revenue resulting from the 1.5 mill discretionary capital improvement levy authorized in law.¹⁸¹

If the school board levies the discretionary capital improvement millage, the Department of Education (DOE) must, when determining the amount of revenue that a school district must distribute to each eligible charter school, reduce from the total amount the total discretionary millage revenue by the school district's annual debt service obligation incurred as of March 1, 2017, which has not been subsequently retired, and any amount of participation requirement under the Special Facility Construction Account that is being satisfied by revenues raised by the discretionary millage.¹⁸² Of the total calculated amount based on a district's discretionary millage and the total number of students in district charter schools, the school district must distribute 40 percent in 2024-2025, and 60 percent in 2025-2026.¹⁸³

By October 1 of each year, each school district must certify to the DOE the amount of debt service and participation requirement that can be reduced from the total discretionary millage revenue. The Auditor General must verify compliance with these requirements during scheduled operational audits of school districts.¹⁸⁴

¹⁷⁹ Email, Florida Department of Education (Feb. 12, 2025).

¹⁸⁰ Email, Florida Department of Education (Feb. 12, 2025).

¹⁸¹ Section 1013.62(1), F.S. The 1.5 mill discretionary capital improvement levy is authorized under s. 1011.71(2), F.S.

¹⁸² Section 1013.62(3), F.S.

¹⁸³ Section 1013.62(3)(d), F.S.

¹⁸⁴ Section 1013.62(3), F.S. Flush-left provision.

For all school districts with charter schools in that district, the total 2025-2026 estimated local funds that must be shared with charter schools is \$214,219,713. Of the 29 fiscally constrained counties¹⁸⁵ that may be eligible for funds under the Special Facilities Construction Account, the 2025-2026 estimated local funds that must be shared with charter schools is \$1,292,083.¹⁸⁶

Effect of Proposed Changes:

Sections 43 amends s. 1013.62, F.S., to specify the revenue to be deducted from the capital funds a district participating under the Special Facility Construction Account (SFCA) program must distribute to each eligible charter school.

The bill maintains the requirement that the total discretionary millage revenue that a school district must distribute to each eligible charter school must be reduced by the school district's annual debt service obligation incurred as of March 1, 2017, which has not been subsequently retired.

However, the bill modifies the additional amount of revenue that must be deducted from the total discretionary millage revenue related to the SFCA:

- For currently funded projects under the SFCA, the bill maintains the requirement that deducts any amount of participation requirement under the SFCA that is being satisfied by revenues raised by the discretionary millage.
- For construction projects for which SFCA funding is sought beginning in the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the additional deducted amount will be the value of 1 mill from the revenue generated under the district's 1.5 mill discretionary ad valorem levy or revenue from the school capital outlay surtax. This amount must be certified to the DOE.

Sections 61-91 make conforming and non-substantive changes throughout Florida Statutes as necessary to implement the bill.

Section 92 provides that the bill takes effect on July 1, 2025.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

¹⁸⁵ Each county that is entirely within a rural area of opportunity as designated by the Governor pursuant to s. 288.0656 or each county for which the value of a mill will raise no more than \$5 million in revenue, based on the taxable value certified pursuant to s. 1011.62(4)(a)1.a., from the previous July 1, is considered a fiscally constrained county. Section 218.67(1), F.S. See also Florida Department of Revenue, *Fiscally Constrained Counties*, available at https://www.floridarevenue.com/property/Documents/fcc_map.pdf (last visited Feb. 26, 2025).

¹⁸⁶ The amount is derived from 60 percent of the calculation of each district's ad valorem taxes, after specified deductions, and eligible charter school full-time equivalent students. See 1013.62(3), F.S.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

D. State Tax or Fee Increases:

None.

E. Other Constitutional Issues:

None.

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

The bill changes a distribution to fiscally constrained counties from the tax collected on direct-to-home satellite service to sales tax. The bill provides for at least \$50 million annually to be distributed to fiscally constrained counties from sales tax based on a new formula that takes into account sales tax collections, per capita personal income, and population. The Revenue Estimating Conference adopted the following fiscal impact for this provision:

New Sales Tax Distribution (\$million)			
Fund	FY 2025-26	FY 2026-27	FY 2027-28
General Revenue	(50.7)	(52.2)	(53.7)
Local/Other	50.7	52.2	53.7

The bill no longer requires that a portion of taxes collected from direct-to-home satellite service be distributed to the Local Government Half-cent Trust Fund and earmarked for distribution to fiscally constrained counties. Instead, the portion of taxes collected from such service will continue to be distributed to the Local Government Half-cent Trust Fund but be made available to all counties participating in the Local Government Half-cent Sales Tax Program.

The bill redirects revenues from documentary stamp taxes and title fees to the Department of Transportation for the new FARM program and the SCRAP. The Revenue Estimating Conference adopted the following fiscal impacts for these provisions:

Documentary Stamp Tax for FARM (\$million)			
Fund	FY 2025-26	FY 2026-27	FY 2027-28
General Revenue	(30.0)	(30.0)	(30.0)
State Transportation Trust Fund	30.0	30.0	30.0

Title Fees for SCRAP (\$million)			
Fund	FY 2025-26	FY 2026-27	FY 2027-28

General Revenue	(24.6)	(38.2)	(40.8)
State Transportation Trust Fund	24.6	38.2	40.8

Fiscally constrained counties will see an increase in state tax revenues shared with these counties. The bill requires these funds to be used as follows: 50 percent for public safety, 30 percent for infrastructure, and 20 percent for any public purpose.

B. Private Sector Impact:

The bill creates a number of new grant programs and increases funding for existing programs which are designed to fund, either directly or indirectly, private sector activity, primarily in the transportation, education, and healthcare fields. Citizens in rural communities will benefit indirectly from programs designed to increase community investment as guided by local governments.

C. Government Sector Impact:

Local governments in rural areas of the state will benefit from participating in the grant programs created specifically for them in the bill and the associated funding for the newly created and already existing programs.

The bill makes the following appropriations to the Department Commerce:

- \$1,827,591 in recurring funds and \$652,327 in nonrecurring funds from the General Revenue Fund for the staffing and operation of the Office of Rural Prosperity, which includes funding for 17 full-time equivalent positions for the office.
- \$8 million in recurring funds from the General Revenue Fund for the Office of Rural Prosperity for block grants to certain low-population rural counties under the Renaissance Grant Program.
- \$500,000 in recurring funds from the Grants and Donations Trust Fund within the Department of Commerce for the Public Infrastructure Smart Technology Grant Program as created by the bill.
- \$40 million in nonrecurring funds and \$5 million in recurring funds from the General Revenue Fund for the Rural Infrastructure Fund. This appropriation is in addition to the base appropriation of \$5 million, bringing the total recurring funds for the program to \$10 million.
- \$4 million in nonrecurring funds and \$1 million in recurring funds from General Revenue for Rural Community Development Revolving Loan Fund. This appropriation is in addition to the base appropriation of \$420,000, bringing the total recurring funds for the program to \$1.42 million.
- \$250,000 in recurring funds from the Grants and Donations Trust Fund within the Department of Commerce is appropriated for the Rural Economic Development Strategy Grant program created by the bill.
- \$1 million in recurring funds from the General Revenue Fund for the SBDC to implement the requirements of the rural-focused Florida SBDC Network activity.

The bill does not change the appropriation for the Regional Rural Development Grants Program in the Department of Commerce, which remains at \$750,000 annually.

The bill increases the base amount for the State Housing Initiatives Partnership (SHIP) from \$350,000 to \$1 million. Funding for this program is provided annually in the General Appropriations Act and is based on a distribution formula. In general, local governments that typically receive the base amount will see an increase in grant funds received.

The bill appropriates \$30 million in nonrecurring funds from the General Revenue Fund to the Florida Housing Finance Corporation to be used to issue loans to preserve affordable multifamily rental housing funded through USDA loans. The bill also authorizes local SHIP administrators to use up to 25 percent of their allocated SHIP funds to preserve such housing.

The amendments made in the bill to the Rural Economic Development Initiative to modernize and revitalize the organization and functions may result in increased use of state programs by rural communities, leading to a financial benefit in these areas.

The bill makes the following appropriations to the Department of Education:

- \$25 million in recurring funds from the General Revenue Fund for grant funding to the three regional consortium service organizations.
- \$3.6 million in recurring funds from the General Revenue Fund for the increase in grant funds to regional consortiums, from \$50,000 to \$150,000 annually. With a base appropriation of \$1.75 million, this would bring the total recurring funds for the program to \$5.35 million annually.
- \$7 million in recurring funds from General Revenue to implement the Rural Incentive for Professional Educators (RIPE) Program.

The bill makes the following appropriations to the Department of Health:

- \$5 million in nonrecurring funds from the General Revenue Fund for the purpose of implementing the Stroke, Cardiac, and Obstetric Response and Education (SCORE) Grant Program.
- \$25 million in nonrecurring funds from the General Revenue Fund to implement the Rural Access to Primary and Preventative Care (RAPP-C) Grant Program.
- \$25 million in nonrecurring funds from the General Revenue Fund implement the Rural Hospital Capital Improvement (RHCI) Grant Program.

The bill appropriates \$187,255 in recurring funds from the General Revenue Fund and \$250,358 in recurring funds from the Medical Care Trust Fund to the Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA) to establish a Diagnosis-Related Grouping (DRG) reimbursement methodology for critical access hospitals, as defined in s. 408.07, F.S., for the purpose of providing inpatient reimbursement to such a hospital in amounts comparable to the reimbursement the hospital would receive for inpatient services from the federal Medicare program.

The bill appropriates \$7,508,124 in recurring funds from the General Revenue Fund and \$10,038,322 in recurring funds from the Medical Care Trust Fund to the AHCA to establish an Enhanced Ambulatory Patient Grouping (EAPG) reimbursement methodology for critical access hospitals, as defined in s. 408.07, F.S., for the purpose of providing outpatient reimbursement to such a hospital in amounts comparable to the reimbursement the hospital would receive for outpatient services from the federal Medicare program.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Statutes Affected:

This bill substantially amends the following sections of the Florida Statutes: 20.60, 163.3168, 201.15, 202.18, 212.20, 215.971, 218.67, 288.0001, 288.001, 288.007, 288.018, 288.019, 288.021, 288.065, 288.0655, 288.0656, 288.0657, 288.1226, 288.9961, 290.06561, 319.32, 334.044, 339.0801, 339.2816, 339.2817, 339.2818, 339.68, 395.6061, 420.9073, 420.9075, 1001.451, 1013.62, 1013.64, 163.3187, 212.205, 257.191, 257.193, 265.283, 288.11621, 288.11631, 443.191, 571.26, 571.265, 288.9935, 125.0104, 193.624, 196.182, 218.12, 218.125, 218.135, 218.136, 252.35, 288.102, 403.064, 589.08, 1011.62, 403.0741, 163.3177, 288.9962, 215.211, 339.66, 381.402, 420.9072, 420.9076, and 420.9079.

This bill creates the following sections of the Florida Statutes: 288.013, 288.014, 288.0175, 381.403, 381.9856, 1001.4511, and 1009.635.

This bill repeals the following sections of the Florida Statutes: 288.06561, 288.12266, and 290.06561.

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 Fiscal Policy on March 13, 2025:

The committee substitute makes the following changes to the bill:

- Directs the entire remainder of the Direct-to-Home Satellite distribution to go to the Local Government Half-cent Sales Tax Clearing Trust Fund, instead of only 70 percent, as provided in the bill.
- Expands the FDOT County Incentive Grant Program to include projects that enhance connectivity between rural agricultural areas and market distribution centers, and allows counties within the Everglades Agricultural Area to request additional funding for such projects.

- Requires Visit Florida’s marketing plan to include provision of marketing assistance to small, rural, and agritourism businesses. It also repeals the defunct Florida Targeted Industry Marketing Program.
- Expands eligibility for Rural Infrastructure Fund grants to include disaster-impacted unincorporated rural areas.
- Regarding the Regional Consortia Service Organization Supplemental Services Program created in the bill, clarifies that program funds may be expended on property insurance, regardless of the source of the insurance.
- Allows physician assistants (in addition to primary care physicians and autonomous APRNs) to apply for funding through the RAPP-C Grant Program, created in the bill.
- Increases funding for Critical Access Hospitals by approximately \$6.5 million.
- Expands the existing Florida Reimbursement Assistance for Medical Education Program to include medical doctors or osteopathic doctors who are board certified in emergency medicine and who are employed by or under contract with a rural hospital or rural emergency hospital.
- Makes other technical and clarifying changes.

B. Amendments:

None.



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LEGISLATIVE ACTION

Senate	.	House
Comm: RCS	.	
03/13/2025	.	
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The Committee on Fiscal Policy (Simon) recommended the following:

Senate Amendment (with title amendment)

Delete everything after the enacting clause
and insert:

Section 1. Paragraph (a) of subsection (3) and paragraph (c) of subsection (10) of section 20.60, Florida Statutes, are amended, and paragraph (a) of subsection (5) of that section is reenacted, to read:

20.60 Department of Commerce; creation; powers and duties.—

(3)(a) The following divisions and offices of the



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Department of Commerce are established:

1. The Division of Economic Development.
2. The Division of Community Development.
3. The Division of Workforce Services.
4. The Division of Finance and Administration.
5. The Division of Information Technology.
6. The Office of the Secretary.
7. The Office of Rural Prosperity.

8.7. The Office of Economic Accountability and
Transparency, which shall:

- a. Oversee the department's critical objectives as determined by the secretary and make sure that the department's key objectives are clearly communicated to the public.
 - b. Organize department resources, expertise, data, and research to focus on and solve the complex economic challenges facing the state.
 - c. Provide leadership for the department's priority issues that require integration of policy, management, and critical objectives from multiple programs and organizations internal and external to the department; and organize and manage external communication on such priority issues.
 - d. Promote and facilitate key department initiatives to address priority economic issues and explore data and identify opportunities for innovative approaches to address such economic issues.
 - e. Promote strategic planning for the department.
- (5) The divisions within the department have specific responsibilities to achieve the duties, responsibilities, and goals of the department. Specifically:



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(a) The Division of Economic Development shall:

1. Analyze and evaluate business prospects identified by the Governor and the secretary.

2. Administer certain tax refund, tax credit, and grant programs created in law. Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the department may expend interest earned from the investment of program funds deposited in the Grants and Donations Trust Fund to contract for the administration of those programs, or portions of the programs, assigned to the department by law, by the appropriations process, or by the Governor. Such expenditures shall be subject to review under chapter 216.

3. Develop measurement protocols for the state incentive programs and for the contracted entities which will be used to determine their performance and competitive value to the state. Performance measures, benchmarks, and sanctions must be developed in consultation with the legislative appropriations committees and the appropriate substantive committees, and are subject to the review and approval process provided in s. 216.177. The approved performance measures, standards, and sanctions shall be included and made a part of the strategic plan for contracts entered into for delivery of programs authorized by this section.

4. Develop a 5-year statewide strategic plan. The strategic plan must include, but need not be limited to:

a. Strategies for the promotion of business formation, expansion, recruitment, and retention through aggressive marketing, attraction of venture capital and finance development, domestic trade, international development, and



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export assistance, which lead to more and better jobs and higher wages for all geographic regions, disadvantaged communities, and populations of the state, including rural areas, minority businesses, and urban core areas.

b. The development of realistic policies and programs to further the economic diversity of the state, its regions, and their associated industrial clusters.

c. Specific provisions for the stimulation of economic development and job creation in rural areas and midsize cities and counties of the state, including strategies for rural marketing and the development of infrastructure in rural areas.

d. Provisions for the promotion of the successful long-term economic development of the state with increased emphasis in market research and information.

e. Plans for the generation of foreign investment in the state which create jobs paying above-average wages and which result in reverse investment in the state, including programs that establish viable overseas markets, assist in meeting the financing requirements of export-ready firms, broaden opportunities for international joint venture relationships, use the resources of academic and other institutions, coordinate trade assistance and facilitation services, and facilitate availability of and access to education and training programs that assure requisite skills and competencies necessary to compete successfully in the global marketplace.

f. The identification of business sectors that are of current or future importance to the state's economy and to the state's global business image, and development of specific strategies to promote the development of such sectors.



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g. Strategies for talent development necessary in the state to encourage economic development growth, taking into account factors such as the state's talent supply chain, education and training opportunities, and available workforce.

h. Strategies and plans to support this state's defense, space, and aerospace industries and the emerging complementary business activities and industries that support the development and growth of defense, space, and aerospace in this state.

5. Update the strategic plan every 5 years.

6. Involve CareerSource Florida, Inc.; direct-support organizations of the department; local governments; the general public; local and regional economic development organizations; other local, state, and federal economic, international, and workforce development entities; the business community; and educational institutions to assist with the strategic plan.

7. Coordinate with the Florida Tourism Industry Marketing Corporation in the development of the 4-year marketing plan pursuant to s. 288.1226(13).

8. Administer and manage relationships, as appropriate, with the entities and programs created pursuant to the Florida Capital Formation Act, ss. 288.9621-288.96255.

(10) The department shall, by November 1 of each year, submit an annual report to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives on the condition of the business climate and economic development in the state.

(c) The report must incorporate annual reports of other programs, including:

1. A detailed report of the performance of the Black



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Business Loan Program and a cumulative summary of quarterly report data required under s. 288.714.

~~2. The Rural Economic Development Initiative established under s. 288.0656.~~

~~3.~~ A detailed report of the performance of the Florida Development Finance Corporation and a summary of the corporation's report required under s. 288.9610.

~~3.4.~~ Information provided by Space Florida under s. 331.3051 and an analysis of the activities and accomplishments of Space Florida.

Section 2. Subsection (5) is added to section 163.3168, Florida Statutes, to read:

163.3168 Planning innovations and technical assistance.—

(5) When selecting applications for funding for technical assistance, the state land planning agency shall give preference to local governments located in a rural area of opportunity as defined in s. 288.0656. The state land planning agency shall consult with the Office of Rural Prosperity when awarding funding pursuant to this section.

Section 3. Paragraph (i) is added to subsection (4) of section 201.15, Florida Statutes, to read:

201.15 Distribution of taxes collected.—All taxes collected under this chapter are hereby pledged and shall be first made available to make payments when due on bonds issued pursuant to s. 215.618 or s. 215.619, or any other bonds authorized to be issued on a parity basis with such bonds. Such pledge and availability for the payment of these bonds shall have priority over any requirement for the costs of collection and enforcement under this section. Before distribution pursuant to this



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section, the Department of Revenue shall deduct amounts necessary to pay the costs of the collection and enforcement of the tax levied by this chapter. The costs may not be levied against any portion of taxes pledged to debt service on bonds to the extent that the costs are required to pay any amounts relating to the bonds. All of the costs of the collection and enforcement of the tax levied by this chapter shall be available and transferred to the extent necessary to pay debt service and any other amounts payable with respect to bonds authorized before January 1, 2017, secured by revenues distributed pursuant to this section. All taxes remaining after deduction of costs shall be distributed as follows:

(4) After the required distributions to the Land Acquisition Trust Fund pursuant to subsections (1) and (2), the lesser of 8 percent of the remainder or \$150 million in each fiscal year shall be paid into the State Treasury to the credit of the State Housing Trust Fund and shall be expended pursuant to s. 420.50871. If 8 percent of the remainder is greater than \$150 million in any fiscal year, the difference between 8 percent of the remainder and \$150 million shall be paid into the State Treasury to the credit of the General Revenue Fund. The remainder shall be distributed as follows:

(i) A total of \$30 million shall be paid to the credit of the State Transportation Trust Fund, which funds are exclusively for the use of the Florida Arterial Road Modernization Program as provided in s. 339.68.

Section 4. Paragraph (c) of subsection (2) of section 202.18, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

202.18 Allocation and disposition of tax proceeds.—The



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proceeds of the communications services taxes remitted under this chapter shall be treated as follows:

(2) The proceeds of the taxes remitted under s. 202.12(1)(b) shall be allocated as follows:

(c)1. After the distribution required under paragraph (b), the remainder ~~During each calendar year, the remaining portion of the proceeds~~ shall be transferred to the Local Government Half-cent Sales Tax Clearing Trust Fund. ~~Seventy percent of such proceeds shall be~~ and allocated in the same proportion as the allocation of total receipts of the half-cent sales tax under s. 218.61 and the emergency distribution under s. 218.65 in the prior state fiscal year. ~~Thirty percent of such proceeds shall be distributed pursuant to s. 218.67.~~

2. The proportion of the proceeds allocated based on the emergency distribution under s. 218.65 shall be distributed pursuant to s. 218.65.

3. In each calendar year, the proportion of the proceeds allocated based on the half-cent sales tax under s. 218.61 shall be allocated to each county in the same proportion as the county's percentage of total sales tax allocation for the prior state fiscal year and distributed pursuant to s. 218.62.

4. The department shall distribute the appropriate amount to each municipality and county each month at the same time that local communications services taxes are distributed pursuant to subsection (3).

Section 5. Paragraph (d) of subsection (6) of section 212.20, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

212.20 Funds collected, disposition; additional powers of department; operational expense; refund of taxes adjudicated



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unconstitutionally collected.—

(6) Distribution of all proceeds under this chapter and ss. 202.18(1)(b) and (2)(b) and 203.01(1)(a)3. is as follows:

(d) The proceeds of all other taxes and fees imposed pursuant to this chapter or remitted pursuant to s. 202.18(1)(b) and (2)(b) shall be distributed as follows:

1. In any fiscal year, the greater of \$500 million, minus an amount equal to 4.6 percent of the proceeds of the taxes collected pursuant to chapter 201, or 5.2 percent of all other taxes and fees imposed pursuant to this chapter or remitted pursuant to s. 202.18(1)(b) and (2)(b) shall be deposited in monthly installments into the General Revenue Fund.

2. After the distribution under subparagraph 1., 8.9744 percent of the amount remitted by a sales tax dealer located within a participating county pursuant to s. 218.61 shall be transferred into the Local Government Half-cent Sales Tax Clearing Trust Fund. Beginning July 1, 2003, the amount to be transferred shall be reduced by 0.1 percent, and the department shall distribute this amount to the Public Employees Relations Commission Trust Fund less \$5,000 each month, which shall be added to the amount calculated in subparagraph 3. and distributed accordingly.

3. After the distribution under subparagraphs 1. and 2., 0.0966 percent shall be transferred to the Local Government Half-cent Sales Tax Clearing Trust Fund and distributed pursuant to s. 218.65.

4. After the distributions under subparagraphs 1., 2., and 3., 2.0810 percent of the available proceeds shall be transferred monthly to the Revenue Sharing Trust Fund for



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Counties pursuant to s. 218.215.

5. After the distributions under subparagraphs 1., 2., and 3., 1.3653 percent of the available proceeds shall be transferred monthly to the Revenue Sharing Trust Fund for Municipalities pursuant to s. 218.215. If the total revenue to be distributed pursuant to this subparagraph is at least as great as the amount due from the Revenue Sharing Trust Fund for Municipalities and the former Municipal Financial Assistance Trust Fund in state fiscal year 1999-2000, no municipality shall receive less than the amount due from the Revenue Sharing Trust Fund for Municipalities and the former Municipal Financial Assistance Trust Fund in state fiscal year 1999-2000. If the total proceeds to be distributed are less than the amount received in combination from the Revenue Sharing Trust Fund for Municipalities and the former Municipal Financial Assistance Trust Fund in state fiscal year 1999-2000, each municipality shall receive an amount proportionate to the amount it was due in state fiscal year 1999-2000.

6. After the distributions required under subparagraphs 1.-5., the greater of \$50 million or 0.1438 percent of the available proceeds shall be transferred in each fiscal year to fiscally constrained counties pursuant to s. 218.67.

7. Of the remaining proceeds:

a. In each fiscal year, the sum of \$29,915,500 shall be divided into as many equal parts as there are counties in the state, and one part shall be distributed to each county. The distribution among the several counties must begin each fiscal year on or before January 5th and continue monthly for a total of 4 months. If a local or special law required that any moneys



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accruing to a county in fiscal year 1999-2000 under the then-existing provisions of s. 550.135 be paid directly to the district school board, special district, or a municipal government, such payment must continue until the local or special law is amended or repealed. The state covenants with holders of bonds or other instruments of indebtedness issued by local governments, special districts, or district school boards before July 1, 2000, that it is not the intent of this subparagraph to adversely affect the rights of those holders or relieve local governments, special districts, or district school boards of the duty to meet their obligations as a result of previous pledges or assignments or trusts entered into which obligated funds received from the distribution to county governments under then-existing s. 550.135. This distribution specifically is in lieu of funds distributed under s. 550.135 before July 1, 2000.

b. The department shall distribute \$166,667 monthly to each applicant certified as a facility for a new or retained professional sports franchise pursuant to s. 288.1162. Up to \$41,667 shall be distributed monthly by the department to each certified applicant as defined in s. 288.11621 for a facility for a spring training franchise. However, not more than \$416,670 may be distributed monthly in the aggregate to all certified applicants for facilities for spring training franchises. Distributions begin 60 days after such certification and continue for not more than 30 years, except as otherwise provided in s. 288.11621. A certified applicant identified in this sub-subparagraph may not receive more in distributions than expended by the applicant for the public purposes provided in s.



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288.1162(5) or s. 288.11621(3).

c. The department shall distribute up to \$83,333 monthly to each certified applicant as defined in s. 288.11631 for a facility used by a single spring training franchise, or up to \$166,667 monthly to each certified applicant as defined in s. 288.11631 for a facility used by more than one spring training franchise. Monthly distributions begin 60 days after such certification or July 1, 2016, whichever is later, and continue for not more than 20 years to each certified applicant as defined in s. 288.11631 for a facility used by a single spring training franchise or not more than 25 years to each certified applicant as defined in s. 288.11631 for a facility used by more than one spring training franchise. A certified applicant identified in this sub-subparagraph may not receive more in distributions than expended by the applicant for the public purposes provided in s. 288.11631(3).

d. The department shall distribute \$15,333 monthly to the State Transportation Trust Fund.

e.(I) On or before July 25, 2021, August 25, 2021, and September 25, 2021, the department shall distribute \$324,533,334 in each of those months to the Unemployment Compensation Trust Fund, less an adjustment for refunds issued from the General Revenue Fund pursuant to s. 443.131(3)(e)3. before making the distribution. The adjustments made by the department to the total distributions shall be equal to the total refunds made pursuant to s. 443.131(3)(e)3. If the amount of refunds to be subtracted from any single distribution exceeds the distribution, the department may not make that distribution and must subtract the remaining balance from the next distribution.



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(II) Beginning July 2022, and on or before the 25th day of each month, the department shall distribute \$90 million monthly to the Unemployment Compensation Trust Fund.

(III) If the ending balance of the Unemployment Compensation Trust Fund exceeds \$4,071,519,600 on the last day of any month, as determined from United States Department of the Treasury data, the Office of Economic and Demographic Research shall certify to the department that the ending balance of the trust fund exceeds such amount.

(IV) This sub-subparagraph is repealed, and the department shall end monthly distributions under sub-sub-subparagraph (II), on the date the department receives certification under sub-sub-subparagraph (III).

f. Beginning July 1, 2023, in each fiscal year, the department shall distribute \$27.5 million to the Florida Agricultural Promotional Campaign Trust Fund under s. 571.26, for further distribution in accordance with s. 571.265.

~~8.7.~~ All other proceeds must remain in the General Revenue Fund.

Section 6. 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:



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(h)1. 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), a provision allowing the agency to provide for the payment of invoices to the county, municipality, or rural area of opportunity as that term is defined in s. 288.0656(2), for verified and eligible performance that has been completed in accordance with the terms and conditions set forth in the agreement. This provision is not intended to require reimbursement to the county, municipality, or rural area of opportunity for invoices paid, but to allow the agency to provide for the payment of invoices due. The agency shall expedite such payment requests in order to facilitate the timely payment of invoices received by the county, municipality, or rural area of opportunity. This provision is included to alleviate the financial hardships that certain rural counties and municipalities encounter when administering agreements, and must be exercised by the agency when a county or municipality demonstrates financial hardship, to the extent that federal or state law, rule, or other regulation allows such payments. This paragraph may not be construed to alter or limit any other provisions of federal or state law, rule, or other regulation.

2. By August 1, 2026, and each year thereafter, each state agency shall report to the Office of Rural Prosperity summarizing the implementation of this paragraph for the preceding fiscal year. The Office of Rural Prosperity shall summarize the information received pursuant to this paragraph in its annual report as required in s. 288.013.

Section 7. Section 218.67, Florida Statutes, is amended to



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read:

218.67 Distribution for fiscally constrained counties.—

(1) Each county ~~that is entirely within a rural area of opportunity as designated by the Governor pursuant to s. 288.0656~~ or each county for which the value of a mill will raise no more than \$10 ~~\$5~~ million in revenue, based on the taxable value certified pursuant to s. 1011.62(4)(a)1.a., from the previous July 1, shall be considered a fiscally constrained county.

(2) Each fiscally constrained county government that participates in the local government half-cent sales tax shall be eligible to receive an additional distribution ~~from the Local Government Half-cent Sales Tax Clearing Trust Fund,~~ as provided in s. 212.20(6)(d)6. ~~s. 202.18(2)(c)1.,~~ in addition to its regular monthly distribution provided under this part and any emergency or supplemental distribution under s. 218.65.

(3) The amount to be distributed to each fiscally constrained county shall be determined by the Department of Revenue at the beginning of the fiscal year, using the prior fiscal year's sales and use tax collections from the most recent fiscal year that reports 12 months of collections ~~July 1 taxable value certified pursuant to s. 1011.62(4)(a)1.a., tax data,~~ population as defined in s. 218.21, and the most current calendar year per capita personal income published by the Bureau of Economic Analysis of the United States Department of Commerce ~~millage rate levied for the prior fiscal year.~~ The amount distributed shall be allocated based upon the following factors:

(a) The contribution-to-revenue ~~relative revenue-raising capacity~~ factor for each participating county shall equal 100



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multiplied by a quotient, the numerator of which is the county's population and the denominator of which is the state sales and use tax collections attributable to the county ~~be the ability of the eligible county to generate ad valorem revenues from 1 mill of taxation on a per capita basis. A county that raises no more than \$25 per capita from 1 mill shall be assigned a value of 1; a county that raises more than \$25 but no more than \$30 per capita from 1 mill shall be assigned a value of 0.75; and a county that raises more than \$30 but no more than \$50 per capita from 1 mill shall be assigned a value of 0.5. No value shall be assigned to counties that raise more than \$50 per capita from 1 mill of ad valorem taxation.~~

(b) The personal-income local-effort factor shall equal a quotient, the numerator of which is the median per capita personal income of participating counties and the denominator of which is the county's per capita personal income ~~be a measure of the relative level of local effort of the eligible county as indicated by the millage rate levied for the prior fiscal year. The local-effort factor shall be the most recently adopted countywide operating millage rate for each eligible county multiplied by 0.1.~~

(c) Each eligible county's proportional allocation of the total amount available to be distributed to all of the eligible counties shall be in the same proportion as the sum of the county's two factors is to the sum of the two factors for all eligible counties. The proportional rate computation must be carried to the fifth decimal place, and the amount to distribute to each county must be rounded to the next whole dollar amount. The counties that are eligible to receive an allocation under



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this subsection and the amount available to be distributed to such counties do ~~shall~~ not include counties participating in the phaseout period under subsection (4) or the amounts they remain eligible to receive during the phaseout.

(4) For those counties that no longer qualify under the requirements of subsection (1) after the effective date of this act, there shall be a 2-year phaseout period. Beginning on July 1 of the year following the year in which the value of a mill for that county exceeds \$10 ~~\$5~~ million in revenue, the county shall receive two-thirds of the amount received in the prior year, and beginning on July 1 of the second year following the year in which the value of a mill for that county exceeds \$10 ~~\$5~~ million in revenue, the county shall receive one-third of the amount received in the last year that the county qualified as a fiscally constrained county. Following the 2-year phaseout period, the county is ~~shall~~ no longer ~~be~~ eligible to receive any distributions under this section unless the county can be considered a fiscally constrained county as provided in subsection (1).

(5)(a) The revenues received under this section must be allocated ~~may be used~~ by a county to be used for the following purposes:

1. Fifty percent for public safety, including salary expenditures for law enforcement officers or correctional officers, as those terms are defined in s. 943.10(1) and (2), respectively, firefighters as defined in s. 633.102, or emergency medical technicians or paramedics as those terms are defined in s. 401.23.

2. Thirty percent for infrastructure needs.



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3. Twenty percent for any public purpose.

(b) The revenues received under this section ~~any public purpose, except that such revenues~~ may not be used to pay debt service on bonds, notes, certificates of participation, or any other forms of indebtedness.

Section 8. Subsection (6) is added to section 288.0001, Florida Statutes, to read:

288.0001 Economic Development Programs Evaluation.—The Office of Economic and Demographic Research and the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA) shall develop and present to the Governor, the President of the Senate, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and the chairs of the legislative appropriations committees the Economic Development Programs Evaluation.

(6) (a) The Office of Economic and Demographic Research and OPPAGA shall prepare a report on the impact of the Florida Statutes on rural communities. Specifically, the report must include the following:

1. A review of definitions in the Florida Statutes of terms such as "rural community," "rural area of opportunity," and other similar terms used to define rural areas of this state, including population-based references, to assess the adequacy of the current statutory framework in defining these areas. The analysis must include, but need not be limited to:

a. Evaluation of whether current provisions properly distinguish these communities or areas from more urban and suburban parts of this state;

b. Consideration of updates to the definitions and references to classify additional rural areas, such as growing



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communities, unincorporated areas, or rural communities by design; and

c. Study of appropriate metrics to be used to describe rural communities or areas, such as population, geographic, demographic, or other metrics, or combinations thereof.

2. A survey of local governments meeting the statutory definition of "rural community" or "rural area of opportunity" to assess the benefits to the local government of being identified as such and any perceived unmet needs in the implementation of current statutory provisions designed to support rural communities or areas.

3. An analysis of state grant programs and recurring appropriations that explicitly benefit rural communities or areas, including, but not limited to, program purpose, funding amounts, participation rates, and consistency with peer-reviewed studies on effective economic programs for these areas.

(b) Upon request, the Office of Economic and Demographic Research and OPPAGA must be provided with all data necessary to complete the report, including any confidential data, by any entity with information related to this review. The offices may collaborate on all data collection and analysis.

(c) The Office of Economic and Demographic Research and OPPAGA shall submit a report to the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives by December 31, 2025. The report must provide recommendations to address any findings, including any changes in statutory definitions or references to rural communities or areas, opportunities to enhance state support to rural communities or areas, outcome measures or other criteria that may be used to examine the



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effectiveness of state grant programs for rural communities or areas, and adjustments to program design, including changes to increase participation in state grant programs for rural communities or areas.

(d) This subsection expires July 1, 2026.

Section 9. Present paragraphs (d) and (e) of subsection (7) of section 288.001, Florida Statutes, are redesignated as paragraphs (e) and (f), respectively, and a new paragraph (d) is added to that subsection, to read:

288.001 The Florida Small Business Development Center Network.—

(7) ADDITIONAL STATE FUNDS; USES; PAY-PER-PERFORMANCE INCENTIVES; STATEWIDE SERVICE; SERVICE ENHANCEMENTS; BEST PRACTICES; ELIGIBILITY.—

(d) Notwithstanding paragraphs (a), (b), and (c), the network shall use funds directly appropriated for the specific purpose of expanding service in rural communities, as defined in s. 288.0656, in addition to any funds allocated by the network from other sources. The network shall use the funds to develop an activity plan focused on network consultants and resources in rural communities. In collaboration with regional economic development organizations as defined in s. 288.018, the plan must provide for either full- or part-time consultants to be available for at least 20 hours per week in rural areas or be permanently stationed in rural areas. This may include establishing a circuit in specific rural locations to ensure the consultants' availability on a regular basis. By using the funds to create a regular presence in rural areas, the network can strengthen community collaboration, raise awareness of available



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resources to provide opportunities for new business development or existing business growth, and make professional experience, education, and business information available in these essential communities. The network may dedicate funds to facilitate local or regional events that focus on small business topics, provide consulting services, and leverage partner organizations, such as the regional economic development organizations, local workforce development boards as described in s. 445.07, and Florida College System institutions.

Section 10. Section 288.007, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

288.007 Inventory of communities seeking to recruit businesses.—By September 30 of each year, a county or municipality that has a population of at least 25,000 or its local economic development organization, and each local government within a rural area of opportunity as defined in s. 288.0656 or its local economic development organization, shall ~~must~~ submit to the department a brief overview of the strengths, services, and economic development incentives that its community offers. The local government or its local economic development organization also shall ~~must~~ identify any industries that it is encouraging to locate or relocate to its area. Unless otherwise required pursuant to this section, a county or municipality having a population of 25,000 or less ~~fewer~~ or its local economic development organization seeking to recruit businesses may submit information as required in this section and may participate in any activity or initiative resulting from the collection, analysis, and reporting of the information to the department pursuant to this section.



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Section 11. Section 288.013, Florida Statutes, is created to read:

288.013 Office of Rural Prosperity.—

(1) The Legislature finds that the unique characteristics and nature of the rural communities in this state are integral to making this state an attractive place to visit, work, and live. Further, the Legislature finds that building a prosperous rural economy and vibrant rural communities is in the best interest of this state. Rural prosperity is integral to supporting this state's infrastructure, housing, and agricultural and food-processing needs, as well as promoting the health and advancement of the overall economy of this state. It is of importance to the state that its rural areas are able to grow, whether locally or in regional partnerships. To better serve rural communities, and in recognition of rural Florida's unique challenges and opportunities, the Office of Rural Prosperity is established to ensure these efforts are coordinated, focused, and effective.

(2) The Office of Rural Prosperity is created within the Department of Commerce for the purpose of supporting rural communities by helping rural stakeholders navigate available programs and resources and representing rural interests across state government.

(3) The Governor shall appoint a director to lead the office, subject to confirmation by the Senate. The director shall report to the secretary of the department and shall serve at the pleasure of the secretary.

(4) The office shall do all of the following:

(a) Serve as the state's point of contact for rural local



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governments.

(b) Administer the Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI) pursuant to s. 288.0656.

(c) Provide training and technical assistance to rural local governments on a broad range of community and economic development activities. The training and technical assistance may be offered using communications technology or in person and must be recorded and posted to the office's website. The training and technical assistance must include, at a minimum, the following topics:

1. How to access state and federal resources, including training on the online rural resource directory required under paragraph (d).

2. Best practices relating to comprehensive planning, economic development, and land development in rural communities.

3. Strategies to address management and administrative capacity challenges unique to rural local governments.

4. Requirements of, and updates on recent changes to, the Community Planning Act under s. 163.3161.

5. Updates on other recent state and federal laws affecting rural local governments.

(d) Create and maintain an online rural resource directory to serve as an interactive tool to navigate the various state and federal resources, tools, and services available to rural local governments. The office shall regularly maintain the resource directory and, to the greatest extent possible, include up-to-date information on state and federal programs, resources, tools, and services that address the needs of rural communities in all areas of governance. Each state agency shall routinely



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provide information and updates to the office for maintenance of the resource directory. The resource directory must allow users to search by indicators, such as agency name, resource type, or topic, and include a notification function to allow users to receive alerts when new or modified resources are available. To the greatest extent possible, the resource directory must include information on financial match requirements for the state and federal programs listed in the directory.

(5)(a) By October 1, 2025, the office shall establish and staff seven regional rural community liaison centers across this state for the purpose of providing specialized in-person state support to local governments in rural areas of opportunity as defined in s. 288.0656. The department shall by rule divide this state into seven regions and assign a regional rural community liaison center to each region. Each liaison center shall support the local governments within its geographic territory and shall be staffed with at least two full-time department personnel. At a minimum, liaison centers shall have the following powers, duties, and functions:

1. Work with local governments to plan and achieve goals for local or regional growth, economic development, and rural prosperity.

2. Facilitate local government access to state and federal resources, such as grants, loans, and other aid or resources.

3. Advise local governments on available waivers of program requirements, including financial match waivers or reductions, for projects using state or federal funds through the Rural Economic Development Initiative under s. 288.0656.

4. Coordinate local government technical assistance needs



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with the department and other state or federal agencies.

5. Promote model ordinances, policies, and strategies related to economic development.

6. Assist local governments with regulatory and reporting compliance.

(b) To the greatest extent possible, the regional rural community liaison centers shall coordinate with local and regional governmental entities, regional economic development organizations as defined in s. 288.018, and other appropriate entities to establish a network to foster community-driven solutions that promote viable and sustainable rural communities.

(c) The regional rural community liaison centers shall regularly engage with the Rural Economic Development Initiative established in s. 288.0656, and at least one staff member from each liaison center shall attend, either in person or by means of electronic communication, the monthly meetings required by s. 288.0656(6)(c).

(6) By December 1, 2025, and each year thereafter, the director of the office shall submit to the Administration Commission in the Executive Office of the Governor a written report describing the office's operations and accomplishments for the preceding year, inclusive of the Rural Economic Development Initiative report required by s. 288.0656(8). In consultation with the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, the office shall also include in the annual report recommendations for policies, programs, and funding to further support the needs of rural communities in this state. The office shall submit the annual report to the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives by December 1 of



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each year and publish the annual report on the office's website.
The director shall present, in person at the next scheduled
Administration Commission meeting, detailed information from the
annual report required by this subsection.

(7)(a) The Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government
Accountability (OPPAGA) shall review the effectiveness of the
office by December 15, 2026, and each year thereafter until
2028. Beginning in 2029, OPPAGA shall review and evaluate the
office every 3 years and shall submit a report based on its
findings. Each report must recommend policy and statutory
modifications for consideration by the Legislature. OPPAGA shall
submit each report to the President of the Senate and the
Speaker of the House of Representatives pursuant to the
schedule.

(b) OPPAGA shall review strategies implemented by other
states on rural community preservation, enhancement, and
revitalization and report on their effectiveness and potential
for implementation in this state. OPPAGA shall include its
findings in its report to the President of the Senate and the
Speaker of the House of Representatives by December 15, 2027,
and every 3 years thereafter.

(c)1. OPPAGA shall review each state-funded or state-
administered grant and loan program available to local
governments to:

a. Identify any specified local government financial match
requirements and whether any portion of a match may be waived or
is required to be waived, pursuant to law, and programs where a
financial match waiver may be appropriate for rural local
government applicants, if not contemplated by law.



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b. Identify grant and loan application evaluation criteria, including scoring procedures, for programs that may be perceived to be overly burdensome for rural local government applicants, and whether special accommodations or preferences for rural local governments may be appropriate.

2. OPPAGA shall produce a report based on its review and submit the report to the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives by December 15, 2026.

3. This paragraph expires June 30, 2027.

Section 12. Section 288.014, Florida Statutes, is created to read:

288.014 Renaissance Grants Program.—

(1) The Legislature finds that it has traditionally provided programs to assist rural communities with economic development and enhance their ability to attract businesses and that, by providing that extra component of economic viability, rural communities are able to attract new businesses and grow existing ones. However, the Legislature finds that a subset of rural communities has decreased in population over the past decade, contributing to a decline in local business activity and economic development. The Legislature further finds that the state must transform its assistance to these specific rural communities to help them achieve a necessary precursor of economic viability. The Legislature further finds that the approach intended by the creation of renaissance grants is to focus on reversing the economic deterioration in rural communities by retaining and attracting residents by giving them a reason to stay, which is the impetus of natural economic growth, business opportunities, and increased quality of life.



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(2) The Office of Rural Prosperity within the department shall administer the Renaissance Grants Program to provide block grants to eligible counties. By October 1, 2025, the Office of Economic and Demographic Research shall certify to the Office of Rural Prosperity which counties are growth-impeded. For the purposes of this section, "growth-impeded" means a county that, as of the most recent population estimate, has had a declining population over the last 10 years. After an initial certification, the Office of Economic and Demographic Research shall annually certify whether the county remains growth-impeded, until the county has 3 consecutive years of population growth. Upon such certification of population growth, the county is eligible to participate in the program for 1 additional year in order for the county to prepare for the end of block grant funding.

(3)(a) Each participating county shall enter into an agreement with the Office of Rural Prosperity to receive the block grant. Each county has broad authority to design its specific plan to achieve population growth within the broad parameters identified in this section. The Office of Rural Prosperity may not determine the manner in which the county implements the block grant. However, regional rural community liaison center staff shall provide assistance in developing the county's plan, upon request.

(b) Each participating county shall report annually to the Office of Rural Prosperity on activities undertaken, intergovernmental agreements entered into, and other information as required by the office.

(c) Each participating county shall receive \$1 million from



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the funds appropriated to the program. Counties participating in the program shall make all attempts to limit expenses for administrative costs, consistent with the need for prudent management and accountability in the use of public funds. Each county may contribute other funds for block grant purposes, including local, state, or federal grant funds, or seek out in-kind or financial contributions from private or public sources to assist in fulfilling the activities undertaken.

(4)(a) A participating county shall hire and retain a renaissance coordinator and may use block grant funds for this purpose. The renaissance coordinator is responsible for:

1. Ensuring that block grant funds are used as provided in this section;

2. Coordinating with other local governments, school boards, Florida College System institutions, or other entities; and

3. Reporting as necessary to the state, including information necessary pursuant to subsection (7).

(b) The Office of Rural Prosperity regional rural community liaison center staff shall provide assistance, upon request, and training to the renaissance coordinator to ensure successful implementation of the block grant.

(5) A participating county shall design a plan to make targeted investments in the community to achieve population growth and increase the economic vitality of the community. The plan must include the following key features for use of the state support:

(a) Technology centers with extended hours located within schools or on school premises, administered by the local school



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board, for such schools which provide extended hours and support for access by students.

(b) Facilities that colocate adult day care with child care facilities. The site-sharing facilities must be managed to also provide opportunities for direct interaction between generations and increase the health and well-being of both younger and older participants, reduce social isolation, and create cost and time efficiencies for working family members. The regional rural community liaison center staff of the Office of Rural Prosperity shall assist the county, upon request, with bringing to the Rural Economic Development Initiative or directly to the appropriate state agency recommendations necessary to streamline any required state permits, licenses, regulations, or other requirements.

(c) Technology labs managed in agreement with the nearest Florida College System institution or a career center as established under s. 1001.44. Repurposing vacant industrial sites or existing office space must be given priority in the selection of lab locations. Each local technology lab must be staffed and open for extended hours with the capacity to provide:

1. Access to trainers and equipment necessary for users to earn various certificates or online degrees in technology;

2. Hands-on assistance with applying for appropriate remote work opportunities; and

3. Studio space with equipment for graduates and other qualifying residents to perform remote work that is based on the use of technology. Collaboration with community partners, including the local workforce development board as described in



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s. 445.007, to provide training opportunities, in-kind support such as transportation to and from the lab, financing of equipment for in-home use, or basic maintenance of such equipment is required.

(6) In addition to the hiring of a renaissance coordinator, a participating county shall develop intergovernmental agreements for shared responsibilities with its municipalities, school board, and Florida College System institution or career center and enter into necessary contracts with providers and community partners in order to implement the plan.

(7)(a) Every 2 years, the Auditor General shall conduct an operational audit as defined in s. 11.45 of each county's grant activities, beginning in 2026.

(b) On December 31, 2026, and every year thereafter, the Office of Economic and Demographic Research shall submit an annual report of renaissance block grant recipients by county to the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives. The report must provide key economic indicators that measure progress in altering longer-term trends in the county. The Office of Rural Prosperity shall provide the Office of Economic and Demographic Research with information as requested to complete the report.

(8) Notwithstanding s. 216.301, funds appropriated for the purposes of this section are not subject to reversion.

(9) This section expires June 30, 2040.

Section 13. Section 288.0175, Florida Statutes, is created to read:

288.0175 Public Infrastructure Smart Technology Grant Program.—



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(1) The Public Infrastructure Smart Technology Grant Program is established within the Office of Rural Prosperity within the department to fund and support the development of public infrastructure smart technology projects in communities located in rural areas of opportunity, subject to legislative appropriation.

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

(a) "Public infrastructure smart technology" means systems and applications that use connectivity, data analytics, and automation to improve public infrastructure by increasing efficiency, enhancing public services, and promoting sustainable development.

(b) "Rural area of opportunity" has the same meaning as in s. 288.0656.

(c) "Smart technology lead organization" means a not-for-profit corporation organized under s. 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code which has been in existence for at least 3 years and specializes in smart region planning.

(3)(a) The Office of Rural Prosperity shall contract with one or more smart technology lead organizations to administer the grant program for the purpose of deploying public infrastructure smart technology in rural communities. In accordance with the terms required by the office, the smart technology lead organization shall provide grants to counties and municipalities located within a rural area of opportunity for public infrastructure smart technology projects.

(b) The office's contract with a smart technology lead organization must specify the contract deliverables, including financial reports and other reports due the office, timeframes



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for achieving contractual obligations, and any other requirements the office determines are necessary. The contract must require the smart technology lead organization to do the following:

1. Collaborate with counties and municipalities located in rural areas of opportunity to identify opportunities for local governments to institute cost-effective smart technology solutions for improving public services and infrastructure.

2. Provide technical assistance to counties and municipalities located in rural areas of opportunity in developing plans for public infrastructure smart technology projects.

3. Assist counties and municipalities located in rural areas of opportunity in connecting with other communities, companies, and other entities to leverage the impact of each public infrastructure smart technology project.

(4) The office shall include in its annual report required by s. 288.013(6) a description of the projects funded under this section.

Section 14. Subsections (1), (2), and (4) of section 288.018, Florida Statutes, are amended to read:

288.018 Regional Rural Development Grants Program.—

(1)(a) For the purposes of this section, the term “regional economic development organization” means an economic development organization located in or contracted to serve a rural area of opportunity, as defined in s. 288.0656 ~~s. 288.0656(2)(d)~~.

(b) Subject to appropriation, the Office of Rural Prosperity ~~department~~ shall establish a grant program to provide funding to regional economic development organizations for the



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purpose of building the professional capacity of those organizations. Building the professional capacity of a regional economic development organization includes hiring professional staff to develop, deliver, and provide needed economic development professional services, including technical assistance, education and leadership development, marketing, and project recruitment. Grants may also be used by a regional economic development organization to provide technical assistance to local governments, local economic development organizations, and existing and prospective businesses.

(c) A regional economic development organization may apply annually to the office department for a grant. The office department is authorized to approve, on an annual basis, grants to such regional economic development organizations. The office ~~may award a maximum amount of \$50,000 in a year to maximum amount an organization may receive in any year will be \$50,000, or \$250,000 each to for~~ any three regional economic development organizations that serve an entire region of a rural area of opportunity designated pursuant to s. 288.0656(7) if they are recognized by the office department as serving such a region.

(2) In approving the participants, the office department shall require the following:

(a) Documentation of official commitments of support from each of the units of local government represented by the regional organization.

(b) Demonstration that the organization is in existence and actively involved in economic development activities serving the region.

(c) Demonstration of the manner in which the organization



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is or will coordinate its efforts with those of other local and state organizations.

(4) Except as otherwise provided in the General Appropriations Act, the department may expend up to \$750,000 each fiscal year from funds appropriated ~~to the Rural Community Development Revolving Loan Fund~~ for the purposes outlined in this section.

Section 15. Section 288.019, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

288.019 Rural considerations in grant review and evaluation processes; financial match waiver or reduction.—

(1) Notwithstanding any other law, and to the fullest extent possible, each agency and organization ~~the member agencies and organizations~~ of the Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI) as defined in s. 288.0656 ~~s. 288.0656(6)(a)~~ shall review:

(a) All grant and loan application evaluation criteria and scoring procedures to ensure the fullest access for rural communities ~~counties~~ as defined in s. 288.0656 ~~s. 288.0656(2)~~ to resources available throughout the state; and

(b) The financial match requirements for projects in rural communities.

(2) ~~(1)~~ Each REDI agency and organization shall consider the impact on and ability of rural communities to meet and be competitive under such criteria, scoring, and requirements. Upon review, each REDI agency and organization shall ~~review all evaluation and scoring procedures and develop a proposal for~~ modifications to those procedures which minimize the financial and resource impact to a rural community, including waiver or



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997 reduction of any required financial match requirements ~~impact of~~
998 ~~a project within a rural area.~~

999 (a)(2) Evaluation criteria and scoring procedures must
1000 provide for an appropriate ranking, when ranking is a component
1001 of the program, based on the proportionate impact that projects
1002 have on a rural area when compared with similar project impacts
1003 on an urban area. Additionally,

1004 ~~(3)~~ evaluation criteria and scoring procedures must
1005 recognize the disparity of available fiscal resources for an
1006 equal level of financial support from an urban county or
1007 municipality and a rural county or municipality.

1008 ~~(a)~~ The evaluation criteria should weight contribution in
1009 proportion to the amount of funding available at the local
1010 level.

1011 (b) Match requirements must be waived or reduced for rural
1012 communities. When appropriate, an in-kind match must ~~should~~ be
1013 allowed and applied as a financial match when a rural community
1014 ~~county~~ is experiencing economic financial distress as defined in
1015 s. 288.0656 ~~through elevated unemployment at a rate in excess of~~
1016 ~~the state's average by 5 percentage points or because of the~~
1017 ~~loss of its ad valorem base. Donations of land, though usually~~
1018 not recognized as an in-kind match, may be treated as such. As
1019 appropriate, each agency and organization that applies for or
1020 receives federal funding must request federal approval to waive
1021 or reduce the financial match requirements, if any, for projects
1022 in rural communities.

1023 ~~(3)(4)~~ For existing programs, The proposal ~~modified~~
1024 ~~evaluation criteria and scoring procedure~~ must be submitted
1025 ~~delivered~~ to the Office of Rural Prosperity ~~department~~ for



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distribution to the REDI agencies and organizations. The REDI agencies and organizations shall review and make comments and recommendations that. ~~Future rules, programs, evaluation criteria, and scoring processes must be brought before a REDI meeting for review, discussion, and recommendation to allow~~ rural communities ~~counties~~ fuller access to the state's resources.

(4) Each REDI agency and organization shall ensure that related administrative rules or policies are modified, as necessary, to reflect the finalized proposal and that information about the authorized wavier or reduction is included in the online rural resource directory of the Office of Rural Prosperity required in s. 288.013(4) (d).

(5) The rural liaison from the related regional district shall assist the rural community to make requests of waiver or reduction of match.

Section 16. Subsection (3) is added to section 288.021, Florida Statutes, to read:

288.021 Economic development liaison.—

(3) When practicable, the staff member appointed as the economic development liaison shall also serve as the agency representative for the Rural Economic Development Initiative pursuant to s. 288.0656.

Section 17. Section 288.065, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

288.065 Rural Community Development Revolving Loan Fund.—

(1) The Rural Community Development Revolving Loan Fund Program is established within the Office of Rural Prosperity ~~department~~ to facilitate the use of existing federal, state, and



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local financial resources by providing local governments with financial assistance to further promote the economic viability of rural communities. These funds may be used to finance initiatives directed toward maintaining or developing the economic base of rural communities, especially initiatives addressing employment opportunities for residents of these communities.

(2)(a) The program shall provide for long-term loans, loan guarantees, and loan loss reserves to units of local governments, or economic development organizations substantially underwritten by a unit of local government.

(b) For purposes of this section, the term "unit of local government" means:

1. A county ~~within counties~~ with a population ~~populations~~ of 75,000 or less. ~~fewer, or within any~~

2. A county with a population of 125,000 or less ~~fewer~~ which is contiguous to a county with a population of 75,000 or less. ~~fewer~~

3. A municipality within a county described in subparagraph 1. or subparagraph 2.

4. A county or municipality within a rural area of opportunity.

For purposes of this paragraph, population is determined in accordance with the most recent official estimates pursuant to s. 186.901 and must include those residing in incorporated and unincorporated areas of a county, ~~based on the most recent official population estimate as determined under s. 186.901, including those residing in incorporated areas and those~~



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~~residing in unincorporated areas of the county, or to units of local government, or economic development organizations substantially underwritten by a unit of local government, within a rural area of opportunity.~~

~~(c)(b)~~ Requests for loans must ~~shall~~ be made by application to the office ~~department~~. Loans must ~~shall~~ be made pursuant to agreements specifying the terms and conditions agreed to between the applicant and the department. The loans are ~~shall be~~ the legal obligations of the applicant.

~~(d)(e)~~ All repayments of principal and interest shall be returned to the loan fund and made available for loans to other applicants. However, in a rural area of opportunity designated under s. 288.0656 ~~by the Governor~~, and upon approval by the office ~~department~~, repayments of principal and interest may be retained by the applicant if such repayments are dedicated and matched to fund regionally based economic development organizations representing the rural area of opportunity.

(3) The office ~~department~~ shall manage the fund, establishing loan practices that must include, but are not limited to, procedures for establishing loan interest rates, uses of funding, application procedures, and application review procedures. The office has ~~department shall have~~ final approval authority for any loan under this section.

(4) Notwithstanding ~~the provisions of~~ s. 216.301, funds appropriated for this loan fund may ~~purpose shall~~ not be subject to reversion.

(5) The office shall include in its annual report required under s. 288.013 detailed information about the fund, including loans made during the previous fiscal year, loans active, loans



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terminated or repaid, and the amount of funds not obligated as
of 14 days before the date the report is due.

Section 18. Subsections (1), (2), and (3) of section
288.0655, Florida Statutes, are amended, and subsection (6) is
added to that section, to read:

288.0655 Rural Infrastructure Fund.—

(1) There is created within the Office of Rural Prosperity
~~department~~ the Rural Infrastructure Fund to facilitate the
planning, preparing, and financing of infrastructure projects in
rural communities which will encourage job creation, capital
investment, and the strengthening and diversification of rural
economies by promoting tourism, trade, and economic development.
Grants under this program may be awarded to a unit of local
government within a rural community or rural area of opportunity
as defined in s. 288.0656; or to a regional economic development
organization, a unit of local government, or an economic
development organization substantially underwritten by a unit of
local government for an infrastructure project located within an
unincorporated area that has a population of 15,000 or less, has
been in existence for 100 year or more, is contiguous to a rural
community, and has been adversely affected by a natural disaster
or presents a unique economic development opportunity of
regional impact.

(2)(a) Funds appropriated by the Legislature shall be
distributed by the office ~~department~~ through grant programs that
maximize the use of federal, local, and private resources,
including, but not limited to, those available under the Small
Cities Community Development Block Grant Program.

(b) To facilitate access of rural communities and rural



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1142 areas of opportunity as defined by the Rural Economic
1143 Development Initiative to infrastructure funding programs of the
1144 Federal Government, such as those offered by the United States
1145 Department of Agriculture and the United States Department of
1146 Commerce, and state programs, including those offered by Rural
1147 Economic Development Initiative agencies, and to facilitate
1148 local government or private infrastructure funding efforts, the
1149 office department ~~department~~ may award grants for up to 75 percent of the
1150 total infrastructure project cost, or up to 100 percent of the
1151 total infrastructure project cost for a project located in a
1152 rural community as defined in s. 288.0656(2) which is also
1153 located in a fiscally constrained county as defined in s.
1154 218.67(1) or a rural area of opportunity as defined in s.
1155 288.0656(2). Eligible uses of funds may include improving any
1156 inadequate infrastructure that has resulted in regulatory action
1157 that prohibits economic or community growth and reducing the
1158 costs to community users of proposed infrastructure improvements
1159 that exceed such costs in comparable communities. Eligible uses
1160 of funds include improvements to public infrastructure for
1161 industrial or commercial sites and upgrades to or development of
1162 public tourism infrastructure. Authorized infrastructure may
1163 include the following public or public-private partnership
1164 facilities: storm water systems; telecommunications facilities;
1165 roads or other remedies to transportation impediments; nature-
1166 based tourism facilities; or other physical requirements
1167 necessary to facilitate tourism, trade, and economic development
1168 activities in the community. Authorized infrastructure may also
1169 include publicly or privately owned self-powered nature-based
1170 tourism facilities, publicly owned telecommunications



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facilities, and additions to the distribution facilities of the existing natural gas utility as defined in s. 366.04(3)(c), the existing electric utility as defined in s. 366.02, or the existing water or wastewater utility as defined in s. 367.021(12), or any other existing water or wastewater facility, which owns a gas or electric distribution system or a water or wastewater system in this state when:

1. A contribution-in-aid of construction is required to serve public or public-private partnership facilities under the tariffs of any natural gas, electric, water, or wastewater utility as defined herein; and

2. Such utilities as defined herein are willing and able to provide such service.

(c) The office ~~department~~ may award grants of up to \$300,000 for infrastructure feasibility studies, design and engineering activities, or other infrastructure planning and preparation or site readiness activities. Site readiness expenses may include clearing title, surveys, permitting, environmental studies, and regulatory compliance costs. Grants awarded under this paragraph may be used in conjunction with grants awarded under paragraph (b). In evaluating applications under this paragraph, the office ~~department~~ shall consider the extent to which the application seeks to minimize administrative and consultant expenses.

(d) The office ~~department~~ shall participate in a memorandum of agreement with the United States Department of Agriculture under which state funds available through the Rural Infrastructure Fund may be advanced, in excess of the prescribed state share, for a project that has received from the United



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States Department of Agriculture a preliminary determination of eligibility for federal financial support. State funds in excess of the prescribed state share which are advanced pursuant to this paragraph and the memorandum of agreement shall be reimbursed when funds are awarded under an application for federal funding.

(e) To enable local governments to access the resources available pursuant to s. 403.973(17), the office department may award grants for surveys, feasibility studies, and other activities related to the identification and preclearance review of land which is suitable for preclearance review. Authorized grants under this paragraph may not exceed \$75,000 each, except in the case of a project in a rural area of opportunity, in which case the grant may not exceed \$300,000. Any funds awarded under this paragraph must be matched at a level of 50 percent with local funds, except that any funds awarded for a project in a rural area of opportunity do not require a match of local funds. ~~If an application for funding is for a catalyst site, as defined in s. 288.0656, the requirement for local match may be waived pursuant to the process in s. 288.06561.~~ In evaluating applications under this paragraph, the office department shall consider the extent to which the application seeks to minimize administrative and consultant expenses.

(3) The office department, in consultation with the Department of Transportation ~~Florida Tourism Industry Marketing Corporation~~, the Department of Environmental Protection, and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, as appropriate, shall review and certify applications pursuant to s. 288.061. The review must include an evaluation of the



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economic benefit and long-term viability. The office has
~~department shall have~~ final approval for any grant under this
section.

(6) The office shall include in its annual report required
under s. 288.013 detailed information about the fund, including
grants made for the year, grants active, grants terminated or
complete, and the amount of funds not obligated as of 14 days
before the date the report is due.

Section 19. Subsection (1), paragraphs (a), (b), and (e) of
subsection (2), subsections (3) and (6), paragraph (c) of
subsection (7), and subsection (8) of section 288.0656, Florida
Statutes, are amended to read:

288.0656 Rural Economic Development Initiative.—

(1)(a) Recognizing that rural communities and regions
continue to face extraordinary challenges in their efforts to
significantly improve their economies, specifically in terms of
personal income, job creation, average wages, and strong tax
bases, it is the intent of the Legislature to encourage and
facilitate the location and expansion of major economic
development projects of significant scale in such rural
communities. The Legislature finds that rural communities are
the essential conduits for the economy's distribution,
manufacturing, and food supply.

(b) The Rural Economic Development Initiative, known as
"REDI," is created within the Office of Rural Prosperity
~~department~~, and all the participation of state and regional
agencies listed in paragraph (6)(a) shall participate in this
~~initiative is authorized.~~

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



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

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

~~(c)(e)~~ "Rural community" means:

1. A county with a population of 75,000 or less ~~fewer~~.
2. A county with a population of 125,000 or less ~~fewer~~ which is contiguous to a county with a population of 75,000 or less ~~fewer~~.
3. A municipality within a county described in subparagraph 1. or subparagraph 2.
4. An unincorporated federal enterprise community or an incorporated rural city with a population of 25,000 or less ~~fewer~~ and an employment base focused on traditional agricultural or 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 (a) ~~paragraph (e)~~ and verified by the department.

For purposes of this paragraph, population shall be determined



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in accordance with the most recent official estimate pursuant to
s. 186.901.

(3) REDI shall be responsible for coordinating and focusing
the efforts and resources of state and regional agencies on the
problems which affect the fiscal, economic, and community
viability of Florida's ~~economically-distressed~~ rural
communities, working with local governments, community-based
organizations, and private organizations that have an interest
in the growth and development of these communities to find ways
to balance environmental and growth management issues with local
needs.

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

1. The Department of Transportation.
2. The Department of Environmental Protection.
3. The Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.
4. The Department of State.
5. The Department of Health.
6. The Department of Children and Families.
7. The Department of Corrections.
8. The Department of Education.
9. The Department of Juvenile Justice.
10. The Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.
11. Each water management district.
12. CareerSource Florida, Inc.
13. VISIT Florida.



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14. The Florida Regional Planning Council Association.

15. The Agency for Health Care Administration.

16. The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS).

(b) An alternate for each designee must ~~shall~~ also be chosen, who must also be a deputy secretary or higher-level staff person, and the names of the designees and alternates must ~~shall~~ be reported sent to the director of the Office of Rural Prosperity. At least one rural liaison from each regional rural community liaison center must participate in the REDI meetings Secretary of Commerce.

(c) REDI shall meet at least each month, but may meet more often as necessary. Each REDI representative, or his or her designee, shall be physically present or available by means of electronic communication for each meeting.

(d) ~~(b)~~ Each REDI representative must have comprehensive knowledge of his or her agency's functions, both regulatory and service in nature, and of the state's economic goals, policies, and programs. This person shall be the primary point of contact for his or her agency with REDI on issues and projects relating to ~~economically distressed~~ rural communities and with regard to expediting project review, shall ensure a prompt effective response to problems arising with regard to rural issues, and shall work closely with the other REDI representatives in the identification of opportunities for preferential awards of program funds, contractual or other agreement provisions which meet the requirements of s. 215.971, and allowances and waiver of program requirements when necessary to encourage and facilitate ~~long-term private~~ capital investment and job creation.



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1345 ~~(e)-(e)~~ The REDI representatives shall work with REDI in the
1346 review and evaluation of statutes and rules for adverse impact
1347 on rural communities and the development of alternative
1348 proposals to mitigate that impact.

1349 ~~(f)-(d)~~ Each REDI representative shall be responsible for
1350 ensuring that each district office or facility of his or her
1351 agency is informed quarterly about the Rural Economic
1352 Development Initiative and for providing assistance throughout
1353 the agency in the implementation of REDI activities.

1354 (7)

1355 ~~(c) Each rural area of opportunity may designate catalyst~~
1356 ~~projects, provided that each catalyst project is specifically~~
1357 ~~recommended by REDI and confirmed as a catalyst project by the~~
1358 ~~department. All state agencies and departments shall use all~~
1359 ~~available tools and resources to the extent permissible by law~~
1360 ~~to promote the creation and development of each catalyst project~~
1361 ~~and the development of catalyst sites.~~

1362 (8) REDI shall submit a report to the Office of Rural
1363 Prosperity ~~department~~ on all REDI activities for the previous
1364 fiscal year as a supplement to the office's ~~department's~~ annual
1365 report required under s. 288.013 ~~s. 20.60~~. This supplementary
1366 report must include:

1367 (a) A status report on every project ~~all projects~~ currently
1368 being coordinated through REDI, the number of preferential
1369 awards and allowances made pursuant to this section in detail by
1370 award, allowance, or match type, the dollar amount of such
1371 awards, and the names of the recipients.

1372 (b) A description of all waivers of program requirements
1373 granted, including a list by program of each waiver that was



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granted. If waivers were requested but were not granted, a list of ungranted waivers, including reasons why the waivers were not granted, must be included.

(c) Detailed information as to the economic impact of the projects coordinated by REDI.

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

(e) Legislative recommendations for statutory waivers or reductions of specified economic development program requirements, including financial match waivers or reductions, for applicants within rural areas of opportunity.

(f) Outcomes of proposals submitted pursuant to s. 288.019.
Section 20. Section 288.06561, Florida Statutes, is repealed.

Section 21. Subsections (2), (3), and (4) of section 288.0657, Florida Statutes, are amended to read:

288.0657 Florida rural economic development strategy grants.—

(2) The Office of Rural Prosperity shall provide ~~department may accept and administer moneys appropriated to the department for providing~~ grants to assist rural communities to develop and implement strategic economic development plans. Grants may be provided to assist with costs associated with marketing a site to business and site selectors for an economic development project that is part of an economic development plan, either as part of funding to develop and implement a plan or related to an already adopted plan.

(3) A rural community, an economic development organization



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in a rural area, or a regional organization representing at least one rural community or such economic development organizations may apply for such grants. The rural liaison for the rural community shall assist those applying for such grants.

(4) The office ~~department~~ shall establish criteria for reviewing grant applications. These criteria must ~~shall~~ include, but are not limited to, the degree of participation and commitment by the local community and the application's consistency with local comprehensive plans or the application's proposal to ensure such consistency. Grants for marketing may include funding for advertising campaign materials and costs associated with meetings, trade missions, and professional development affiliated with site preparation and marketing. The office ~~department~~ shall review each application for a grant. ~~The department may approve grants only to the extent that funds are appropriated for such grants by the Legislature.~~

Section 22. Paragraph (a) of subsection (13) of section 288.1226, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

288.1226 Florida Tourism Industry Marketing Corporation; use of property; board of directors; duties; audit.—

(13) FOUR-YEAR MARKETING PLAN.—

(a) The corporation shall, in collaboration with the department, develop a 4-year marketing plan. At a minimum, the marketing plan must discuss the following:

1. Continuation of overall tourism growth in this state.
2. Expansion to new or under-represented tourist markets.
3. Maintenance of traditional and loyal tourist markets.
4. Coordination of efforts with county destination marketing organizations, other local government marketing



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groups, privately owned attractions and destinations, and other private sector partners to create a seamless, four-season advertising campaign for the state and its regions.

5. Development of innovative techniques or promotions to build repeat visitation by targeted segments of the tourist population.

6. Consideration of innovative sources of state funding for tourism marketing.

7. Promotion of nature-based tourism, including, but not limited to, promotion of the Florida Greenways and Trails System as described under s. 260.014 and the Florida Shared-Use Nonmotorized Trail Network as described under s. 339.81.

8. Coordination of efforts with the Office of Greenways and Trails of the Department of Environmental Protection and the department to promote and assist local communities, including, but not limited to, communities designated as trail towns by the Office of Greenways and Trails, to maximize use of nearby trails as economic assets, including specific promotion of trail-based tourism.

9. Promotion of heritage tourism.

10. Development of a component to address emergency response to natural and manmade disasters from a marketing standpoint.

11. Provision of appropriate marketing assistance resources to small, rural, and agritourism businesses located in this state. Such resources may include, but are not limited to, marketing plans, marketing assistance, promotional support, media development, technical expertise, marketing advice, technology training, and social marketing support.



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Section 23. Section 288.12266, Florida Statutes, is repealed.

Section 24. Paragraph (f) of subsection (2) and paragraphs (a), (b), and (c) of subsection (4) of section 288.9961, Florida Statutes, are amended, and subsections (6) and (7) are added to that section, to read:

288.9961 Promotion of broadband adoption; Florida Office of Broadband.—

(2) DEFINITIONS.—As used in this section, the term:

(f) “Underserved” means a geographic area of this state in which there is no provider of broadband Internet service that offers a connection to the Internet with a capacity for transmission at a consistent speed of at least 100 megabits per second downstream and at least 20 ~~10~~ megabits per second upstream.

(4) FLORIDA OFFICE OF BROADBAND.—The Florida Office of Broadband is created within the Division of Community Development in the department for the purpose of developing, marketing, and promoting broadband Internet services in this state. The office, in the performance of its duties, shall do all of the following:

(a) Create a strategic plan that has goals and strategies for increasing and improving the availability of, access to, and use of broadband Internet service in this state. In development of the plan, the department shall incorporate applicable federal broadband activities, including any efforts or initiatives of the Federal Communications Commission, to improve broadband Internet service in this state. The plan must identify available federal funding sources for the expansion or improvement of



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broadband. The strategic plan must be submitted to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives by June 30, 2022. The strategic plan must be updated biennially thereafter. The plan must include a process to review and verify public input regarding transmission speeds and availability of broadband Internet service throughout this state. The office shall consult with each regional rural community liaison center within the Office of Rural Prosperity on the development and update of the plan.

(b) Build and facilitate local technology planning teams or partnerships with members representing cross-sections of the community, which may include, but are not limited to, representatives from the following organizations and industries: libraries, K-12 education, colleges and universities, local health care providers, private businesses, community organizations, economic development organizations, local governments, tourism, parks and recreation, and agriculture. The local technology planning teams or partnerships shall work with rural communities to help the communities understand their current broadband availability, locate unserved and underserved businesses and residents, identify assets relevant to broadband deployment, build partnerships with broadband service providers, and identify opportunities to leverage assets and reduce barriers to the deployment of broadband Internet services in the community. The teams or partnerships must be proactive in rural communities as defined in s. 288.0656 ~~fiscally constrained counties~~ in identifying and providing assistance, in coordination with the regional rural community liaison centers within the Office of Rural Prosperity, with applying for federal



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grants for broadband Internet service.

(c) Provide technical and planning assistance to rural communities in coordination with the regional rural community liaison centers within the Office of Rural Prosperity.

(6) The office shall submit to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives a quarterly report detailing the implementation of broadband activities in rural, unserved, and underserved communities. Such information must be listed by county and include the amount of state and federal funds allocated and expended in the county by program; the progress toward deploying broadband in the county; any technical assistance provided; the activities of the local technology planning teams and partnerships; and the fulfillment of any other duties of the office required by this part.

(7) By December 31 each year, the office shall submit to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives an annual report on the office's operations and accomplishments for that calendar year and the status of broadband Internet service access and use in this state. The report must also incorporate the quarterly reports on rural, unserved, and underserved communities required by subsection (6).

Section 25. Section 290.06561, Florida Statutes, is repealed.

Section 26. Paragraph (a) of subsection (5) of section 319.32, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

319.32 Fees; service charges; disposition.—

(5)(a) Forty-seven dollars of each fee collected, except for fees charged on a certificate of title for a motor vehicle



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for hire registered under s. 320.08(6), for each applicable original certificate of title and each applicable duplicate copy of a certificate of title shall be deposited as follows: ~~into the State Transportation Trust Fund. Deposits to the State Transportation Trust Fund pursuant to this paragraph may not exceed \$200 million in any fiscal year, and from any collections in excess of that amount during the fiscal year,~~

1. The first \$30 million collected shall be deposited into the Highway Safety Operating Trust Fund; ~~and~~

2. Any remaining collections shall be paid into the State Transportation Trust General Revenue Fund.

Section 27. Subsection (37) is added to section 334.044, Florida Statutes, to read:

334.044 Powers and duties of the department.—The department shall have the following general powers and duties:

(37) To provide technical assistance and support from the appropriate district of the department to counties that are not located in a metropolitan planning organization created pursuant to s. 339.175.

Section 28. Section 339.0801, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

339.0801 Allocation of increased revenues derived from amendments to s. 319.32(5)(a) ~~by ch. 2012-128.~~—

(1) The first \$200 million of funds that result from increased revenues to the State Transportation Trust Fund derived from the amendments to s. 319.32(5)(a) made by s. 11, chapter 2012-128, Laws of Florida, this act must be used annually, first as set forth in paragraph (a) subsection (1) and then as set forth in paragraphs (b), (c), and (d) subsections



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~~(2)-(4)~~, notwithstanding any other provision of law:

(a)1.~~(1)(a)~~ Beginning in the 2013-2014 fiscal year and annually for 30 years thereafter, \$10 million shall be for the purpose of funding any seaport project identified in the adopted work program of the Department of Transportation, to be known as the Seaport Investment Program.

2.~~(b)~~ The revenues may be assigned, pledged, or set aside as a trust for the payment of principal or interest on revenue bonds, or other forms of indebtedness issued by an individual port or appropriate local government having jurisdiction thereof, or collectively by interlocal agreement among any of the ports, or used to purchase credit support to permit such borrowings. Alternatively, revenue bonds shall be issued by the Division of Bond Finance at the request of the Department of Transportation under the State Bond Act and shall be secured by such revenues as are provided in this subsection.

3.~~(c)~~ Revenue bonds or other indebtedness issued hereunder are not a general obligation of the state and are secured solely by a first lien on the revenues distributed under this subsection.

4.~~(d)~~ The state covenants with holders of the revenue bonds or other instruments of indebtedness issued pursuant to this subsection that it will not repeal this subsection; nor take any other action, including but not limited to amending this subsection, that will materially and adversely affect the rights of such holders so long as revenue bonds or other indebtedness authorized by this subsection are outstanding.

5.~~(e)~~ The proceeds of any revenue bonds or other indebtedness, after payment of costs of issuance and



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establishment of any required reserves, shall be invested in projects approved by the Department of Transportation and included in the department's adopted work program, by amendment if necessary. As required under s. 11(f), Art. VII of the State Constitution, the Legislature approves projects included in the department's adopted work program, including any projects added to the work program by amendment under s. 339.135(7).

6.~~(f)~~ Any revenues that are not used for the payment of bonds as authorized by this subsection may be used for purposes authorized under the Florida Seaport Transportation and Economic Development Program. This revenue source is in addition to any amounts provided for and appropriated in accordance with ss. 311.07 and 320.20(3) and (4).

(b)~~(2)~~ Beginning in the 2013-2014 fiscal year and annually thereafter, \$10 million shall be transferred to the Transportation Disadvantaged Trust Fund, to be used as specified in s. 427.0159.

(c)~~(3)~~ Beginning in the 2013-2014 fiscal year and annually thereafter, \$10 million shall be allocated to the Small County Outreach Program to be used as specified in s. 339.2818. These funds are in addition to the funds provided for the program pursuant to s. 201.15(4)(a)2.

(d)~~(4)~~ After the distributions required pursuant to paragraphs (a), (b), and (c) ~~subsections (1)-(3)~~, the remaining funds shall be used annually for transportation projects within this state for existing or planned strategic transportation projects which connect major markets within this state or between this state and other states, which focus on job creation, and which increase this state's viability in the



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national and global markets.

(2) The remaining funds that result from increased revenue to the State Transportation Trust Fund derived pursuant to s. 319.32(5)(a) must be used annually, notwithstanding any other law, beginning in the 2025-2026 fiscal year and annually thereafter, for the Small County Road Assistance Program as prescribed in s. 339.2816.

(3)~~(5)~~ Pursuant to s. 339.135(7), the department shall amend the work program to add the projects provided for in this section.

Section 29. Subsection (3) and paragraph (a) of subsection (4) of section 339.2816, Florida Statutes, are amended, and paragraph (c) of subsection (4) of that section is reenacted, to read:

339.2816 Small County Road Assistance Program.—

(3) Beginning with fiscal year ~~1999-2000 until fiscal year 2009-2010, and beginning again with fiscal year 2012-2013, up to~~ \$25 million annually from the State Transportation Trust Fund must ~~may~~ be used for the purposes of funding the Small County Road Assistance Program as described in this section. In addition, beginning with fiscal year 2025-2026, the department must use the additional revenues allocated by s. 339.0801 for the Small County Road Assistance Program.

(4)(a) Small counties shall be eligible to compete for funds that have been designated for the Small County Road Assistance Program for resurfacing or reconstruction projects on county roads that were part of the county road system on June 10, 1995. Capacity improvements on county roads are ~~shall not be~~ eligible for funding under the program unless a safety issue



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exists or the department finds it necessary to widen existing lanes as part of a resurfacing or reconstruction project.

(c) The following criteria must be used to prioritize road projects for funding under the program:

1. The primary criterion is the physical condition of the road as measured by the department.

2. As secondary criteria the department may consider:

a. Whether a road is used as an evacuation route.

b. Whether a road has high levels of agricultural travel.

c. Whether a road is considered a major arterial route.

d. Whether a road is considered a feeder road.

e. Whether a road is located in a fiscally constrained county, as defined in s. 218.67(1).

f. Other criteria related to the impact of a project on the public road system or on the state or local economy as determined by the department.

Section 30. Subsection (3) of section 339.2817, Florida Statutes, is amended, and a new subsection (6) is added to that section, to read:

339.2817 County Incentive Grant Program.—

(3) The department must consider, but is not limited to, the following criteria for evaluation of projects for County Incentive Grant Program assistance:

(a) The extent to which the project will encourage, enhance, or create economic benefits;

(b) The likelihood that assistance would enable the project to proceed at an earlier date than the project could otherwise proceed;

(c) The extent to which assistance would foster innovative



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public-private partnerships and attract private debt or equity investment;

(d) The extent to which the project uses new technologies, including intelligent transportation systems, which enhance the efficiency of the project;

(e) The extent to which the project enhances connectivity between rural agricultural areas and market distribution centers;

(f)~~(e)~~ The extent to which the project helps to maintain or protect the environment; and

(g)~~(f)~~ The extent to which the project includes transportation benefits for improving intermodalism and safety.

(6) A county located either wholly or partially within the Everglades Agricultural Area as defined in s. 373.4592(15) may, notwithstanding subsection (4), request 100 percent of project costs for eligible projects that meet the criteria established in paragraph (3)(e).

Section 31. Subsections (1), (2), (3), (6), (7), and (8) of section 339.2818, Florida Statutes, are amended to read:

339.2818 Small County Outreach Program.—

(1) There is created within the department ~~of Transportation~~ the Small County Outreach Program. The purpose of this program is to assist small county governments in repairing or rehabilitating county bridges, paving unpaved roads, addressing road-related drainage improvements, resurfacing or reconstructing county roads, or constructing capacity or safety improvements to county roads.

(2) For the purposes of this section, the term “small county” means any county that has a population of 200,000 or



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less as determined by the most recent official population census determination estimate pursuant to s. 186.901.

~~(3) Funds allocated under this program, pursuant to s. 4, ch. 2000-257, Laws of Florida, are in addition to any funds provided pursuant to s. 339.2816, for the Small County Road Assistance Program.~~

(5)~~(6)~~ Funds paid into the State Transportation Trust Fund pursuant to ss. 201.15, 320.072, and 339.0801 ~~s. 201.15~~ for the purposes of the Small County Outreach Program are hereby annually appropriated for expenditure to support the Small County Outreach Program.

(6)~~(7)~~ Subject to a specific appropriation in addition to funds annually appropriated for projects under this section, a municipality within a rural area of opportunity or a rural area of opportunity community designated under s. 288.0656(7)(a) may compete for the additional project funding using the criteria listed in subsection (3) ~~(4)~~ at up to 100 percent of project costs, excluding capacity improvement projects.

~~(8) Subject to a specific appropriation in addition to funds appropriated for projects under this section, a local government either wholly or partially within the Everglades Agricultural Area as defined in s. 373.4592(15), the Peace River Basin, or the Suwannee River Basin may compete for additional funding using the criteria listed in paragraph (4)(c) at up to 100 percent of project costs on state or county roads used primarily as farm-to-market connections between rural agricultural areas and market distribution centers, excluding capacity improvement projects.~~

Section 32. Section 339.68, Florida Statutes, is amended to



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read:

(Substantial rewording of section.

See s. 339.68, F.S., for present text.)

339.68 Florida Arterial Road Modernization Program.—

(1) The Legislature finds that increasing demands continue to be placed on rural arterial roads in this state by a fast-growing economy, continued population growth, and increased tourism. Investment in the rural arterial roads of this state is needed to maintain the safety, mobility, reliability, and resiliency of the transportation system in order to support the movement of people, goods, and commodities; to enhance economic prosperity and competitiveness; and to enrich the quality of life of the rural communities and the environment of this state.

(2) The Florida Arterial Road Modernization Program is created within the department to make capacity and safety improvements to two-lane arterial roads located in rural communities. For purposes of this section, the term "rural community" has the same meaning as provided in s. 288.0656.

(3) Beginning in the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the department shall allocate from the State Transportation Trust Fund a minimum of \$50 million in each fiscal year for purposes of funding the program. This funding is in addition to any other funding provided to the program by any other law.

(4) The department shall use the following criteria to prioritize projects for funding under the program:

(a) Whether the road has documented safety concerns or requires additional safety and design improvements. This may be evidenced by the number of fatalities or crashes per vehicle mile traveled.



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(b) Whether the road has or is projected to have a significant amount of truck tractor traffic as determined by the department. For purposes of this paragraph, the term "truck tractor" has the same meaning as in s. 320.01(11).

(c) Whether the road is used to transport agricultural products and commodities from the farm to the market or other sale or distribution point.

(d) Whether the road is used to transport goods to or from warehouses, distribution centers, or intermodal logistics centers as defined in s. 311.101(2).

(e) Whether the road is used as an evacuation route.

(f) Whether the physical condition of the road meets department standards.

(g) Whether the road currently has, or is projected to have within the next 5 years, a level of service of D, E, or F.

(h) Any other criteria related to the impact of a project on the public road system or on the state or local economy as determined by the department.

(5) By January 1, 2027, and every 2 years thereafter, the department shall submit to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives a report regarding the use and condition of arterial roads located in rural communities, which report must include the following:

(a) A map of roads located in rural communities which are designated as arterial roads.

(b) A needs assessment that must include, but is not limited to, consideration of infrastructure improvements to improve capacity on arterial roads in rural communities.

(c) A synopsis of the department's project prioritization



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process.

(d) An estimate of the local and state economic impact of improving capacity on arterial roads in rural communities.

(e) A listing of the arterial roads and the associated improvements to be included in the program and a schedule or timeline for the inclusion of such projects in the work program.

Section 33. (1) The Department of Transportation shall allocate the additional funds provided by this act to implement the Small County Road Assistance Program as created by s. 339.2816, Florida Statutes, and amend the current tentative work program for the 2025-2026 through 2031-2032 fiscal years to include additional projects. In addition, before adoption of the work program, the department shall submit a budget amendment pursuant to s. 339.135(7), Florida Statutes, requesting budget authority necessary to implement the additional projects.

(2) The department shall allocate sufficient funds to implement the Florida Arterial Road Modernization Program, develop a plan to expend the revenues as specified in s. 339.68, Florida Statutes, and, before its adoption, amend the current tentative work program for the 2025-2026 through 2031-2032 fiscal years to include the program's projects. In addition, before adoption of the work program, the department shall submit a budget amendment pursuant to s. 339.135(7), Florida Statutes, requesting budget authority necessary to implement the program as specified in s. 339.68, Florida Statutes.

(3) Notwithstanding any other law, the increase in revenue to the State Transportation Trust Fund derived from the amendments to ss. 201.15 and 319.32, Florida Statutes, made by this act and deposited into the trust fund pursuant to ss.



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201.15 and 339.0801, Florida Statutes, shall be used by the
department to fund the programs as specified in this section.

Section 34. Paragraph (h) is added to subsection (2) of
section 381.402, Florida Statutes, and paragraph (b) of
subsection (3) of that section is amended, to read:

381.402 Florida Reimbursement Assistance for Medical
Education Program.—

(2) The following licensed or certified health care
practitioners are eligible to participate in the program:

(h) Medical doctors or doctors of osteopathic medicine who
are board certified in emergency medicine and employed by or
under contract with a rural hospital as defined in s.
395.602(2)(b) or a rural emergency hospital as defined in s.
395.607(1)(a) to provide medical care in the rural hospital's or
rural emergency hospital's emergency department.

Primary care medical specialties for physicians include
obstetrics, gynecology, general and family practice, geriatrics,
internal medicine, pediatrics, psychiatry, and other specialties
which may be identified by the Department of Health.

(3) From the funds available, the Department of Health
shall make payments as follows:

(b) All payments are contingent on continued proof of:

1.a. Primary care practice in a rural hospital as defined
in s. 395.602(2)(b) or an underserved area designated by the
Department of Health, provided the practitioner accepts Medicaid
reimbursement if eligible for such reimbursement; ~~or~~

b. Emergency medicine practice in a rural hospital as
defined in s. 395.602(2)(b) or rural emergency hospital as



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defined in s. 395.607(1)(a), provided the practitioner accepts
Medicaid reimbursement if eligible for such reimbursement; or

~~c.b.~~ For practitioners other than physicians, practice in
other settings, including, but not limited to, a nursing home
facility as defined in s. 400.021, a home health agency as
defined in s. 400.462, or an intermediate care facility for the
developmentally disabled as defined in s. 400.960. Any such
setting must be located in, or serve residents or patients in,
an underserved area designated by the Department of Health and
must provide services to Medicaid patients.

2. Providing 25 hours annually of volunteer ~~primary care~~
services within the practitioner's scope of practice in a free
clinic as specified in s. 766.1115(3)(d)14. or through another
volunteer program operated ~~by the state~~ pursuant to part IV of
chapter 110 and approved by the department. In order to meet the
requirements of this subparagraph, the volunteer hours must be
verifiable in a manner determined by the department.

Section 35. Section 381.403, Florida Statutes, is created
to read:

381.403 Rural Access to Primary and Preventive Care Grant
Program.—The Legislature recognizes that access to primary and
preventive health care is critical for the well-being of the
residents of this state. The Legislature also recognizes that
many rural areas of this state have significantly fewer
available physicians, physician assistants, and autonomous
advanced practice registered nurses who serve those areas. To
increase the availability of health care in such underserved
rural areas, there is created the Rural Access to Primary and
Preventive Care Grant Program within the Department of Health to



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use grants to incentivize the creation or expansion of health care practices in those areas.

(1) As used in this section, the term:

(a) "Autonomous advanced practice registered nurse" means an advanced practice registered nurse who is registered under s. 464.0123 to engage in autonomous practice.

(b) "Majority ownership" means ownership of more than 50 percent of the interests in a private practice.

(c) "Physician" means a physician licensed under chapter 458 or chapter 459.

(d) "Physician assistant" means a physician assistant licensed under chapter 458 or chapter 459 to perform medical services delegated by a supervising physician.

(e) "Preventive care" means routine health care services designed to prevent illness. The term includes, but is not limited to, general physical examinations provided on an annual basis, screenings for acute or chronic illnesses, and patient counseling to promote overall wellness and avoid the need for emergency services.

(f) "Primary care" means health care services focused primarily on preventive care, wellness care, and treatment for common illnesses. The term may include the health care provider serving as a patient's entry point into the overall health care system and coordinating a patient's care among specialists or acute care settings. The term does not include elective services provided solely for cosmetic purposes.

(g) "Program" means the Rural Access to Primary and Preventive Care Grant Program.

(h) "Qualifying rural area" means a rural community as



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defined in s. 288.0657 in this state which is also designated as a health professional shortage area by the Health Resources and Services Administration of the United States Department of Health and Human Services.

(2) The department shall award grants under the program to physicians, physician assistants, and autonomous advanced practice registered nurses who intend to open a new private practice in a qualifying rural area or who intend to open a new location within a qualifying rural area if the current private practice is located in a different county. To qualify for a grant, an applicant must meet all of the following criteria:

(a) The practice must:

1. Have majority ownership by physicians, physician assistants, or autonomous advanced practice registered nurses, or a combination thereof.

2. Be physically located in a qualifying rural area and serve at that location patients who live in that qualifying rural area or in other nearby qualifying rural areas. The practice may also serve patients who reside outside of a qualifying rural area. While the practice may use telehealth to supplement the services provided at the location, the majority of services provided by the practice must be provided in-person at the physical location.

3. Accept Medicaid patients.

4. Provide services solely in primary care or preventative care, except that a physician, and any nurse licensed under chapter 464 or any physician assistant supervised by the physician, may provide services at the practice in primary care or preventative care, or services that are within the



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practitioner's scope of practice based on the physician's board-
certified specialty in obstetrics, gynecology, general and
family practice, geriatrics, internal medicine, pediatrics, or
psychiatry.

(b) The owners of the practice must commit to providing the
following information to the department on an annual basis, and
upon request by the department, for the duration of the contract
entered into pursuant to subsection (6):

1. Deidentified patient encounter data.

2. A detailed report on the use of grant funds until such
funds are expended.

(3) By March 1, 2026, the department shall create an
application process for eligible physicians, physician
assistants, and autonomous advanced practice registered nurses
to apply for grants under the program. The application must
require a detailed budget of anticipated use of grant funds and
how the new or existing practice will meet the requirements of
subsection (2). The department shall establish a ranking system
to determine which applicants will be awarded grants if there
are more applicants for the program than can be awarded grants
with available appropriated funds.

(4) Subject to specific appropriation, the department may
award grants of up to \$250,000 to eligible applicants. Only one
grant may be awarded per practice. Grant funds awarded for
establishing a new private practice or a new practice location
may be used for any of the following expenses:

(a) Facility construction, acquisition, renovation, or
lease.

(b) Purchasing medical equipment.



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(c) Purchasing or implementing information technology equipment or services.

(d) Purchasing or implementing telehealth technology.

(e) Training on the use of medical equipment, information technology, or telehealth technology implemented under paragraph (b), paragraph (c), or paragraph (d), respectively.

(5) Grant funds may not be used for any of the following:

(a) Salaries.

(b) Utilities.

(c) Internet or telecommunications services other than those necessary for implementing telehealth technology under paragraph (4) (d).

(d) Insurance.

(e) Incidental maintenance and repairs.

(f) Disposable medical supplies.

(g) Medicines or vaccines.

(h) Licensing or certification fees, including costs for continuing education other than training under paragraph (4) (e).

(6) The department shall enter into a contract with each grant recipient which details the requirements for the expenditure of grant funds for that recipient. The contract must include, at a minimum, all of the following:

(a) The purpose of the contract.

(b) Specific performance standards and responsibilities for the recipient under the contract, including penalties for not meeting such performance standards and responsibilities.

(c) A detailed project or contract budget, if applicable.

(d) Reporting requirements for grant recipients to provide information to the department under paragraph (2) (b) as well as



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any additional information the department deems necessary for the administration of the program.

(7) The department may adopt rules to implement the program.

(8) Beginning July 1, 2026, and each year thereafter in which there are outstanding contracts with grant recipients under subsection (6), the department shall provide a report to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives which includes, but need not be limited to, all of the following:

(a) Each grant awarded, including the proposed uses for each grant.

(b) The progress on each outstanding contract.

(c) The number of patients residing in rural areas who were served by grant awardees.

(d) The number of Medicaid recipients who were served by grant awardees.

(e) The number and types of services provided during patient encounters in locations opened under the program.

(f) The number of health care practitioners, delineated by licensure type, providing services in locations opened under the program.

(9) This section is repealed July 1, 2035, unless reviewed and saved from repeal through reenactment by the Legislature.

Section 36. Section 381.9856, Florida Statutes, is created to read:

381.9856 Stroke, Cardiac, and Obstetric Response and Education Grant Program.—

(1) PROGRAM CREATION.—The Stroke, Cardiac, and Obstetric



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Response and Education (SCORE) Grant Program is created within the Department of Health.

(2) PURPOSE.—The purpose of the program is to improve patient outcomes and the coordination of emergency medical care in rural communities by increasing access to high-quality stroke, cardiac, and obstetric care through the application of technology and innovative training, such as blended learning training programs. Blended learning training programs ensure that participants gain both the theoretical foundations of diagnosis and management as well as real-world clinical experience through scenario-based learning, ultimately enhancing decisionmaking and patient outcomes.

(3) DEFINITIONS.—As used in this section, the term:

(a) “Blended learning training program” means a structured educational model that uses blended learning methodologies, including simulation-based training, virtual reality, and distance learning technologies, in conjunction with hands-on instruction, such as simulation-based practice, and in-person skills sessions to provide comprehensive education.

(b) “High-risk care provider” means a licensed health care facility or licensed ambulance service that regularly provides emergency or ongoing care to patients experiencing a stroke, heart attack, or pregnancy-related emergency.

(c) “Rural community” has the same meaning as provided in s. 288.0657.

(4) GRANT PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS.—

(a) The department shall award grants to high-risk care providers serving rural communities to accomplish at least one of the following initiatives:



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1. Implement a blended learning training program for health care providers in stroke care protocols and best practices.

2. Purchase simulation equipment and technology for training.

3. Establish telehealth capabilities between prehospital providers, such as paramedics or emergency medical technicians, and in-hospital providers, such as neurologists, to expedite emergency stroke care, emergency cardiac care, or emergency obstetric care.

4. Develop quality improvement programs in one or more of the following specialty areas: emergency stroke care, emergency cardiac care, or emergency obstetric care.

(b) Priority must be given to proposals that:

1. Demonstrate collaboration between prehospital and in-hospital providers; or

2. Show potential for significant improvement in patient outcomes in rural communities.

(5) FUNDING LIMITS; REPORTING.—

(a) Individual grants may not exceed \$100,000 per year.

(b) Grant recipients must submit quarterly reports to the department documenting program activities, expenditures, and outcomes.

(6) ADMINISTRATION.—The department shall monitor program implementation and outcomes. The department shall submit an annual report to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives by December 1 of each year, detailing program implementation and outcomes.

(7) RULEMAKING.—The department may adopt rules to implement this section.



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(8) IMPLEMENTATION.—This section may be implemented only to the extent specifically funded by legislative appropriation.

(9) REPEAL.—This section is repealed July 1, 2030, unless reviewed and saved from repeal through reenactment by the Legislature.

Section 37. Subsection (2) of section 395.6061, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

395.6061 Rural hospital capital improvement.—There is established a rural hospital capital improvement grant program.

(2)(a) Each rural hospital as defined in s. 395.602 shall receive a minimum of \$100,000 annually, subject to legislative appropriation, upon application to the Department of Health, for projects to acquire, repair, improve, or upgrade systems, facilities, or equipment. Such projects may include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Establishing mobile care units to provide primary care services, behavioral health services, or obstetric and gynecological services in rural health professional shortage areas.

2. Establishing telehealth kiosks to provide urgent care and primary care services remotely in rural health professional shortage areas.

(b) As used in this subsection, the term:

1. "Preventive care" means routine health care services designed to prevent illness. The term includes, but is not limited to, general physical examinations provided on an annual basis, screenings for acute or chronic illnesses, and patient counseling to promote overall wellness and avoid the need for emergency services.



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2. "Primary care" means health care services focused primarily on preventive care, wellness care, and treatment for common illnesses. The term may include the health care provider serving as a patient's entry point into the overall health care system and coordinating a patient's care among specialists or acute care settings. The term does not include elective services provided solely for cosmetic purposes.

3. "Rural health professional shortage area" means a rural community as defined in s. 288.0657 which is also designated as a health professional shortage area by the Health Resources and Services Administration of the United States Department of Health and Human Services.

Section 38. Subsection (3) of section 420.9073, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

420.9073 Local housing distributions.—

(3) Calculation of guaranteed amounts:

(a) The guaranteed amount under subsection (1) shall be calculated for each state fiscal year by multiplying \$1 million ~~\$350,000~~ by a fraction, the numerator of which is the amount of funds distributed to the Local Government Housing Trust Fund pursuant to s. 201.15(4)(c) and the denominator of which is the total amount of funds distributed to the Local Government Housing Trust Fund pursuant to s. 201.15.

(b) The guaranteed amount under subsection (2) shall be calculated for each state fiscal year by multiplying \$1 million ~~\$350,000~~ by a fraction, the numerator of which is the amount of funds distributed to the Local Government Housing Trust Fund pursuant to s. 201.15(4)(d) and the denominator of which is the total amount of funds distributed to the Local Government



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Housing Trust Fund pursuant to s. 201.15.

Section 39. Paragraph (n) of subsection (5) of section 420.9075, Florida Statutes, is amended, paragraph (o) is added to that subsection, and paragraph (b) of subsection (13) of that section is reenacted, to read:

420.9075 Local housing assistance plans; partnerships.—

(5) The following criteria apply to awards made to eligible sponsors or eligible persons for the purpose of providing eligible housing:

(n) Funds from the local housing distribution not used to meet the criteria established in paragraph (a), ~~or~~ paragraph (c), or paragraph (o), or not used for the administration of a local housing assistance plan must be used for housing production and finance activities, including, but not limited to, financing preconstruction activities or the purchase of existing units, providing rental housing, and providing home ownership training to prospective home buyers and owners of homes assisted through the local housing assistance plan.

1. Notwithstanding the provisions of paragraphs (a) and (c), program income as defined in s. 420.9071(26) may also be used to fund activities described in this paragraph.

2. When preconstruction due-diligence activities conducted as part of a preservation strategy show that preservation of the units is not feasible and will not result in the production of an eligible unit, such costs shall be deemed a program expense rather than an administrative expense if such program expenses do not exceed 3 percent of the annual local housing distribution.

3. If both an award under the local housing assistance plan



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and federal low-income housing tax credits are used to assist a project and there is a conflict between the criteria prescribed in this subsection and the requirements of s. 42 of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, as amended, the county or eligible municipality may resolve the conflict by giving precedence to the requirements of s. 42 of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, as amended, in lieu of following the criteria prescribed in this subsection with the exception of paragraphs (a) and (g) of this subsection.

4. Each county and each eligible municipality may award funds as a grant for construction, rehabilitation, or repair as part of disaster recovery or emergency repairs or to remedy accessibility or health and safety deficiencies. Any other grants must be approved as part of the local housing assistance plan.

(o) Notwithstanding paragraphs (a) and (c), up to 25 percent of the funds made available in each county and eligible municipality from the local housing distribution may be used to preserve multifamily affordable rental housing funded through United States Department of Agriculture loans. These funds may be used to rehabilitate housing, extend affordability periods, or acquire or transfer properties in partnership with private organizations. This paragraph expires on June 30, 2031.

(13)

(b) If, as a result of its review of the annual report, the corporation determines that a county or eligible municipality has failed to implement a local housing incentive strategy, or, if applicable, a local housing incentive plan, it shall send a notice of termination of the local government's share of the



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local housing distribution by certified mail to the affected county or eligible municipality.

1. The notice must specify a date of termination of the funding if the affected county or eligible municipality does not implement the plan or strategy and provide for a local response. A county or eligible municipality shall respond to the corporation within 30 days after receipt of the notice of termination.

2. The corporation shall consider the local response that extenuating circumstances precluded implementation and grant an extension to the timeframe for implementation. Such an extension shall be made in the form of an extension agreement that provides a timeframe for implementation. The chief elected official of a county or eligible municipality or his or her designee shall have the authority to enter into the agreement on behalf of the local government.

3. If the county or the eligible municipality has not implemented the incentive strategy or entered into an extension agreement by the termination date specified in the notice, the local housing distribution share terminates, and any uncommitted local housing distribution funds held by the affected county or eligible municipality in its local housing assistance trust fund shall be transferred to the Local Government Housing Trust Fund to the credit of the corporation to administer.

4.a. If the affected local government fails to meet the timeframes specified in the agreement, the corporation shall terminate funds. The corporation shall send a notice of termination of the local government's share of the local housing distribution by certified mail to the affected local government.



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The notice shall specify the termination date, and any uncommitted funds held by the affected local government shall be transferred to the Local Government Housing Trust Fund to the credit of the corporation to administer.

b. If the corporation terminates funds to a county, but an eligible municipality receiving a local housing distribution pursuant to an interlocal agreement maintains compliance with program requirements, the corporation shall thereafter distribute directly to the participating eligible municipality its share calculated in the manner provided in ss. 420.9072 and 420.9073.

c. Any county or eligible municipality whose local distribution share has been terminated may subsequently elect to receive directly its local distribution share by adopting the ordinance, resolution, and local housing assistance plan in the manner and according to the procedures provided in ss. 420.907-420.9079.

Section 40. Subsections (1), (2), and (5) of section 1001.451, Florida Statutes, are amended, and subsection (6) is added to that section, to read:

1001.451 Regional consortium service organizations.—In order to provide a full range of programs to larger numbers of students, minimize duplication of services, and encourage the development of new programs and services:

(1) School districts with 20,000 or fewer unweighted full-time equivalent students, developmental research (laboratory) schools established pursuant to s. 1002.32, and the Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind may enter into cooperative agreements to form a regional consortium service organization.



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Each regional consortium service organization shall provide any
~~of, at a minimum, three of~~ the following services determined
necessary and appropriate by the board of directors:

(a) Exceptional student education;

(b) Safe schools support ~~teacher education centers;~~
~~environmental education;~~

(c) State and federal grant procurement and coordination;

(d) Data services ~~processing; health~~

(e) Insurance services;

(f) Risk management ~~insurance;~~

(g) Professional learning;

(h) College, career, and workforce development;

(i) Business and operational services ~~staff development;~~

(j) Purchasing; or

(k) Planning and accountability.

(2)(a) Each regional consortium service organization that
consists of four or more school districts is eligible to
receive, through the Department of Education, subject to the
funds provided in the General Appropriations Act, an allocation
~~incentive grant~~ of \$150,000 ~~\$50,000~~ per school district and
eligible member to be used for the delivery of services within
~~the~~ participating school districts. The determination of
services and use of such funds must ~~shall~~ be established by the
board of directors of the regional consortium service
organization. The funds must ~~shall~~ be distributed to each
regional consortium service organization no later than 30 days
following the release of the funds to the department. Each
regional consortium service organization shall submit an annual
report to the department regarding the use of funds for



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consortia services. Unexpended amounts in any fund in a
consortium's current year operating budget must be carried
forward and included as the balance forward for that fund in the
approved operating budget for the following year. Each regional
consortium service organization shall provide quarterly
financial reports to member districts.

(b) Member districts shall designate a district that will
serve as a fiscal agent for contractual and reporting purposes.
Such fiscal agent district is entitled to reasonable
compensation for accounting and other services performed. The
regional consortium service organization shall retain all funds
received from grants or contracted services to cover indirect or
administrative costs associated with the provision of such
services. The regional consortium service organization board of
directors shall determine the products and services to be
provided by the consortium; however, in all contractual matters,
the school board of the fiscal agent district shall act on
proposed actions of the regional consortium service
organization.

(c) The regional consortium service organization board of
directors shall recommend establishment of positions and
individuals for appointment to the fiscal agent district.
Personnel must be employed under the personnel policies of the
fiscal agent district and are deemed to be public employees of
the fiscal agent district. The regional consortium service
organization board of directors may recommend a salary schedule
and job descriptions specific to its personnel.

(d) The regional consortium service organization may
purchase or lease property and facilities essential for its



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operations and is responsible for their maintenance and
associated overhead costs.

(e) If a regional consortium service organization is
dissolved, any revenue from the sale of assets must be
distributed among the member districts as determined by the
board of directors ~~Application for incentive grants shall be
made to the Commissioner of Education by July 30 of each year
for distribution to qualifying regional consortium service
organizations by January 1 of the fiscal year.~~

(5) The board of directors of a regional consortium service
organization may use various means to generate revenue in
support of its activities, including, but not limited to,
contracting for services to nonmember districts. The board of
directors may acquire, enjoy, use, and dispose of patents,
copyrights, and trademarks and any licenses and associated ~~other~~
rights or interests ~~thereunder or therein~~. Ownership of all such
patents, copyrights, trademarks, licenses, and associated rights
or interests ~~thereunder or therein shall~~ vest in the state, with
the board of directors having full right of use and full right
to retain associated ~~the revenues derived therefrom~~. Any funds
realized from contracted services, patents, copyrights,
trademarks, or licenses are ~~shall be~~ considered internal funds
as provided in s. 1011.07. A fund balance must be established
for maintaining or expanding services, facilities maintenance,
terminal pay, and other liabilities ~~Such funds shall be used to
support the organization's marketing and research and
development activities in order to improve and increase services
to its member districts.~~

(6) A regional consortium service organization is



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authorized to administer the Regional Consortia Service
Organization Supplemental Services Program under s. 1001.4511.

Section 41. Section 1001.4511, Florida Statutes, is created
to read:

1001.4511 Regional Consortia Service Organization
Supplemental Services Program.—

(1) There is created the Regional Consortia Service
Organization Supplemental Services Program to increase the
ability of regional consortium service organizations under s.
1001.451 to provide programs and services to consortia members
through cooperative agreements. Program funds may be used to
supplement member needs related to transportation; district
finance personnel services; property insurance, including
property insurance obtained from any source; cybersecurity
support; school safety; college, career, and workforce
development; academic support; and behavior support within
exceptional student education services.

(2) Each regional consortium service organization shall
annually report to the President of the Senate and the Speaker
of the House of Representatives the distribution of funds,
including members awarded and services provided.

(3) Notwithstanding s. 216.301 and pursuant to s. 216.351,
funds allocated for this purpose which are not disbursed by June
30 of the fiscal year in which the funds are allocated may be
carried forward for up to 5 years after the effective date of
the original appropriation.

Section 42. Section 1009.635, Florida Statutes, is created
to read:

1009.635 Rural Incentive for Professional Educators.—



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(1) ESTABLISHMENT.—The Rural Incentive for Professional Educators (RIPE) Program is established within the Department of Education to support the recruitment and retention of qualified instructional personnel in rural communities. The program shall provide financial assistance for the repayment of student loans for eligible participants who establish permanent residency and employment in rural areas of opportunity.

(2) ELIGIBILITY.—An individual is eligible to participate in the RIPE Program if he or she does all of the following:

(a) Establishes permanent residency on or after July 1, 2025, in a rural area of opportunity as designated pursuant to s. 288.0656. The address on an individual's state-issued identification card or driver license is evidence of residence.

(b) Secures full-time employment as a teacher or administrator in a private school as defined in s. 1002.01, or as instructional or administrative personnel as those terms are defined in s. 1012.01(2) and (3), respectively, in the public school district located within the same rural area of opportunity as he or she resides.

(c) Holds an associate degree, bachelor's degree, postgraduate degree, or certificate from an accredited institution earned before establishing residency.

(d) Has an active student loan balance incurred for the completion of the qualifying degree or certificate.

(3) LOAN REPAYMENT.—Eligible participants may receive up to \$15,000 in total student loan repayment assistance over 5 years, disbursed in annual payments not to exceed \$3,000 per year. Payments shall be made directly to the lender servicing the participant's student loan.



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(4) AWARD DISTRIBUTION.—Before disbursement of an award, the department shall verify that the participant:

(a) Has maintained continuous employment with the school district in an instructional or administrative position;

(b) Has received a rating of effective or highly effective pursuant to s. 1012.34; and

(c) Has not been placed on probation, had his or her certificate suspended or revoked, or been placed on the disqualification list, pursuant to s. 1012.796.

(5) ADMINISTRATION.—The program shall be administered by the Office of Student Financial Assistance within the Department of Education, which shall:

(a) Develop application procedures requiring documentation, including proof of residency, verification of employment, official academic transcripts, and details of outstanding student loans.

(b) Monitor compliance with program requirements.

(6) RULEMAKING.—The State Board of Education shall adopt rules no later than January 31, 2026, to administer this section.

Section 43. Subsection (3) of section 1013.62, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

1013.62 Charter schools capital outlay funding.—

(3) If the school board levies the discretionary millage authorized in s. 1011.71(2), the department must ~~shall~~ use the following calculation methodology to determine the amount of revenue that a school district must distribute to each eligible charter school:

(a) Reduce the total discretionary millage revenue by the



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school district's annual debt service obligation incurred as of March 1, 2017, which has not been subsequently retired, and:

1. Beginning in the 2025-2026 fiscal year, for any district with an active project or an outstanding participation requirement balance, any amount of participation requirement pursuant to s. 1013.64(2)(a)8. that is being satisfied by revenues raised by the discretionary millage; or

2. For construction projects for which Special Facilities Construction Account funding is sought beginning in the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the value of 1 mill from the revenue generated pursuant to s. 1013.64(2)(a)8.b.

(b) Divide the school district's adjusted discretionary millage revenue by the district's total capital outlay full-time equivalent membership and the total number of full-time equivalent students of each eligible charter school to determine a capital outlay allocation per full-time equivalent student.

(c) Multiply the capital outlay allocation per full-time equivalent student by the total number of full-time equivalent students of each eligible charter school to determine the capital outlay allocation for each charter school.

(d) If applicable, reduce the capital outlay allocation identified in paragraph (c) by the total amount of state funds allocated to each eligible charter school in subsection (2) to determine the maximum calculated capital outlay allocation. The amount of funds a school district must distribute to charter schools shall be as follows:

1. For fiscal year 2023-2024, the amount is 20 percent of the amount calculated under this paragraph.

2. For fiscal year 2024-2025, the amount is 40 percent of



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the amount calculated under this paragraph.

3. For fiscal year 2025-2026, the amount is 60 percent of the amount calculated under this paragraph.

4. For fiscal year 2026-2027, the amount is 80 percent of the amount calculated under this paragraph.

5. For fiscal year 2027-2028, and each fiscal year thereafter, the amount is 100 percent of the amount calculated under this paragraph.

(e) School districts shall distribute capital outlay funds to eligible charter schools no later than February 1 of each year, as required by this subsection, based on the amount of funds received by the district school board. School districts shall distribute any remaining capital outlay funds, as required by this subsection, upon the receipt of such funds until the total amount calculated pursuant to this subsection is distributed.

By October 1 of each year, each school district shall certify to the department the amount of debt service that ~~and participation requirement that complies with the requirement of paragraph (a)~~ and can be reduced from the total discretionary millage revenue. Each school district shall also certify the amount of the participation requirement that complies with paragraph (a), or certify the value of 1 mill from revenue generated pursuant to s. 1013.64(2)(a)8.b. that can be reduced from the total discretionary millage revenue, as applicable. The Auditor General shall verify compliance with the requirements of paragraph (a) and s. 1011.71(2)(e) during scheduled operational audits of school districts.



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Section 44. Paragraph (a) of subsection (2) of section 1013.64, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

1013.64 Funds for comprehensive educational plant needs; construction cost maximums for school district capital projects.—Allocations from the Public Education Capital Outlay and Debt Service Trust Fund to the various boards for capital outlay projects shall be determined as follows:

(2)(a) The department shall establish, as a part of the Public Education Capital Outlay and Debt Service Trust Fund, a separate account, in an amount determined by the Legislature, to be known as the "Special Facility Construction Account." The Special Facility Construction Account shall be used to provide necessary construction funds to school districts which have urgent construction needs but which lack sufficient resources at present, and cannot reasonably anticipate sufficient resources within the period of the next 3 years, for these purposes from currently authorized sources of capital outlay revenue. A school district requesting funding from the Special Facility Construction Account shall submit one specific construction project, not to exceed one complete educational plant, to the Special Facility Construction Committee. A district may not receive funding for more than one approved project in any 3-year period ~~or while any portion of the district's participation requirement is outstanding.~~ The first year of the 3-year period shall be the first year a district receives an appropriation. The department shall encourage a construction program that reduces the average size of schools in the district. The request must meet the following criteria to be considered by the committee:



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1. The project must be deemed a critical need and must be recommended for funding by the Special Facility Construction Committee. Before developing construction plans for the proposed facility, the district school board must request a preapplication review by the Special Facility Construction Committee or a project review subcommittee convened by the chair of the committee to include two representatives of the department and two staff members from school districts not eligible to participate in the program. A school district may request a preapplication review at any time; however, if the district school board seeks inclusion in the department's next annual capital outlay legislative budget request, the preapplication review request must be made before February 1. Within 90 days after receiving the preapplication review request, the committee or subcommittee must meet in the school district to review the project proposal and existing facilities. To determine whether the proposed project is a critical need, the committee or subcommittee shall consider, at a minimum, the capacity of all existing facilities within the district as determined by the Florida Inventory of School Houses; the district's pattern of student growth; the district's existing and projected capital outlay full-time equivalent student enrollment as determined by the demographic, revenue, and education estimating conferences established in s. 216.136; the district's existing satisfactory student stations; the use of all existing district property and facilities; grade level configurations; and any other information that may affect the need for the proposed project.

2. The construction project must be recommended in the most



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recent survey or survey amendment cooperatively prepared by the district and the department, and approved by the department under the rules of the State Board of Education. If a district employs a consultant in the preparation of a survey or survey amendment, the consultant may not be employed by or receive compensation from a third party that designs or constructs a project recommended by the survey.

3. The construction project must appear on the district's approved project priority list under the rules of the State Board of Education.

4. The district must have selected and had approved a site for the construction project in compliance with s. 1013.36 and the rules of the State Board of Education.

5. The district shall have developed a district school board adopted list of facilities that do not exceed the norm for net square feet occupancy requirements under the State Requirements for Educational Facilities, using all possible programmatic combinations for multiple use of space to obtain maximum daily use of all spaces within the facility under consideration.

6. Upon construction, the total cost per student station, including change orders, must not exceed the cost per student station as provided in subsection (6) unless approved by the Special Facility Construction Committee. At the discretion of the committee, costs that exceed the cost per student station for special facilities may include legal and administrative fees, the cost of site improvements or related offsite improvements, the cost of complying with public shelter and hurricane hardening requirements, cost overruns created by a



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disaster as defined in s. 252.34(2), costs of security enhancements approved by the school safety specialist, and unforeseeable circumstances beyond the district's control.

7. There shall be an agreement signed by the district school board stating that it will advertise for bids within 30 days of receipt of its encumbrance authorization from the department.

8.a.(I) For construction projects for which Special Facilities Construction Account funding is sought before the 2019-2020 fiscal year, the district shall, at the time of the request and for a continuing period necessary to meet the district's participation requirement, levy the maximum millage against its nonexempt assessed property value as allowed in s. 1011.71(2) or shall raise an equivalent amount of revenue from the school capital outlay surtax authorized under s. 212.055(6).

(II) Beginning with construction projects for which Special Facilities Construction Account funding is sought in the 2019-2020 fiscal year, the district shall, for a minimum of 3 years before submitting the request and for a continuing period necessary to meet its participation requirement, levy the maximum millage against the district's nonexempt assessed property value as authorized under s. 1011.71(2) or shall raise an equivalent amount of revenue from the school capital outlay surtax authorized under s. 212.055(6).

(III) Beginning with the 2025-2026 fiscal year, any district with an ~~a new or~~ active project or an outstanding participation requirement balance, funded under ~~the provisions~~ of this subsection, shall be required to budget no more than the value of 1 mill per year to the project until the district's



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participation requirement relating to the local discretionary capital improvement millage or the equivalent amount of revenue from the school capital outlay surtax is satisfied.

b. For construction projects for which Special Facilities Construction Account funding is sought beginning in the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the district shall, for a minimum of 3 years before submitting the request and for the initial year of the appropriation and the 2 years following the initial appropriation, levy the maximum millage against the district's nonexempt assessed property value as authorized under s. 1011.71(2) or shall raise an equivalent amount of revenue from the school capital outlay surtax authorized under s. 212.055(6). The district is not required to budget the funds toward the project, but must use the funds as authorized pursuant to s. 1011.71 or s. 212.055(6), as applicable.

9. If a contract has not been signed 90 days after the advertising of bids, the funding for the specific project must ~~shall~~ revert to the Special Facility New Construction Account to be reallocated to other projects on the list. However, an additional 90 days may be granted by the commissioner.

10. The department shall certify the inability of the district to fund the survey-recommended project over a continuous 3-year period using projected capital outlay revenue derived from s. 9(d), Art. XII of the State Constitution, as amended, paragraph (3)(a) of this section, and s. 1011.71(2).

11.a. For projects funded before the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the district shall have on file with the department an adopted resolution acknowledging its commitment to satisfy its participation requirement, which is equivalent to all



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unencumbered and future revenue acquired from s. 9(d), Art. XII of the State Constitution, as amended, paragraph (3)(a) of this section, and s. 1011.71(2), in the year of the initial appropriation and for the 2 years immediately following the initial appropriation.

b. For projects funded during the 2025-2026 fiscal year, and thereafter, the district shall have on file with the department an adopted resolution acknowledging its commitment to comply with the requirements of this paragraph.

12. Phase I plans must be approved by the district school board as being in compliance with the building and life safety codes before June 1 of the year the application is made.

Section 45. For the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the sum of \$1 million in recurring funds from the General Revenue Fund is appropriated to the Florida Small Business Development Center Network under s. 288.001, Florida Statutes, to expand services in rural communities. The funds shall be allocated to the Office of Rural Prosperity budget entity within the Department of Commerce in the Special Categories-SBDCN Rural Services specific appropriation category.

Section 46. (1) For the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the sums of \$1,827,591 in recurring funds and \$652,327 in nonrecurring funds are appropriated from the General Revenue Fund to the Department of Commerce.

(2) The recurring general revenue funds shall be allocated to the Office of Rural Prosperity budget entity in the following specific appropriations categories: \$1,585,823 in Salaries and Benefits, \$175,961 in Expenses, \$50,000 in Contracted Services, \$10,000 in Operating Capital Outlay, and \$5,807 in Transfer to



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the Department of Management Services/Statewide Human Resources Contract.

(3) The nonrecurring general revenue funds shall be allocated to the Office of Rural Prosperity budget entity in the following specific appropriations categories: \$92,327 in Expenses and \$560,000 in Acquisition of Motor Vehicles.

(4) The Department of Commerce is authorized to establish 17.00 full-time equivalent positions with associated salary rate of 1,060,000 in the Office of Rural Prosperity for the purpose of implementing this act. The following specific positions, classifications, and pay plans are authorized: 1.00 Director of General Operation, Class Code 9327, Pay Grade 940; 15.00 Government Analyst II, Class Code 2225, Pay Grade 026; and 1.00 Administrative Assistant II, Class Code 0712, Pay Grade 018.

Section 47. For the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the recurring sum of \$8 million from the General Revenue Fund is appropriated to the Office of Rural Prosperity within the Department of Commerce to implement the Renaissance Grants Program created by s. 288.014, Florida Statutes. No funds may be used by the state for administrative costs.

Section 48. For the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the recurring sum of \$500,000 from the Grants and Donations Trust Fund within the Department of Commerce is appropriated to the Office of Rural Prosperity within the Department of Commerce to implement the Public Infrastructure Smart Technology Grant Program created by s. 288.0175, Florida Statutes.

Section 49. For the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the sums of \$4 million in nonrecurring funds and \$1 million in recurring funds from the General Revenue Fund are appropriated to the Office of



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Rural Prosperity within the Department of Commerce to implement the Rural Community Development Revolving Loan Fund under s. 288.065, Florida Statutes, as amended by this act.

Section 50. For the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the sums of \$40 million in nonrecurring funds and \$5 million in recurring funds from the General Revenue Fund are appropriated to the Office of Rural Prosperity within the Department of Commerce to implement the Rural Infrastructure Fund under s. 288.0655, Florida Statutes, as amended by this act.

Section 51. For the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the sum of \$250,000 in recurring funds from the Grants and Donations Trust Fund within the Department of Commerce is appropriated to the Office of Rural Prosperity within the Department of Commerce to implement s. 288.0657, Florida Statutes, as amended by this act.

Section 52. For the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the sum of \$30 million in nonrecurring funds from the General Revenue Fund is appropriated to the Florida Housing Finance Corporation to be used to preserve affordable multifamily rental housing in rural communities funded through United States Department of Agriculture loans. The funds provided in this appropriation shall be used to issue competitive requests for application for the rehabilitation or acquisition of such properties to ensure continued affordability. By October 1, 2026, the Florida Housing Finance Corporation shall submit a report to the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives on projects funded pursuant to this section, which report must include the number of units preserved and the financing portfolio for each project.

Section 53. For the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the sum of \$25



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million in nonrecurring funds from the General Revenue Fund is appropriated to the Department of Health for the purpose of implementing the Rural Access to Primary and Preventive Care Grant Program created under s. 381.403, Florida Statutes. Grant funds shall be awarded over a 5-year period. Notwithstanding s. 216.301, Florida Statutes, and pursuant to s. 216.351, Florida Statutes, the unexpended balance of funds appropriated pursuant to this section which is not disbursed by June 30 of the fiscal year in which funds are appropriated may be carried forward through the 2033-2034 fiscal year.

Section 54. For the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the sum of \$5 million in nonrecurring funds from the General Revenue Fund is appropriated to the Department of Health for the purpose of implementing the Stroke, Cardiac, and Obstetric Response and Education Grant Program under s. 381.9856, Florida Statutes. Notwithstanding s. 216.301, Florida Statutes, and pursuant to s. 216.351, Florida Statutes, the unexpended balance of funds appropriated pursuant to this section which is not disbursed by June 30 of the fiscal year in which funds are appropriated may be carried forward through the 2029-2030 fiscal year.

Section 55. For the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the sum of \$25 million in nonrecurring funds from the General Revenue Fund is appropriated in fixed capital outlay to the Department of Health for the purpose of implementing the rural hospital capital improvement grant program under s. 395.6061, Florida Statutes.

Section 56. For the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the sums of \$187,255 in recurring funds from the General Revenue Fund and \$250,358 in recurring funds from the Medical Care Trust Fund are appropriated to the Agency for Health Care Administration to



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establish a Diagnosis-Related Grouping (DRG) reimbursement methodology for critical access hospitals, as defined in s. 408.07, Florida Statutes, for the purpose of providing inpatient reimbursement to such a hospital in amounts comparable to the reimbursement the hospital would receive for inpatient services from the federal Medicare program. The 2025-2026 fiscal year General Appropriations Act shall establish the DRG reimbursement methodology for critical access hospital inpatient services as directed in s. 409.905(5)(c), Florida Statutes. Health plans that participate in the Statewide Medicaid Managed Care program shall pass through the fee increase to providers in this appropriation.

Section 57. For the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the sums of \$7,508,124 in recurring funds from the General Revenue Fund and \$10,038,322 in recurring funds from the Medical Care Trust Fund are appropriated to the Agency for Health Care Administration to establish an Enhanced Ambulatory Patient Grouping (EAPG) reimbursement methodology for critical access hospitals, as defined in s. 408.07, Florida Statutes, for the purpose of providing outpatient reimbursement to such a hospital in amounts comparable to the reimbursement the hospital would receive for outpatient services from the federal Medicare program. The 2025-2026 fiscal year General Appropriations Act shall establish the EAPG reimbursement methodology for critical access hospital outpatient services as directed in s. 409.905(6)(b), Florida Statutes. Health plans that participate in the Statewide Medicaid Managed Care program shall pass through the fee increase to providers in this appropriation.

Section 58. For the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the sum of \$3.6



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million in recurring funds from the General Revenue Fund is appropriated to the Department of Education to implement s. 1001.451, Florida Statutes, as amended by this act.

Section 59. For the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the sum of \$25 million in recurring funds is appropriated from the General Revenue Fund to the Department of Education to be distributed to regional consortium service organizations under s. 1001.451, Florida Statutes, in order to provide funds pursuant to s. 1001.4511, Florida Statutes. These funds shall be allocated as follows: \$5,555,149 to the Heartland Educational Consortium; \$11,912,923 to the North East Florida Educational Consortium; and \$7,531,928 to the Panhandle Area Educational Consortium. The funds must be distributed to each regional consortium service organization no later than 30 days following the release of the funds to the department.

Section 60. For the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the sum of \$7 million in recurring funds from the General Revenue Fund is appropriated to the Department of Education to implement the Rural Incentive for Professional Educators (RIPE) Program, s. 1009.635, Florida Statutes, as created by this act.

Section 61. Subsection (3) of section 163.3187, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

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

(3) If the small scale development amendment involves a site within a rural area of opportunity as defined under s. 288.0656 ~~s. 288.0656(2)(d)~~ for the duration of such designation, the acreage limit listed in subsection (1) shall be increased by 100 percent. The local government approving the small scale plan



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amendment shall certify to the state land planning agency that the plan amendment furthers the economic objectives set forth in the executive order issued under s. 288.0656(7), and the property subject to the plan amendment shall undergo public review to ensure that all concurrency requirements and federal, state, and local environmental permit requirements are met.

Section 62. Section 212.205, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

212.205 Sales tax distribution reporting.—By March 15 of each year, each person who received a distribution pursuant to s. 212.20(6)(d)7.b. and c. ~~s. 212.20(6)(d)6.b. and c.~~ in the preceding calendar year shall report to the Office of Economic and Demographic Research the following information:

(1) An itemized accounting of all expenditures of the funds distributed in the preceding calendar year, including amounts spent on debt service.

(2) A statement indicating what portion of the distributed funds have been pledged for debt service.

(3) The original principal amount and current debt service schedule of any bonds or other borrowing for which the distributed funds have been pledged for debt service.

Section 63. Section 257.191, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

257.191 Construction grants.—The Division of Library and Information Services may accept and administer library construction moneys appropriated to it and shall allocate such appropriation to municipal, county, and regional libraries in the form of library construction grants on a matching basis. The local matching portion shall be no less than the grant amount,



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on a dollar-for-dollar basis, up to the maximum grant amount, unless the matching requirement is waived pursuant to s. 288.019 ~~by s. 288.06561~~. Initiation of a library construction project 12 months or less prior to the grant award under this section does ~~shall~~ not affect the eligibility of an applicant to receive a library construction grant. The division shall adopt rules for the administration of library construction grants. For the purposes of this section, s. 257.21 does not apply.

Section 64. Subsection (2) of section 257.193, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

257.193 Community Libraries in Caring Program.—

(2) The purpose of the Community Libraries in Caring Program is to assist libraries in rural communities, as defined in s. 288.0656(2) and subject to the provisions of s. 288.019 ~~s. 288.06561~~, to strengthen their collections and services, improve literacy in their communities, and improve the economic viability of their communities.

Section 65. Subsection (17) of section 265.283, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

265.283 Definitions.—The following definitions shall apply to ss. 265.281-265.703:

(17) “Underserved arts community assistance program grants” means grants used by qualified organizations under the Rural Economic Development Initiative, pursuant to s. 288.0656 and subject to the provisions of s. 288.019 ~~ss. 288.0656 and 288.06561~~, for the purpose of economic and organizational development for underserved cultural organizations.

Section 66. Paragraphs (a) and (d) of subsection (3) of section 288.11621, Florida Statutes, are amended to read:



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288.11621 Spring training baseball franchises.—

(3) USE OF FUNDS.—

(a) A certified applicant may use funds provided under s. 212.20(6)(d)7.b. ~~s. 212.20(6)(d)6.b.~~ only to:

1. Serve the public purpose of acquiring, constructing, reconstructing, or renovating a facility for a spring training franchise.

2. Pay or pledge for the payment of debt service on, or to fund debt service reserve funds, arbitrage rebate obligations, or other amounts payable with respect thereto, bonds issued for the acquisition, construction, reconstruction, or renovation of such facility, or for the reimbursement of such costs or the refinancing of bonds issued for such purposes.

3. Assist in the relocation of a spring training franchise from one unit of local government to another only if the governing board of the current host local government by a majority vote agrees to relocation.

(d)1. All certified applicants must place unexpended state funds received pursuant to s. 212.20(6)(d)7.b. ~~s. 212.20(6)(d)6.b.~~ in a trust fund or separate account for use only as authorized in this section.

2. A certified applicant may request that the Department of Revenue suspend further distributions of state funds made available under s. 212.20(6)(d)7.b. ~~s. 212.20(6)(d)6.b.~~ for 12 months after expiration of an existing agreement with a spring training franchise to provide the certified applicant with an opportunity to enter into a new agreement with a spring training franchise, at which time the distributions shall resume.

3. The expenditure of state funds distributed to an



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applicant certified before July 1, 2010, must begin within 48 months after the initial receipt of the state funds. In addition, the construction of, or capital improvements to, a spring training facility must be completed within 24 months after the project's commencement.

Section 67. Paragraph (c) of subsection (2) and paragraphs (a), (c), and (d) of subsection (3) of section 288.11631, Florida Statutes, are amended to read:

288.11631 Retention of Major League Baseball spring training baseball franchises.—

(2) CERTIFICATION PROCESS.—

(c) Each applicant certified on or after July 1, 2013, shall enter into an agreement with the department which:

1. Specifies the amount of the state incentive funding to be distributed. The amount of state incentive funding per certified applicant may not exceed \$20 million. However, if a certified applicant's facility is used by more than one spring training franchise, the maximum amount may not exceed \$50 million, and the Department of Revenue shall make distributions to the applicant pursuant to s. 212.20(6)(d)7.c. ~~s.~~

~~212.20(6)(d)6.e.~~

2. States the criteria that the certified applicant must meet in order to remain certified. These criteria must include a provision stating that the spring training franchise must reimburse the state for any funds received if the franchise does not comply with the terms of the contract. If bonds were issued to construct or renovate a facility for a spring training franchise, the required reimbursement must be equal to the total amount of state distributions expected to be paid from the date



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the franchise violates the agreement with the applicant through the final maturity of the bonds.

3. States that the certified applicant is subject to decertification if the certified applicant fails to comply with this section or the agreement.

4. States that the department may recover state incentive funds if the certified applicant is decertified.

5. Specifies the information that the certified applicant must report to the department.

6. Includes any provision deemed prudent by the department.

(3) USE OF FUNDS.—

(a) A certified applicant may use funds provided under s. 212.20(6)(d)7.c. ~~s. 212.20(6)(d)6.e.~~ only to:

1. Serve the public purpose of constructing or renovating a facility for a spring training franchise.

2. Pay or pledge for the payment of debt service on, or to fund debt service reserve funds, arbitrage rebate obligations, or other amounts payable with respect thereto, bonds issued for the construction or renovation of such facility, or for the reimbursement of such costs or the refinancing of bonds issued for such purposes.

(c) The Department of Revenue may not distribute funds under s. 212.20(6)(d)7.c. ~~s. 212.20(6)(d)6.e.~~ until July 1, 2016. Further, the Department of Revenue may not distribute funds to an applicant certified on or after July 1, 2013, until it receives notice from the department that:

1. The certified applicant has encumbered funds under either subparagraph (a)1. or subparagraph (a)2.; and

2. If applicable, any existing agreement with a spring



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training franchise for the use of a facility has expired.

(d)1. All certified applicants shall place unexpended state funds received pursuant to s. 212.20(6)(d)7.c. ~~s. 212.20(6)(d)6.e.~~ in a trust fund or separate account for use only as authorized in this section.

2. A certified applicant may request that the department notify the Department of Revenue to suspend further distributions of state funds made available under s. 212.20(6)(d)7.c. ~~s. 212.20(6)(d)6.e.~~ for 12 months after expiration of an existing agreement with a spring training franchise to provide the certified applicant with an opportunity to enter into a new agreement with a spring training franchise, at which time the distributions shall resume.

3. The expenditure of state funds distributed to an applicant certified after July 1, 2013, must begin within 48 months after the initial receipt of the state funds. In addition, the construction or renovation of a spring training facility must be completed within 24 months after the project's commencement.

Section 68. Subsection (1) of section 443.191, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

443.191 Unemployment Compensation Trust Fund; establishment and control.—

(1) There is established, as a separate trust fund apart from all other public funds of this state, an Unemployment Compensation Trust Fund, which shall be administered by the Department of Commerce exclusively for the purposes of this chapter. The fund must consist of:

(a) All contributions and reimbursements collected under



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this chapter;

(b) Interest earned on any moneys in the fund;

(c) Any property or securities acquired through the use of moneys belonging to the fund;

(d) All earnings of these properties or securities;

(e) All money credited to this state's account in the federal Unemployment Compensation Trust Fund under 42 U.S.C. s. 1103;

(f) All money collected for penalties imposed pursuant to s. 443.151(6)(a);

(g) Advances on the amount in the federal Unemployment Compensation Trust Fund credited to the state under 42 U.S.C. s. 1321, as requested by the Governor or the Governor's designee; and

(h) All money deposited in this account as a distribution pursuant to s. 212.20(6)(d)7.e. ~~s. 212.20(6)(d)6.e.~~

Except as otherwise provided in s. 443.1313(4), all moneys in the fund must be mingled and undivided.

Section 69. Section 571.26, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

571.26 Florida Agricultural Promotional Campaign Trust Fund.—There is hereby created the Florida Agricultural Promotional Campaign Trust Fund within the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services to receive all moneys related to the Florida Agricultural Promotional Campaign. Moneys deposited in the trust fund shall be appropriated for the sole purpose of implementing the Florida Agricultural Promotional Campaign, except for money deposited in the trust fund pursuant



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to s. 212.20(6)(d)7.h. ~~s. 212.20(6)(d)6.h.~~, which shall be held separately and used solely for the purposes identified in s. 571.265.

Section 70. Subsection (2) of section 571.265, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

571.265 Promotion of Florida thoroughbred breeding and of thoroughbred racing at Florida thoroughbred tracks; distribution of funds.—

(2) Funds deposited into the Florida Agricultural Promotional Campaign Trust Fund pursuant to s. 212.20(6)(d)7.f. ~~s. 212.20(6)(d)6.f.~~ shall be used by the department to encourage the agricultural activity of breeding thoroughbred racehorses in this state and to enhance thoroughbred racing conducted at thoroughbred tracks in this state as provided in this section. If the funds made available under this section are not fully used in any one fiscal year, any unused amounts shall be carried forward in the trust fund into future fiscal years and made available for distribution as provided in this section.

Section 71. For the purpose of incorporating the amendment made by this act to section 20.60, Florida Statutes, in a reference thereto, subsection (8) of section 288.9935, Florida Statutes, is reenacted to read:

288.9935 Microfinance Guarantee Program.—

(8) The department must, in the department's report required under s. 20.60(10), include an annual report on the program. The report must, at a minimum, provide:

(a) A comprehensive description of the program, including an evaluation of its application and guarantee activities, recommendations for change, and identification of any other



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state programs that overlap with the program;

(b) An assessment of the current availability of and access to credit for entrepreneurs and small businesses in this state;

(c) A summary of the financial and employment results of the entrepreneurs and small businesses receiving loan guarantees, including the number of full-time equivalent jobs created as a result of the guaranteed loans and the amount of wages paid to employees in the newly created jobs;

(d) Industry data about the borrowers, including the six-digit North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) code;

(e) The name and location of lenders that receive loan guarantees;

(f) The number of loan guarantee applications received;

(g) The number, duration, location, and amount of guarantees made;

(h) The number and amount of guaranteed loans outstanding, if any;

(i) The number and amount of guaranteed loans with payments overdue, if any;

(j) The number and amount of guaranteed loans in default, if any;

(k) The repayment history of the guaranteed loans made; and

(l) An evaluation of the program's ability to meet the financial performance measures and objectives specified in subsection (3).

Section 72. For the purpose of incorporating the amendment made by this act to section 218.67, Florida Statutes, in a reference thereto, paragraph (c) of subsection (5) of section



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125.0104, Florida Statutes, is reenacted to read:

125.0104 Tourist development tax; procedure for levying;
authorized uses; referendum; enforcement.—

(5) AUTHORIZED USES OF REVENUE.—

(c) A county located adjacent to the Gulf of Mexico or the Atlantic Ocean, except a county that receives revenue from taxes levied pursuant to s. 125.0108, which meets the following criteria may use up to 10 percent of the tax revenue received pursuant to this section to reimburse expenses incurred in providing public safety services, including emergency medical services as defined in s. 401.107(3), and law enforcement services, which are needed to address impacts related to increased tourism and visitors to an area. However, if taxes collected pursuant to this section are used to reimburse emergency medical services or public safety services for tourism or special events, the governing board of a county or municipality may not use such taxes to supplant the normal operating expenses of an emergency medical services department, a fire department, a sheriff's office, or a police department. To receive reimbursement, the county must:

1.a. Generate a minimum of \$10 million in annual proceeds from any tax, or any combination of taxes, authorized to be levied pursuant to this section;

b. Have at least three municipalities; and

c. Have an estimated population of less than 275,000, according to the most recent population estimate prepared pursuant to s. 186.901, excluding the inmate population; or

2. Be a fiscally constrained county as described in s. 218.67(1).



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The board of county commissioners must by majority vote approve reimbursement made pursuant to this paragraph upon receipt of a recommendation from the tourist development council.

Section 73. For the purpose of incorporating the amendment made by this act to section 218.67, Florida Statutes, in a reference thereto, subsection (3) of section 193.624, Florida Statutes, is reenacted to read:

193.624 Assessment of renewable energy source devices.—

(3) This section applies to the installation of a renewable energy source device installed on or after January 1, 2013, to new and existing residential real property. This section applies to a renewable energy source device installed on or after January 1, 2018, to all other real property, except when installed as part of a project planned for a location in a fiscally constrained county, as defined in s. 218.67(1), and for which an application for a comprehensive plan amendment or planned unit development zoning has been filed with the county on or before December 31, 2017.

Section 74. For the purpose of incorporating the amendment made by this act to section 218.67, Florida Statutes, in a reference thereto, subsection (2) of section 196.182, Florida Statutes, is reenacted to read:

196.182 Exemption of renewable energy source devices.—

(2) The exemption provided in this section does not apply to a renewable energy source device that is installed as part of a project planned for a location in a fiscally constrained county, as defined in s. 218.67(1), and for which an application for a comprehensive plan amendment or planned unit development



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zoning has been filed with the county on or before December 31, 2017.

Section 75. For the purpose of incorporating the amendment made by this act to section 218.67, Florida Statutes, in a reference thereto, subsection (1) of section 218.12, Florida Statutes, is reenacted to read:

218.12 Appropriations to offset reductions in ad valorem tax revenue in fiscally constrained counties.—

(1) Beginning in fiscal year 2008-2009, the Legislature shall appropriate moneys to offset the reductions in ad valorem tax revenue experienced by fiscally constrained counties, as defined in s. 218.67(1), which occur as a direct result of the implementation of revisions of Art. VII of the State Constitution approved in the special election held on January 29, 2008. The moneys appropriated for this purpose shall be distributed in January of each fiscal year among the fiscally constrained counties based on each county's proportion of the total reduction in ad valorem tax revenue resulting from the implementation of the revision.

Section 76. For the purpose of incorporating the amendment made by this act to section 218.67, Florida Statutes, in a reference thereto, subsection (1) of section 218.125, Florida Statutes, is reenacted to read:

218.125 Offset for tax loss associated with certain constitutional amendments affecting fiscally constrained counties.—

(1) Beginning in the 2010-2011 fiscal year, the Legislature shall appropriate moneys to offset the reductions in ad valorem tax revenue experienced by fiscally constrained counties, as



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defined in s. 218.67(1), which occur as a direct result of the implementation of revisions of ss. 3(f) and 4(b), Art. VII of the State Constitution which were approved in the general election held in November 2008. The moneys appropriated for this purpose shall be distributed in January of each fiscal year among the fiscally constrained counties based on each county's proportion of the total reduction in ad valorem tax revenue resulting from the implementation of the revisions.

Section 77. For the purpose of incorporating the amendment made by this act to section 218.67, Florida Statutes, in a reference thereto, subsection (1) of section 218.135, Florida Statutes, is reenacted to read:

218.135 Offset for tax loss associated with reductions in value of certain citrus fruit packing and processing equipment.—

(1) For the 2018-2019 fiscal year, the Legislature shall appropriate moneys to offset the reductions in ad valorem tax revenue experienced by fiscally constrained counties, as defined in s. 218.67(1), which occur as a direct result of the implementation of s. 193.4516. The moneys appropriated for this purpose shall be distributed in January 2019 among the fiscally constrained counties based on each county's proportion of the total reduction in ad valorem tax revenue resulting from the implementation of s. 193.4516.

Section 78. For the purpose of incorporating the amendment made by this act to section 218.67, Florida Statutes, in a reference thereto, subsection (1) of section 218.136, Florida Statutes, is reenacted to read:

218.136 Offset for ad valorem revenue loss affecting fiscally constrained counties.—



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(1) Beginning in fiscal year 2025-2026, the Legislature shall appropriate moneys to offset the reductions in ad valorem tax revenue experienced by fiscally constrained counties, as defined in s. 218.67(1), which occur as a direct result of the implementation of revisions of s. 6(a), Art. VII of the State Constitution approved in the November 2024 general election. The moneys appropriated for this purpose shall be distributed in January of each fiscal year among the fiscally constrained counties based on each county's proportion of the total reduction in ad valorem tax revenue resulting from the implementation of the revision of s. 6(a), Art. VII of the State Constitution.

Section 79. For the purpose of incorporating the amendment made by this act to section 218.67, Florida Statutes, in a reference thereto, paragraph (cc) of subsection (2) of section 252.35, Florida Statutes, is reenacted to read:

252.35 Emergency management powers; Division of Emergency Management.—

(2) The division is responsible for carrying out the provisions of ss. 252.31-252.90. In performing its duties, the division shall:

(cc) Prioritize technical assistance and training to fiscally constrained counties as defined in s. 218.67(1) on aspects of safety measures, preparedness, prevention, response, recovery, and mitigation relating to natural disasters and emergencies.

Section 80. For the purpose of incorporating the amendment made by this act to section 218.67, Florida Statutes, in a reference thereto, subsection (4) of section 288.102, Florida



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Statutes, is reenacted to read:

288.102 Supply Chain Innovation Grant Program.—

(4) A minimum of a one-to-one match of nonstate resources, including local, federal, or private funds, to the state contribution is required. An award may not be made for a project that is receiving or using state funding from another state source or statutory program, including tax credits. The one-to-one match requirement is waived for a public entity located in a fiscally constrained county as defined in s. 218.67(1).

Section 81. For the purpose of incorporating the amendment made by this act to section 218.67, Florida Statutes, in a reference thereto, paragraph (g) of subsection (16) of section 403.064, Florida Statutes, is reenacted to read:

403.064 Reuse of reclaimed water.—

(16) By November 1, 2021, domestic wastewater utilities that dispose of effluent, reclaimed water, or reuse water by surface water discharge shall submit to the department for review and approval a plan for eliminating nonbeneficial surface water discharge by January 1, 2032, subject to the requirements of this section. The plan must include the average gallons per day of effluent, reclaimed water, or reuse water that will no longer be discharged into surface waters and the date of such elimination, the average gallons per day of surface water discharge which will continue in accordance with the alternatives provided for in subparagraphs (a)2. and 3., and the level of treatment that the effluent, reclaimed water, or reuse water will receive before being discharged into a surface water by each alternative.

(g) This subsection does not apply to any of the following:



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1. A domestic wastewater treatment facility that is located in a fiscally constrained county as described in s. 218.67(1).

2. A domestic wastewater treatment facility that is located in a municipality that is entirely within a rural area of opportunity as designated pursuant to s. 288.0656.

3. A domestic wastewater treatment facility that is located in a municipality that has less than \$10 million in total revenue, as determined by the municipality's most recent annual financial report submitted to the Department of Financial Services in accordance with s. 218.32.

4. A domestic wastewater treatment facility that is operated by an operator of a mobile home park as defined in s. 723.003 and has a permitted capacity of less than 300,000 gallons per day.

Section 82. For the purpose of incorporating the amendment made by this act to section 218.67, Florida Statutes, in references thereto, subsections (2) and (3) of section 589.08, Florida Statutes, are reenacted to read:

589.08 Land acquisition restrictions.—

(2) The Florida Forest Service may receive, hold the custody of, and exercise the control of any lands, and set aside into a separate, distinct and inviolable fund, any proceeds derived from the sales of the products of such lands, the use thereof in any manner, or the sale of such lands save the 25 percent of the proceeds to be paid into the State School Fund as provided by law. The Florida Forest Service may use and apply such funds for the acquisition, use, custody, management, development, or improvement of any lands vested in or subject to the control of the Florida Forest Service. After full payment



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has been made for the purchase of a state forest to the Federal Government or other grantor, 15 percent of the gross receipts from a state forest shall be paid to the fiscally constrained county or counties, as described in s. 218.67(1), in which it is located in proportion to the acreage located in each county for use by the county or counties for school purposes.

(3) The Florida Forest Service shall pay 15 percent of the gross receipts from the Goethe State Forest to each fiscally constrained county, as described in s. 218.67(1), in which a portion of the respective forest is located in proportion to the forest acreage located in such county. The funds must be equally divided between the board of county commissioners and the school board of each fiscally constrained county.

Section 83. For the purpose of incorporating the amendment made by this act to section 218.67, Florida Statutes, in a reference thereto, paragraph (f) of subsection (1) of section 1011.62, Florida Statutes, is reenacted to read:

1011.62 Funds for operation of schools.—If the annual allocation from the Florida Education Finance Program to each district for operation of schools is not determined in the annual appropriations act or the substantive bill implementing the annual appropriations act, it shall be determined as follows:

(1) COMPUTATION OF THE BASIC AMOUNT TO BE INCLUDED FOR OPERATION.—The following procedure shall be followed in determining the annual allocation to each district for operation:

(f) *Small district factor*.—An additional value per full-time equivalent student membership is provided to each school



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district with a full-time equivalent student membership of fewer than 20,000 full-time equivalent students which is in a fiscally constrained county as described in s. 218.67(1). The amount of the additional value shall be specified in the General Appropriations Act.

Section 84. For the purpose of incorporating the amendment made by this act to sections 218.67 and 339.2818, Florida Statutes, in references thereto, paragraph (c) of subsection (6) of section 403.0741, Florida Statutes, is reenacted to read:

403.0741 Grease waste removal and disposal.—

(6) REGULATION BY LOCAL GOVERNMENTS.—

(c) Fiscally constrained counties as described in s. 218.67(1) and small counties as defined in s. 339.2818(2) may opt out of the requirements of this section.

Section 85. For the purpose of incorporating the amendment made by this act to section 288.0656, Florida Statutes, in a reference thereto, paragraph (e) of subsection (7) of section 163.3177, Florida Statutes, is reenacted to read:

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

(7)

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

Section 86. For the purpose of incorporating the amendment made by this act to section 288.9961, Florida Statutes, in a reference thereto, paragraph (a) of subsection (7) of section 288.9962, Florida Statutes, is reenacted to read:



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288.9962 Broadband Opportunity Program.—

(7)(a) In evaluating grant applications and awarding grants, the office must give priority to applications that:

1. Offer broadband Internet service to important community institutions, including, but not limited to, libraries, educational institutions, public safety facilities, and health care facilities;

2. Facilitate the use of telemedicine and electronic health records;

3. Serve economically distressed areas of this state, as measured by indices of unemployment, poverty, or population loss that are significantly greater than the statewide average;

4. Provide for scalability to transmission speeds of at least 100 megabits per second download and 10 megabits per second upload;

5. Include a component to actively promote the adoption of the newly available broadband Internet service in the community;

6. Provide evidence of strong support for the project from citizens, government, businesses, and institutions in the community;

7. Provide access to broadband Internet service to the greatest number of unserved households and businesses;

8. Leverage greater amounts of funding for a project from private sources; or

9. Demonstrate consistency with the strategic plan adopted under s. 288.9961.

Section 87. For the purpose of incorporating the amendment made by this act to section 319.32, Florida Statutes, in a reference thereto, subsection (1) of section 215.211, Florida



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Statutes, is reenacted to read:

215.211 Service charge; elimination or reduction for specified proceeds.—

(1) Notwithstanding the provisions of s. 215.20(1) and former s. 215.20(3), the service charge provided in s. 215.20(1) and former s. 215.20(3), which is deducted from the proceeds of the taxes distributed under ss. 206.606(1), 207.026, 212.0501(6), and 319.32(5), shall be eliminated beginning July 1, 2000.

Section 88. For the purpose of incorporating the amendment made by this act to section 339.68, Florida Statutes, in references thereto, subsections (5) and (6) of section 339.66, Florida Statutes, are reenacted to read:

339.66 Upgrade of arterial highways with controlled access facilities.—

(5) Any existing applicable requirements relating to department projects shall apply to projects undertaken by the department pursuant to this section. The department shall take into consideration the guidance and recommendations of any previous studies or reports relevant to the projects authorized by this section and ss. 339.67 and 339.68, including, but not limited to, the task force reports prepared pursuant to chapter 2019-43, Laws of Florida.

(6) Any existing applicable requirements relating to turnpike projects apply to projects undertaken by the Turnpike Enterprise pursuant to this section. The Turnpike Enterprise shall take into consideration the guidance and recommendations of any previous studies or reports relevant to the projects authorized by this section and ss. 339.67 and 339.68, including,



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but not limited to, the task force reports prepared pursuant to chapter 2019-43, Laws of Florida, and with respect to any extension of the Florida Turnpike from its northerly terminus in Wildwood.

Section 89. For the purpose of incorporating the amendment made by this act to section 420.9073, Florida Statutes, in references thereto, subsections (4) and (6) of section 420.9072, Florida Statutes, are reenacted to read:

420.9072 State Housing Initiatives Partnership Program.—The State Housing Initiatives Partnership Program is created for the purpose of providing funds to counties and eligible municipalities as an incentive for the creation of local housing partnerships, to expand production of and preserve affordable housing, to further the housing element of the local government comprehensive plan specific to affordable housing, and to increase housing-related employment.

(4) Moneys in the Local Government Housing Trust Fund shall be distributed by the corporation to each approved county and eligible municipality within the county as provided in s. 420.9073. Distributions shall be allocated to the participating county and to each eligible municipality within the county according to an interlocal agreement between the county governing authority and the governing body of the eligible municipality or, if there is no interlocal agreement, according to population. The portion for each eligible municipality is computed by multiplying the total moneys earmarked for a county by a fraction, the numerator of which is the population of the eligible municipality and the denominator of which is the total population of the county. The remaining revenues shall be



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distributed to the governing body of the county.

(6) The moneys that otherwise would be distributed pursuant to s. 420.9073 to a local government that does not meet the program's requirements for receipts of such distributions shall remain in the Local Government Housing Trust Fund to be administered by the corporation.

Section 90. For the purpose of incorporating the amendment made by this act to section 420.9073, Florida Statutes, in a reference thereto, paragraph (b) of subsection (7) of section 420.9076, Florida Statutes, is reenacted to read:

420.9076 Adoption of affordable housing incentive strategies; committees.—

(7) The governing board of the county or the eligible municipality shall notify the corporation by certified mail of its adoption of an amendment of its local housing assistance plan to incorporate local housing incentive strategies. The notice must include a copy of the approved amended plan.

(b) If a county fails to timely adopt an amended local housing assistance plan to incorporate local housing incentive strategies but an eligible municipality receiving a local housing distribution pursuant to an interlocal agreement within the county does timely adopt an amended local housing assistance plan to incorporate local housing incentive strategies, the corporation, after issuance of a notice of termination, shall thereafter distribute directly to the participating eligible municipality its share calculated in the manner provided in s. 420.9073.

Section 91. For the purpose of incorporating the amendment made by this act to section 420.9073, Florida Statutes, in a



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reference thereto, subsection (2) of section 420.9079, Florida Statutes, is reenacted to read:

420.9079 Local Government Housing Trust Fund.—

(2) The corporation shall administer the fund exclusively for the purpose of implementing the programs described in ss. 420.907-420.9076 and this section. With the exception of monitoring the activities of counties and eligible municipalities to determine local compliance with program requirements, the corporation shall not receive appropriations from the fund for administrative or personnel costs. For the purpose of implementing the compliance monitoring provisions of s. 420.9075(9), the corporation may request a maximum of one-quarter of 1 percent of the annual appropriation per state fiscal year. When such funding is appropriated, the corporation shall deduct the amount appropriated prior to calculating the local housing distribution pursuant to ss. 420.9072 and 420.9073.

Section 92. This act shall take effect July 1, 2025.

===== 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 rural communities; reenacting and amending s. 20.60, F.S.; revising the list of divisions and offices within the Department of Commerce to conform to changes made by the act; revising the annual program reports that must be



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3491 included in the annual report of the Department of
3492 Commerce; amending s. 163.3168, F.S.; requiring the
3493 state land planning agency to give preference for
3494 technical assistance funding to local governments
3495 located in a rural area of opportunity; requiring the
3496 agency to consult with the Office of Rural Prosperity
3497 when awarding certain funding; amending s. 201.15,
3498 F.S.; requiring that a certain sum be paid to the
3499 credit of the State Transportation Trust Fund for the
3500 exclusive use of the Florida Arterial Road
3501 Modernization Program; amending s. 202.18, F.S.;
3502 redirecting the transfer of certain communication
3503 services tax revenue; amending s. 212.20, F.S.;
3504 revising the distribution of sales and use tax revenue
3505 to include a transfer to fiscally constrained
3506 counties; amending s. 215.971, F.S.; providing
3507 construction regarding agreements funded with federal
3508 or state assistance; requiring the agency to expedite
3509 payment requests from a county, municipality, or rural
3510 area of opportunity for a specified purpose; requiring
3511 each state agency to report to the Office of Rural
3512 Prosperity by a certain date with a summary of certain
3513 information; requiring the office to summarize the
3514 information it receives for its annual report;
3515 amending s. 218.67, F.S.; revising the conditions
3516 required for a county to be considered a fiscally
3517 constrained county; authorizing eligible counties to
3518 receive a distribution of sales and use tax revenue;
3519 revising the sources that the Department of Revenue



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3520 must use to determine the amount distributed to
3521 fiscally constrained counties; revising the factors
3522 for allocation of the distribution of revenue to
3523 fiscally constrained counties; requiring that the
3524 computation and amount distributed be calculated based
3525 on a specified rounding algorithm; authorizing
3526 specified uses for the revenue; conforming a cross-
3527 reference; amending s. 288.0001, F.S.; requiring the
3528 Office of Economic and Demographic Research and the
3529 Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government
3530 Accountability (OPPAGA) to prepare a report for a
3531 specified purpose; specifying requirements for the
3532 report; providing that the Office of Economic and
3533 Demographic Research and OPPAGA must be provided with
3534 all data necessary to complete the rural communities
3535 or areas report upon request; authorizing the Office
3536 of Economic and Demographic Research and OPPAGA to
3537 collaborate on all data collection and analysis;
3538 requiring the Office of Economic and Demographic
3539 Research and OPPAGA to submit the report to the
3540 Legislature by a specified date; providing additional
3541 requirements for the report; providing for expiration;
3542 amending s. 288.001, F.S.; requiring the Florida Small
3543 Business Development Center Network to use certain
3544 funds appropriated for a specified purpose;
3545 authorizing the network to dedicate funds to
3546 facilitate certain events; amending s. 288.007, F.S.;
3547 revising which local governments and economic
3548 development organizations seeking to recruit



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3549 businesses are required to submit a specified report;
3550 creating s. 288.013, F.S.; providing legislative
3551 findings; creating the Office of Rural Prosperity
3552 within the Department of Commerce; requiring the
3553 Governor to appoint a director, subject to
3554 confirmation by the Senate; providing that the
3555 director reports to and serves at the pleasure of the
3556 secretary of the department; providing the duties of
3557 the office; requiring the office to establish by a
3558 specified date a certain number of regional rural
3559 community liaison centers across this state for a
3560 specified purpose; providing the powers, duties, and
3561 functions of the liaison centers; requiring the
3562 liaison centers, to the extent possible, to coordinate
3563 with certain entities; requiring the liaison centers
3564 to engage with the Rural Economic Development
3565 Initiative (REDI); requiring at least one staff member
3566 of a liaison center to attend the monthly meetings in
3567 person or by means of electronic communication;
3568 requiring the director of the office to submit an
3569 annual report to the Administration Commission in the
3570 Executive Office of the Governor; specifying
3571 requirements for the annual report; requiring that the
3572 annual report also be submitted to the Legislature by
3573 a specified date and published on the office's
3574 website; requiring the director of the office to
3575 attend the next Administration Commission meeting to
3576 present detailed information from the annual report;
3577 requiring OPPAGA to review the effectiveness of the



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3578 office by a certain date annually until a specified
3579 date; requiring OPPAGA to review the office at
3580 specified intervals; requiring such reviews to include
3581 certain information to be considered by the
3582 Legislature; requiring that such reports be submitted
3583 to the Legislature; requiring OPPAGA to review certain
3584 strategies from other states; requiring OPPAGA to
3585 submit to the Legislature its findings at certain
3586 intervals; creating s. 288.014, F.S.; providing
3587 legislative findings; requiring the Office of Rural
3588 Prosperity to administer the Renaissance Grants
3589 Program to provide block grants to eligible
3590 communities; requiring the Office of Economic and
3591 Demographic Research to certify to the Office of Rural
3592 Prosperity certain information by a specified date;
3593 defining the term "growth-impeded"; requiring the
3594 Office of Economic and Demographic Research to certify
3595 annually that a county remains growth-impeded until
3596 such county has positive population growth for a
3597 specified amount of time; providing that such county,
3598 after 3 consecutive years of population growth, is
3599 eligible to participate in the program for 1
3600 additional year; requiring a county eligible for the
3601 program to enter into an agreement with the Office of
3602 Rural Prosperity in order to receive the block grant;
3603 giving such counties broad authority to design their
3604 specific plans; prohibiting the Office of Rural
3605 Prosperity from determining how such counties
3606 implement the block grant; requiring regional rural



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3607 community liaison center staff to provide assistance,
3608 upon request; requiring participating counties to
3609 report annually to the Office of Rural Prosperity with
3610 certain information; providing that a participating
3611 county receives a specified amount from funds
3612 appropriated to the program; requiring participating
3613 counties to make all attempts to limit the amount
3614 spent on administrative costs; authorizing
3615 participating counties to contribute other funds for
3616 block grant purposes; requiring participating counties
3617 to hire a renaissance coordinator; providing that
3618 funds from the block grant may be used to hire the
3619 renaissance coordinator; providing the
3620 responsibilities of the renaissance coordinator;
3621 requiring the regional rural community liaison center
3622 staff to provide assistance and training to the
3623 renaissance coordinator, upon request; requiring
3624 participating counties to design a plan to make
3625 targeted investments to achieve population growth and
3626 increase economic vitality; providing requirements for
3627 such plans; requiring participating counties to
3628 develop intergovernmental agreements with certain
3629 entities in order to implement the plan; requiring the
3630 Auditor General to conduct an operational audit every
3631 2 years for a specified purpose; requiring the Office
3632 of Economic and Demographic Research to provide an
3633 annual report on a specified date of renaissance block
3634 grant recipients by county; providing requirements for
3635 the annual report; requiring that the report be



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3636 submitted to the Governor and the Legislature;
3637 prohibiting funds appropriated for the program from
3638 being subject to reversion; providing for an
3639 expiration of the section; creating s. 288.0175, F.S.;
3640 creating the Public Infrastructure Smart Technology
3641 Grant Program within the Office of Rural Prosperity;
3642 defining terms; requiring the office to contract with
3643 one or more smart technology lead organizations to
3644 administer a grant program for a specified purpose;
3645 providing the criteria for such contracts; requiring
3646 that projects funded by the grant program be included
3647 in the office's annual report; amending s. 288.018,
3648 F.S.; requiring the office, rather than the Department
3649 of Commerce, to establish a grant program to provide
3650 funding for regional economic development
3651 organizations; revising who may apply for such grants;
3652 providing that a grant award may not exceed a certain
3653 amount in a year; providing exceptions to a provision
3654 that the department may expend a certain amount for a
3655 certain purpose; amending s. 288.019, F.S.; revising
3656 the program criteria and procedures that agencies and
3657 organizations of REDI are required to review; revising
3658 the list of impacts each REDI agency and organization
3659 must consider in its review; requiring REDI agencies
3660 and organizations to develop a proposal for
3661 modifications which minimizes the financial and
3662 resource impacts to a rural community; requiring that
3663 ranking of evaluation criteria and scoring procedures
3664 be used only when ranking is a component of the



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3665 program; requiring that match requirements be waived
3666 or reduced for rural communities; providing that
3667 donations of land may be treated as in-kind matches;
3668 requiring each agency and organization that applies
3669 for or receives federal funding to request federal
3670 approval to waive or reduce the financial match
3671 requirements, if any, for projects in rural
3672 communities; requiring that proposals be submitted to
3673 the office, rather than the department; requiring each
3674 REDI agency and organization to modify rules or
3675 policies as necessary to reflect the finalized
3676 proposal; requiring that information about authorized
3677 waivers be included on the office's online rural
3678 resource directory; conforming a cross-reference;
3679 amending s. 288.021, F.S.; requiring, when
3680 practicable, the economic development liaison to serve
3681 as the agency representative for REDI; amending s.
3682 288.065, F.S.; defining the term "unit of local
3683 government"; requiring the office to include in its
3684 annual report certain information about the Rural
3685 Community Development Revolving Loan Fund; conforming
3686 provisions to changes made by the act; amending s.
3687 288.0655, F.S.; revising the list of grants that may
3688 be awarded by the office; deleting the authorization
3689 for local match requirements to be waived for a
3690 catalyst site; revising the list of departments the
3691 office must consult with to certify applicants;
3692 requiring the office to include certain information
3693 about the Rural Infrastructure Trust Fund in its



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3694 annual report; conforming provisions to changes made
3695 by the act; amending s. 288.0656, F.S.; providing
3696 legislative findings; providing that REDI is created
3697 within the Office of Rural Prosperity, rather than the
3698 department; deleting the definitions of the terms
3699 "catalyst project" and "catalyst site"; requiring that
3700 an alternate for each designated deputy secretary be a
3701 deputy secretary or higher-level staff person;
3702 requiring that the names of such alternates be
3703 reported to the director of the office; requiring at
3704 least one rural liaison to participate in REDI
3705 meetings; requiring REDI to meet at least each month;
3706 deleting a provision that a rural area of opportunity
3707 may designate catalyst projects; requiring REDI to
3708 submit a certain report to the office, rather than to
3709 the department; specifying requirements for such
3710 report; conforming provisions to changes made by the
3711 act; repealing s. 288.06561, F.S., relating to
3712 reduction or waiver of financial match requirements;
3713 amending s. 288.0657, F.S.; requiring the office,
3714 rather than the department, to provide grants to
3715 assist rural communities; providing that such grants
3716 may be used for specified purposes; requiring the
3717 rural liaison to assist those applying for such
3718 grants; providing that marketing grants may include
3719 certain funding; amending s. 288.1226, F.S.; revising
3720 required components of the 4-year marketing plan of
3721 the Florida Tourism Industry Marketing Corporation;
3722 repealing s. 288.12266, F.S., relating to the Targeted



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3723 Marketing Assistance Program; amending s. 288.9961,
3724 F.S.; revising the definition of the term
3725 "underserved"; requiring the office to consult with
3726 regional rural community liaison centers on
3727 development of a certain strategic plan; requiring
3728 rural liaisons to assist rural communities with
3729 providing feedback in applying for federal grants for
3730 broadband Internet services; requiring the office to
3731 submit reports with specified information to the
3732 Governor and the Legislature within certain
3733 timeframes; repealing s. 290.06561, F.S., relating to
3734 designation of rural enterprise zones as catalyst
3735 sites; amending s. 319.32, F.S.; revising the
3736 disposition of fees collected for certain title
3737 certificates; amending s. 334.044, F.S.; revising the
3738 powers and duties of the Department of Transportation;
3739 amending s. 339.0801, F.S.; revising the allocation of
3740 funds received in the State Transportation Trust Fund;
3741 amending s. 339.2816, F.S.; requiring, rather than
3742 authorizing, that certain funds received from the
3743 State Transportation Trust Fund be used for the Small
3744 County Road Assistance Program; requiring the
3745 department to use other additional revenues for the
3746 Small County Road Assistance Program; providing an
3747 exception from the prohibition against funding
3748 capacity improvements on county roads; amending s.
3749 339.2817, F.S.; revising the criteria that the
3750 department must consider for evaluating projects for
3751 County Incentive Grant Program assistance; authorizing



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3752 a county located either wholly or partially within the
3753 Everglades Agricultural Area to request a specified
3754 percent of project costs for eligible projects;
3755 amending s. 339.2818, F.S.; deleting a provision that
3756 the funds allocated under the Small County Outreach
3757 Program are in addition to the Small County Road
3758 Assistance Program; deleting a provision that a local
3759 government within the Everglades Agricultural Area,
3760 the Peace River Basin, or the Suwannee River Basin may
3761 compete for additional funding; conforming provisions
3762 to changes made by the act; making a technical change;
3763 amending s. 339.68, F.S.; providing legislative
3764 findings; creating the Florida Arterial Road
3765 Modernization Program within the Department of
3766 Commerce; defining the term "rural community";
3767 requiring the department to allocate from the State
3768 Transportation Trust Fund a minimum sum in each fiscal
3769 year to fund the program; providing that such funding
3770 is in addition to any other funding provided to the
3771 program; providing criteria the department must use to
3772 prioritize projects for funding under the program;
3773 requiring the department to submit a report to the
3774 Governor and the Legislature by a specified date;
3775 requiring that such report be submitted every 2 years
3776 thereafter; providing the criteria for such report;
3777 requiring the Department of Transportation to allocate
3778 additional funds to implement the Small County Road
3779 Assistance Program and amend the tentative work
3780 program for a specified number of fiscal years;



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3781 requiring the department to submit a budget amendment
3782 before the adoption of the work program; requiring the
3783 department to allocate sufficient funds to implement
3784 the Florida Arterial Road Modernization Program;
3785 requiring the department to amend the current
3786 tentative work program for a specified number of
3787 fiscal years to include the program's projects;
3788 requiring the department to submit a budget amendment
3789 before the implementation of the program; requiring
3790 that the revenue increases in the State Transportation
3791 Trust Fund which are derived from the act be used to
3792 fund the work program; amending s. 381.402, F.S.;
3793 revising eligibility requirements for the Florida
3794 Reimbursement Assistance for Medical Education
3795 Program; revising the proof required to make payments
3796 for participation in the program; creating s. 381.403,
3797 F.S.; providing legislative findings; creating the
3798 Rural Access to Primary and Preventive Care Grant
3799 Program within the Department of Health for a
3800 specified purpose; defining terms; requiring the
3801 department to award grants under the program to
3802 physicians, physician assistants, and autonomous
3803 advanced practice registered nurses intending to open
3804 new practices or practice locations in qualifying
3805 rural areas; specifying eligibility criteria for the
3806 grants; requiring the department, by a specified date,
3807 to create an application process for applying for
3808 grants under the program; specifying requirements for
3809 the application and application process; authorizing



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3810 the department, subject to specific appropriation, to
3811 award grants under the program; specifying limitations
3812 on the awarding of grants; specifying expenses for
3813 which grant funds are authorized and prohibited;
3814 requiring the department to enter into a contract with
3815 each grant recipient; specifying requirements for the
3816 contracts; authorizing the department to adopt rules;
3817 requiring the department, beginning on a specified
3818 date and annually thereafter, to provide a report
3819 containing specified information to the Governor and
3820 the Legislature; providing for future legislative
3821 review and repeal of the program; creating s.
3822 381.9856, F.S.; creating the Stroke, Cardiac, and
3823 Obstetric Response and Education Grant Program within
3824 the Department of Health; specifying the purpose of
3825 the program; defining terms; requiring the department
3826 to award grants under the program to certain entities
3827 meeting specified criteria; requiring the department
3828 to give priority to certain applicants; limiting
3829 individual grants to a specified amount per year;
3830 requiring grant recipients to submit quarterly reports
3831 to the department; requiring the department to monitor
3832 program implementation and outcomes; requiring the
3833 department to submit an annual report to the Governor
3834 and the Legislature by a specified date; authorizing
3835 the department to adopt rules; providing construction;
3836 providing for future legislative review and repeal of
3837 the program; amending s. 395.6061, F.S.; providing
3838 that rural hospital capital grant improvement program



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3839 funding may be awarded to rural hospitals to establish
3840 mobile care units and telehealth kiosks for specified
3841 purposes; defining terms; amending s. 420.9073, F.S.;
3842 revising the calculation of guaranteed amounts
3843 distributed from the Local Government Housing Trust
3844 Fund; reenacting and amending s. 420.9075, F.S.;
3845 authorizing a certain percentage of the funds made
3846 available in each county and eligible municipality
3847 from the local housing distribution to be used to
3848 preserve multifamily affordable rental housing;
3849 specifying what such funds may be used for; providing
3850 an expiration; amending s. 1001.451, F.S.; revising
3851 the services required to be provided by regional
3852 consortium service organizations when such services
3853 are found to be necessary and appropriate by such
3854 organizations' boards of directors; revising the
3855 allocation that certain regional consortium service
3856 organizations are eligible to receive from the General
3857 Appropriations Act; requiring each regional consortium
3858 service organization to submit an annual report to the
3859 Department of Education; requiring that unexpended
3860 amounts in certain funds be carried forward; requiring
3861 each regional consortium service organization to
3862 provide quarterly financial reports to member
3863 districts; requiring member districts to designate a
3864 district to serve as a fiscal agent for certain
3865 purposes; providing for compensation of the fiscal
3866 agent district; requiring regional consortium service
3867 organizations to retain all funds received from grants



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3868 or contracted services to cover indirect or
3869 administrative costs associated with the provision of
3870 such services; requiring the regional consortium
3871 service organization board of directors to determine
3872 products and services provided by the organization;
3873 requiring a regional consortium service organization
3874 board of directors to recommend the establishment of
3875 positions and appointments to a fiscal agent district;
3876 requiring that personnel be employed under specified
3877 personnel policies; authorizing the regional
3878 consortium service organization board of directors to
3879 recommend a salary schedule for personnel; authorizing
3880 regional consortium service organizations to purchase
3881 or lease property and facilities essential to their
3882 operations; providing for the distribution of revenue
3883 if a regional consortium service organization is
3884 dissolved; deleting a provision requiring applications
3885 for incentive grants; authorizing regional consortium
3886 service organization boards of directors to contract
3887 to provide services to nonmember districts; requiring
3888 that a fund balance be established for specified
3889 purposes; deleting a requirement for the use of
3890 certain funds; authorizing a regional consortium
3891 service organization to administer a specified
3892 program; creating s. 1001.4511, F.S.; creating the
3893 Regional Consortia Service Organization Supplemental
3894 Services Program; providing the purpose of the
3895 program; authorizing funds to be used for specified
3896 purposes; requiring each regional consortium service



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3897 organization to report the distribution of funds
3898 annually to the Legislature; providing for the
3899 carryforward of funds; providing appropriations;
3900 creating s. 1009.635, F.S.; establishing the Rural
3901 Incentive for Professional Educators Program within
3902 the Department of Education; requiring the program to
3903 provide financial assistance for the repayment of
3904 student loans to eligible participants who establish
3905 permanent residency and employment in rural
3906 communities; providing that eligible participants may
3907 receive up to a certain amount in total student loan
3908 repayment assistance over a certain timeframe;
3909 requiring the department to verify certain information
3910 of participants in the program before it disburses
3911 awards; providing that the program is administered
3912 through the Office of Student Financial Assistance
3913 within the department; requiring the department to
3914 develop procedures and monitor compliance; requiring
3915 the State Board of Education to adopt rules by a
3916 certain date; amending s. 1013.62, F.S.; revising the
3917 calculation methodology to determine the amount of
3918 revenue that a school district must distribute to each
3919 eligible charter school; amending s. 1013.64, F.S.;
3920 revising conditions under which a school district may
3921 receive funding on an approved construction project;
3922 providing appropriations for specified purposes;
3923 amending ss. 163.3187, 212.205, 257.191, 257.193,
3924 265.283, 288.11621, 288.11631, 443.191, 571.26, and
3925 571.265, F.S.; conforming cross-references and



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3926 provisions to changes made by the act; reenacting s.
3927 288.9935(8), F.S., relating to the Microfinance
3928 Guarantee Program, to incorporate the amendment made
3929 to s. 20.60, F.S., in a reference thereto; reenacting
3930 ss. 125.0104(5)(c), 193.624(3), 196.182(2), 218.12(1),
3931 218.125(1), 218.135(1), 218.136(1), 252.35(2)(cc),
3932 288.102(4), 403.064(16)(g), 589.08(2) and (3), and
3933 1011.62(1)(f), F.S., relating to authorized uses of
3934 tourist development tax; applicability of assessments
3935 of renewable energy source devices; application of
3936 exemptions of renewable energy source devices;
3937 appropriations to offset reductions in ad valorem tax
3938 revenue in fiscally constrained counties; offset for
3939 tax loss associated with certain constitutional
3940 amendments affecting fiscally constrained counties;
3941 offset for tax loss associated with reductions in
3942 value of certain citrus fruit packing and processing
3943 equipment; offset for ad valorem revenue loss
3944 affecting fiscally constrained counties; Division of
3945 Emergency Management powers; one-to-one match
3946 requirement under the Supply Chain Innovation Grant
3947 Program; applicability of provisions related to reuse
3948 of reclaimed water; land acquisition restrictions; and
3949 funds for operation of schools, respectively, to
3950 incorporate the amendment made to s. 218.67, F.S., in
3951 references thereto; reenacting s. 403.0741(6)(c),
3952 F.S., relating to grease waste removal and disposal,
3953 to incorporate the amendments made to ss. 218.67 and
3954 339.2818, F.S., in references thereto; reenacting s.



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3955 163.3177(7)(e), F.S., relating to required and
3956 optional elements of comprehensive plans and studies
3957 and surveys, to incorporate the amendment made to s.
3958 288.0656, F.S., in a reference thereto; reenacting s.
3959 288.9962(7)(a), F.S., relating to the Broadband
3960 Opportunity Program, to incorporate the amendment made
3961 to s. 288.9961, F.S., in a reference thereto;
3962 reenacting s. 215.211(1), F.S., relating to service
3963 charges and elimination or reduction for specified
3964 proceeds, to incorporate the amendment made to s.
3965 319.32, F.S., in a reference thereto; reenacting s.
3966 339.66(5) and (6), F.S., relating to upgrades of
3967 arterial highways with controlled access facilities,
3968 to incorporate the amendment made to s. 339.68, F.S.,
3969 in references thereto; reenacting ss. 420.9072(4) and
3970 (6), 420.9076(7)(b), and 420.9079(2), F.S., relating
3971 to the State Housing Initiatives Partnership Program,
3972 adoption of affordable housing incentive strategies
3973 and committees, and the Local Government Housing Trust
3974 Fund, respectively, to incorporate the amendment made
3975 to s. 420.9073, F.S., in references thereto; providing
3976 an effective date.

By Senator Simon

3-00384A-25

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1 A bill to be entitled
 2 An act relating to rural communities; amending s.
 3 20.60, F.S.; revising the list of divisions and
 4 offices within the Department of Commerce to conform
 5 to changes made by the act; revising the annual
 6 program reports that must be included in the annual
 7 report of the Department of Commerce; amending s.
 8 163.3168, F.S.; requiring the state land planning
 9 agency to give preference for technical assistance
 10 funding to local governments located in a rural area
 11 of opportunity; requiring the agency to consult with
 12 the Office of Rural Prosperity when awarding certain
 13 funding; amending s. 201.15, F.S.; requiring that a
 14 certain sum be paid to the credit of the State
 15 Transportation Trust Fund for the exclusive use of the
 16 Florida Arterial Road Modernization Program; amending
 17 s. 202.18, F.S.; redirecting the transfer of certain
 18 communication services tax revenue; amending s.
 19 212.20, F.S.; revising the distribution of sales and
 20 use tax revenue to include a transfer to fiscally
 21 constrained counties; amending s. 215.971, F.S.;
 22 providing construction regarding agreements funded
 23 with federal or state assistance; requiring each state
 24 agency to report to the Office of Rural Prosperity by
 25 a certain date with a summary of certain information;
 26 requiring the office to summarize the information it
 27 receives for its annual report; amending s. 218.67,
 28 F.S.; revising the conditions required for a county to
 29 be considered a fiscally constrained county;

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30 authorizing eligible counties to receive a
 31 distribution of sales and use tax revenue; revising
 32 the sources that the Department of Revenue must use to
 33 determine the amount distributed to fiscally
 34 constrained counties; revising the factors for
 35 allocation of the distribution of revenue to fiscally
 36 constrained counties; requiring that the computation
 37 and amount distributed be calculated based on a
 38 specified rounding algorithm; authorizing specified
 39 uses for the revenue; conforming a cross-reference;
 40 amending s. 288.0001, F.S.; requiring the Office of
 41 Economic and Demographic Research and the Office of
 42 Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability
 43 (OPPAGA) to prepare a report for a specified purpose;
 44 specifying requirements for the report; providing that
 45 the Office of Economic and Demographic Research and
 46 OPPAGA must be provided with all data necessary to
 47 complete the rural communities or areas report upon
 48 request; authorizing the Office of Economic and
 49 Demographic Research and OPPAGA to collaborate on all
 50 data collection and analysis; requiring the Office of
 51 Economic and Demographic Research and OPPAGA to submit
 52 the report to the Legislature by a specified date;
 53 providing additional requirements for the report;
 54 providing for expiration; amending s. 288.001, F.S.;
 55 requiring the Florida Small Business Development
 56 Center Network to use certain funds appropriated for a
 57 specified purpose; authorizing the network to dedicate
 58 funds to facilitate certain events; amending s.

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59 288.007, F.S.; revising which local governments and
 60 economic development organizations seeking to recruit
 61 businesses are required to submit a specified report;
 62 creating s. 288.013, F.S.; providing legislative
 63 findings; creating the Office of Rural Prosperity
 64 within the Department of Commerce; requiring the
 65 Governor to appoint a director, subject to
 66 confirmation by the Senate; providing that the
 67 director reports to and serves at the pleasure of the
 68 secretary of the department; providing the duties of
 69 the office; requiring the office to establish by a
 70 specified date a certain number of regional rural
 71 community liaison centers across this state for a
 72 specified purpose; providing the powers, duties, and
 73 functions of the liaison centers; requiring the
 74 liaison centers, to the extent possible, to coordinate
 75 with certain entities; requiring the liaison centers
 76 to engage with the Rural Economic Development
 77 Initiative (REDI); requiring at least one staff member
 78 of a liaison center to attend the monthly meetings in
 79 person or by means of electronic communication;
 80 requiring the director of the office to submit an
 81 annual report to the Administration Commission in the
 82 Executive Office of the Governor; specifying
 83 requirements for the annual report; requiring that the
 84 annual report also be submitted to the Legislature by
 85 a specified date and published on the office's
 86 website; requiring the director of the office to
 87 attend the next Administration Commission meeting to

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88 present detailed information from the annual report;
 89 requiring OPPAGA to review the effectiveness of the
 90 office by a certain date annually until a specified
 91 date; requiring OPPAGA to review the office at
 92 specified intervals; requiring such reviews to include
 93 certain information to be considered by the
 94 Legislature; requiring that such reports be submitted
 95 to the Legislature; requiring OPPAGA to review certain
 96 strategies from other states; requiring OPPAGA to
 97 submit to the Legislature its findings at certain
 98 intervals; creating s. 288.014, F.S.; providing
 99 legislative findings; requiring the Office of Rural
 100 Prosperity to administer the Renaissance Grants
 101 Program to provide block grants to eligible
 102 communities; requiring the Office of Economic and
 103 Demographic Research to certify to the Office of Rural
 104 Prosperity certain information by a specified date;
 105 defining the term "growth-impeded"; requiring the
 106 Office of Economic and Demographic Research to certify
 107 annually that a county remains growth-impeded until
 108 such county has positive population growth for a
 109 specified amount of time; providing that such county,
 110 after 3 consecutive years of population growth, is
 111 eligible to participate in the program for 1
 112 additional year; requiring a county eligible for the
 113 program to enter into an agreement with the Office of
 114 Rural Prosperity in order to receive the block grant;
 115 giving such counties broad authority to design their
 116 specific plans; prohibiting the Office of Rural

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117 Prosperity from determining how such counties
 118 implement the block grant; requiring regional rural
 119 community liaison center staff to provide assistance,
 120 upon request; requiring participating counties to
 121 report annually to the Office of Rural Prosperity with
 122 certain information; providing that a participating
 123 county receives a specified amount from funds
 124 appropriated to the program; requiring participating
 125 counties to make all attempts to limit the amount
 126 spent on administrative costs; authorizing
 127 participating counties to contribute other funds for
 128 block grant purposes; requiring participating counties
 129 to hire a renaissance coordinator; providing that
 130 funds from the block grant may be used to hire the
 131 renaissance coordinator; providing the
 132 responsibilities of the renaissance coordinator;
 133 requiring the regional rural community liaison center
 134 staff to provide assistance and training to the
 135 renaissance coordinator, upon request; requiring
 136 participating counties to design a plan to make
 137 targeted investments to achieve population growth and
 138 increase economic vitality; providing requirements for
 139 such plans; requiring participating counties to
 140 develop intergovernmental agreements with certain
 141 entities in order to implement the plan; requiring the
 142 Auditor General to conduct an operational audit every
 143 2 years for a specified purpose; requiring the Office
 144 of Economic and Demographic Research to provide an
 145 annual report on a specified date of renaissance block

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146 grant recipients by county; providing requirements for
 147 the annual report; requiring that the report be
 148 submitted to the Governor and the Legislature;
 149 prohibiting funds appropriated for the program from
 150 being subject to reversion; providing for an
 151 expiration of the section; creating s. 288.0175, F.S.;
 152 creating the Public Infrastructure Smart Technology
 153 Grant Program within the Office of Rural Prosperity;
 154 defining terms; requiring the office to contract with
 155 one or more smart technology lead organizations to
 156 administer a grant program for a specified purpose;
 157 providing the criteria for such contracts; requiring
 158 that projects funded by the grant program be included
 159 in the office's annual report; amending s. 288.018,
 160 F.S.; requiring the office, rather than the Department
 161 of Commerce, to establish a grant program to provide
 162 funding for regional economic development
 163 organizations; revising who may apply for such grants;
 164 providing that a grant award may not exceed a certain
 165 amount in a year; providing exceptions to a provision
 166 that the department may expend a certain amount for a
 167 certain purpose; amending s. 288.019, F.S.; revising
 168 the program criteria and procedures that agencies and
 169 organizations of REDI are required to review; revising
 170 the list of impacts each REDI agency and organization
 171 must consider in its review; requiring REDI agencies
 172 and organizations to develop a proposal for
 173 modifications which minimizes the financial and
 174 resource impacts to a rural community; requiring that

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175 ranking of evaluation criteria and scoring procedures
 176 be used only when ranking is a component of the
 177 program; requiring that match requirements be waived
 178 or reduced for rural communities; providing that
 179 donations of land may be treated as in-kind matches;
 180 requiring each agency and organization that applies
 181 for or receives federal funding to request federal
 182 approval to waive or reduce the financial match
 183 requirements, if any, for projects in rural
 184 communities; requiring that proposals be submitted to
 185 the office, rather than the department; requiring each
 186 REDI agency and organization to modify rules or
 187 policies as necessary to reflect the finalized
 188 proposal; requiring that information about authorized
 189 waivers be included on the office's online rural
 190 resource directory; conforming a cross-reference;
 191 amending s. 288.021, F.S.; requiring, when
 192 practicable, the economic development liaison to serve
 193 as the agency representative for REDI; amending s.
 194 288.065, F.S.; defining the term "unit of local
 195 government"; requiring the office to include in its
 196 annual report certain information about the Rural
 197 Community Development Revolving Loan Fund; conforming
 198 provisions to changes made by the act; amending s.
 199 288.0655, F.S.; revising the list of grants that may
 200 be awarded by the office; deleting the authorization
 201 for local match requirements to be waived for a
 202 catalyst site; revising the list of departments the
 203 office must consult with to certify applicants;

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204 requiring the office to include certain information
 205 about the Rural Infrastructure Trust Fund in its
 206 annual report; conforming provisions to changes made
 207 by the act; amending s. 288.0656, F.S.; providing
 208 legislative findings; providing that REDI is created
 209 within the Office of Rural Prosperity, rather than the
 210 department; deleting the definitions of the terms
 211 "catalyst project" and "catalyst site"; requiring that
 212 an alternate for each designated deputy secretary be a
 213 deputy secretary or higher-level staff person;
 214 requiring that the names of such alternates be
 215 reported to the director of the office; requiring at
 216 least one rural liaison to participate in REDI
 217 meetings; requiring REDI to meet at least each month;
 218 deleting a provision that a rural area of opportunity
 219 may designate catalyst projects; requiring REDI to
 220 submit a certain report to the office, rather than to
 221 the department; specifying requirements for such
 222 report; conforming provisions to changes made by the
 223 act; repealing s. 288.06561, F.S., relating to
 224 reduction or waiver of financial match requirements;
 225 amending s. 288.0657, F.S.; requiring the office,
 226 rather than the department, to provide grants to
 227 assist rural communities; providing that such grants
 228 may be used for specified purposes; requiring the
 229 rural liaison to assist those applying for such
 230 grants; providing that marketing grants may include
 231 certain funding; amending s. 288.9961, F.S.; revising
 232 the definition of the term "underserved"; requiring

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233 the office to consult with regional rural community
 234 liaison centers on development of a certain strategic
 235 plan; requiring rural liaisons to assist rural
 236 communities with providing feedback in applying for
 237 federal grants for broadband Internet services;
 238 requiring the office to submit reports with specified
 239 information to the Governor and the Legislature within
 240 certain timeframes; repealing s. 290.06561, F.S.,
 241 relating to designation of rural enterprise zones as
 242 catalyst sites; amending s. 319.32, F.S.; revising the
 243 disposition of fees collected for certain title
 244 certificates; amending s. 334.044, F.S.; revising the
 245 powers and duties of the Department of Transportation;
 246 amending s. 339.0801, F.S.; revising the allocation of
 247 funds received in the State Transportation Trust Fund;
 248 amending s. 339.2816, F.S.; requiring, rather than
 249 authorizing, that certain funds received from the
 250 State Transportation Trust Fund be used for the Small
 251 County Road Assistance Program; requiring the
 252 department to use other additional revenues for the
 253 Small County Road Assistance Program; providing an
 254 exception from the prohibition against funding
 255 capacity improvements on county roads; amending s.
 256 339.2818, F.S.; deleting a provision that the funds
 257 allocated under the Small County Outreach Program are
 258 in addition to the Small County Road Assistance
 259 Program; deleting a provision that a local government
 260 within the Everglades Agricultural Area, the Peace
 261 River Basin, or the Suwannee River Basin may compete

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262 for additional funding; conforming provisions to
 263 changes made by the act; making a technical change;
 264 amending s. 339.68, F.S.; providing legislative
 265 findings; creating the Florida Arterial Road
 266 Modernization Program within the Department of
 267 Commerce; defining the term "rural community";
 268 requiring the department to allocate from the State
 269 Transportation Trust Fund a minimum sum in each fiscal
 270 year to fund the program; providing that such funding
 271 is in addition to any other funding provided to the
 272 program; providing criteria the department must use to
 273 prioritize projects for funding under the program;
 274 requiring the department to submit a report to the
 275 Governor and the Legislature by a specified date;
 276 requiring that such report be submitted every 2 years
 277 thereafter; providing the criteria for such report;
 278 requiring the Department of Transportation to allocate
 279 additional funds to implement the Small County Road
 280 Assistance Program and amend the tentative work
 281 program for a specified number of fiscal years;
 282 requiring the department to submit a budget amendment
 283 before the adoption of the work program; requiring the
 284 department to allocate sufficient funds to implement
 285 the Florida Arterial Road Modernization Program;
 286 requiring the department to amend the current
 287 tentative work program for a specified number of
 288 fiscal years to include the program's projects;
 289 requiring the department to submit a budget amendment
 290 before the implementation of the program; requiring

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291 that the revenue increases in the State Transportation
 292 Trust Fund which are derived from the act be used to
 293 fund the work program; creating s. 381.403, F.S.;
 294 providing legislative findings; creating the Rural
 295 Access to Primary and Preventive Care Grant Program
 296 within the Department of Health for a specified
 297 purpose; defining terms; requiring the department to
 298 award grants under the program to physicians and
 299 autonomous advanced practice registered nurses
 300 intending to open new practices or practice locations
 301 in qualifying rural areas; specifying eligibility
 302 criteria for the grants; requiring the department, by
 303 a specified date, to create an application process for
 304 applying for grants under the program; specifying
 305 requirements for the application and application
 306 process; authorizing the department, subject to
 307 specific appropriation, to award grants under the
 308 program; specifying limitations on the awarding of
 309 grants; specifying expenses for which grant funds are
 310 authorized and prohibited; requiring the department to
 311 enter into a contract with each grant recipient;
 312 specifying requirements for the contracts; authorizing
 313 the department to adopt rules; requiring the
 314 department, beginning on a specified date and annually
 315 thereafter, to provide a report containing specified
 316 information to the Governor and the Legislature;
 317 providing for future legislative review and repeal of
 318 the program; creating s. 381.9856, F.S.; creating the
 319 Stroke, Cardiac, and Obstetric Response and Education

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320 Grant Program within the Department of Health;
 321 specifying the purpose of the program; defining terms;
 322 requiring the department to award grants under the
 323 program to certain entities meeting specified
 324 criteria; requiring the department to give priority to
 325 certain applicants; limiting individual grants to a
 326 specified amount per year; requiring grant recipients
 327 to submit quarterly reports to the department;
 328 requiring the department to monitor program
 329 implementation and outcomes; requiring the department
 330 to submit an annual report to the Governor and the
 331 Legislature by a specified date; authorizing the
 332 department to adopt rules; providing construction;
 333 providing for future legislative review and repeal of
 334 the program; amending s. 395.6061, F.S.; providing
 335 that rural hospital capital grant improvement program
 336 funding may be awarded to rural hospitals to establish
 337 mobile care units and telehealth kiosks for specified
 338 purposes; defining terms; amending s. 420.9073, F.S.;
 339 revising the calculation of guaranteed amounts
 340 distributed from the Local Government Housing Trust
 341 Fund; reenacting and amending s. 420.9075, F.S.;
 342 authorizing a certain percentage of the funds made
 343 available in each county and eligible municipality
 344 from the local housing distribution to be used to
 345 preserve multifamily affordable rental housing;
 346 specifying what such funds may be used for; providing
 347 an expiration; amending s. 1001.451, F.S.; revising
 348 the services required to be provided by regional

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349 consortium service organizations when such services
 350 are found to be necessary and appropriate by such
 351 organizations' boards of directors; revising the
 352 allocation that certain regional consortium service
 353 organizations are eligible to receive from the General
 354 Appropriations Act; requiring each regional consortium
 355 service organization to submit an annual report to the
 356 Department of Education; requiring that unexpended
 357 amounts in certain funds be carried forward; requiring
 358 each regional consortium service organization to
 359 provide quarterly financial reports to member
 360 districts; requiring member districts to designate a
 361 district to serve as a fiscal agent for certain
 362 purposes; providing for compensation of the fiscal
 363 agent district; requiring regional consortium service
 364 organizations to retain all funds received from grants
 365 or contracted services to cover indirect or
 366 administrative costs associated with the provision of
 367 such services; requiring the regional consortium
 368 service organization board of directors to determine
 369 products and services provided by the organization;
 370 requiring a regional consortium service organization
 371 board of directors to recommend the establishment of
 372 positions and appointments to a fiscal agent district;
 373 requiring that personnel be employed under specified
 374 personnel policies; authorizing the regional
 375 consortium service organization board of directors to
 376 recommend a salary schedule for personnel; authorizing
 377 regional consortium service organizations to purchase

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378 or lease property and facilities essential to their
 379 operations; providing for the distribution of revenue
 380 if a regional consortium service organization is
 381 dissolved; deleting a provision requiring applications
 382 for incentive grants; authorizing regional consortium
 383 service organization boards of directors to contract
 384 to provide services to nonmember districts; requiring
 385 that a fund balance be established for specified
 386 purposes; deleting a requirement for the use of
 387 certain funds; authorizing a regional consortium
 388 service organization to administer a specified
 389 program; creating s. 1001.4511, F.S.; creating the
 390 Regional Consortia Service Organization Supplemental
 391 Services Program; providing the purpose of the
 392 program; authorizing funds to be used for specified
 393 purposes; requiring each regional consortium service
 394 organization to report the distribution of funds
 395 annually to the Legislature; providing for the
 396 carryforward of funds; providing appropriations;
 397 creating s. 1009.635, F.S.; establishing the Rural
 398 Incentive for Professional Educators Program within
 399 the Department of Education; requiring the program to
 400 provide financial assistance for the repayment of
 401 student loans to eligible participants who establish
 402 permanent residency and employment in rural
 403 communities; providing that eligible participants may
 404 receive up to a certain amount in total student loan
 405 repayment assistance over a certain timeframe;
 406 requiring the department to verify certain information

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407 of participants in the program before it disburses
 408 awards; providing that the program is administered
 409 through the Office of Student Financial Assistance
 410 within the department; requiring the department to
 411 develop procedures and monitor compliance; requiring
 412 the State Board of Education to adopt rules by a
 413 certain date; amending s. 1013.62, F.S.; revising the
 414 calculation methodology to determine the amount of
 415 revenue that a school district must distribute to each
 416 eligible charter school; amending s. 1013.64, F.S.;
 417 revising conditions under which a school district may
 418 receive funding on an approved construction project;
 419 providing appropriations for specified purposes;
 420 amending ss. 163.3187, 212.205, 257.191, 257.193,
 421 265.283, 288.11621, 288.11631, 443.191, 571.26, and
 422 571.265, F.S.; conforming cross-references and
 423 provisions to changes made by the act; reenacting s.
 424 288.9935(8), F.S., relating to the Microfinance
 425 Guarantee Program, to incorporate the amendment made
 426 to s. 20.60, F.S., in a reference thereto; reenacting
 427 ss. 125.0104(5)(c), 193.624(3), 196.182(2), 218.12(1),
 428 218.125(1), 218.135(1), 218.136(1), 252.35(2)(cc),
 429 288.102(4), 403.064(16)(g), 589.08(2) and (3), and
 430 1011.62(1)(f), F.S., relating to authorized uses of
 431 tourist development tax; applicability of assessments
 432 of renewable energy source devices; application of
 433 exemptions of renewable energy source devices;
 434 appropriations to offset reductions in ad valorem tax
 435 revenue in fiscally constrained counties; offset for

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436 tax loss associated with certain constitutional
 437 amendments affecting fiscally constrained counties;
 438 offset for tax loss associated with reductions in
 439 value of certain citrus fruit packing and processing
 440 equipment; offset for ad valorem revenue loss
 441 affecting fiscally constrained counties; Division of
 442 Emergency Management powers; one-to-one match
 443 requirement under the Supply Chain Innovation Grant
 444 Program; applicability of provisions related to reuse
 445 of reclaimed water; land acquisition restrictions; and
 446 funds for operation of schools, respectively, to
 447 incorporate the amendment made to s. 218.67, F.S., in
 448 references thereto; reenacting s. 403.0741(6)(c),
 449 F.S., relating to grease waste removal and disposal,
 450 to incorporate the amendments made to ss. 218.67 and
 451 339.2818, F.S., in references thereto; reenacting s.
 452 163.3177(7)(e), F.S., relating to required and
 453 optional elements of comprehensive plans and studies
 454 and surveys, to incorporate the amendment made to s.
 455 288.0656, F.S., in a reference thereto; reenacting s.
 456 288.9962(7)(a), F.S., relating to the Broadband
 457 Opportunity Program, to incorporate the amendment made
 458 to s. 288.9961, F.S., in a reference thereto;
 459 reenacting s. 215.211(1), F.S., relating to service
 460 charges and elimination or reduction for specified
 461 proceeds, to incorporate the amendment made to s.
 462 319.32, F.S., in a reference thereto; reenacting s.
 463 339.66(5) and (6), F.S., relating to upgrades of
 464 arterial highways with controlled access facilities,

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465 to incorporate the amendment made to s. 339.68, F.S.,
 466 in references thereto; reenacting ss. 420.9072(4) and
 467 (6), 420.9076(7)(b), and 420.9079(2), F.S., relating
 468 to the State Housing Initiatives Partnership Program,
 469 adoption of affordable housing incentive strategies
 470 and committees, and the Local Government Housing Trust
 471 Fund, respectively, to incorporate the amendment made
 472 to s. 420.9073, F.S., in references thereto; providing
 473 an effective date.

474
 475 Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

476
 477 Section 1. Paragraph (a) of subsection (3) and paragraph
 478 (c) of subsection (10) of section 20.60, Florida Statutes, are
 479 amended to read:

480 20.60 Department of Commerce; creation; powers and duties.—

481 (3)(a) The following divisions and offices of the
 482 Department of Commerce are established:

- 483 1. The Division of Economic Development.
- 484 2. The Division of Community Development.
- 485 3. The Division of Workforce Services.
- 486 4. The Division of Finance and Administration.
- 487 5. The Division of Information Technology.
- 488 6. The Office of the Secretary.
- 489 7. The Office of Rural Prosperity.

490 8.7- The Office of Economic Accountability and
 491 Transparency, which shall:

492 a. Oversee the department's critical objectives as
 493 determined by the secretary and make sure that the department's

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494 key objectives are clearly communicated to the public.

495 b. Organize department resources, expertise, data, and
 496 research to focus on and solve the complex economic challenges
 497 facing the state.

498 c. Provide leadership for the department's priority issues
 499 that require integration of policy, management, and critical
 500 objectives from multiple programs and organizations internal and
 501 external to the department; and organize and manage external
 502 communication on such priority issues.

503 d. Promote and facilitate key department initiatives to
 504 address priority economic issues and explore data and identify
 505 opportunities for innovative approaches to address such economic
 506 issues.

507 e. Promote strategic planning for the department.

508 (10) The department shall, by November 1 of each year,
 509 submit an annual report to the Governor, the President of the
 510 Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives on the
 511 condition of the business climate and economic development in
 512 the state.

513 (c) The report must incorporate annual reports of other
 514 programs, including:

515 1. A detailed report of the performance of the Black
 516 Business Loan Program and a cumulative summary of quarterly
 517 report data required under s. 288.714.

518 ~~2. The Rural Economic Development Initiative established~~
 519 ~~under s. 288.0656.~~

520 ~~3-~~ A detailed report of the performance of the Florida
 521 Development Finance Corporation and a summary of the
 522 corporation's report required under s. 288.9610.

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523 ~~3.4-~~ Information provided by Space Florida under s.
 524 331.3051 and an analysis of the activities and accomplishments
 525 of Space Florida.

526 Section 2. Subsection (5) is added to section 163.3168,
 527 Florida Statutes, to read:

528 163.3168 Planning innovations and technical assistance.—

529 (5) When selecting applications for funding for technical
 530 assistance, the state land planning agency shall give preference
 531 to local governments located in a rural area of opportunity as
 532 defined in s. 288.0656. The state land planning agency shall
 533 consult with the Office of Rural Prosperity when awarding
 534 funding pursuant to this section.

535 Section 3. Paragraph (i) is added to subsection (4) of
 536 section 201.15, Florida Statutes, to read:

537 201.15 Distribution of taxes collected.—All taxes collected
 538 under this chapter are hereby pledged and shall be first made
 539 available to make payments when due on bonds issued pursuant to
 540 s. 215.618 or s. 215.619, or any other bonds authorized to be
 541 issued on a parity basis with such bonds. Such pledge and
 542 availability for the payment of these bonds shall have priority
 543 over any requirement for the costs of collection and enforcement
 544 under this section. Before distribution pursuant to this
 545 section, the Department of Revenue shall deduct amounts
 546 necessary to pay the costs of the collection and enforcement of
 547 the tax levied by this chapter. The costs may not be levied
 548 against any portion of taxes pledged to debt service on bonds to
 549 the extent that the costs are required to pay any amounts
 550 relating to the bonds. All of the costs of the collection and
 551 enforcement of the tax levied by this chapter shall be available

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552 and transferred to the extent necessary to pay debt service and
 553 any other amounts payable with respect to bonds authorized
 554 before January 1, 2017, secured by revenues distributed pursuant
 555 to this section. All taxes remaining after deduction of costs
 556 shall be distributed as follows:

557 (4) After the required distributions to the Land
 558 Acquisition Trust Fund pursuant to subsections (1) and (2), the
 559 lesser of 8 percent of the remainder or \$150 million in each
 560 fiscal year shall be paid into the State Treasury to the credit
 561 of the State Housing Trust Fund and shall be expended pursuant
 562 to s. 420.50871. If 8 percent of the remainder is greater than
 563 \$150 million in any fiscal year, the difference between 8
 564 percent of the remainder and \$150 million shall be paid into the
 565 State Treasury to the credit of the General Revenue Fund. The
 566 remainder shall be distributed as follows:

567 (i) A total of \$30 million shall be paid to the credit of
 568 the State Transportation Trust Fund, which funds are exclusively
 569 for the use of the Florida Arterial Road Modernization Program
 570 as provided in s. 339.68.

571 Section 4. Paragraph (c) of subsection (2) of section
 572 202.18, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

573 202.18 Allocation and disposition of tax proceeds.—The
 574 proceeds of the communications services taxes remitted under
 575 this chapter shall be treated as follows:

576 (2) The proceeds of the taxes remitted under s.
 577 202.12(1)(b) shall be allocated as follows:

578 (c)1. After the distribution required under paragraph (b),
 579 70 percent of the remainder ~~During each calendar year, the~~
 580 ~~remaining portion of the proceeds~~ shall be transferred to the

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Local Government Half-cent Sales Tax Clearing Trust Fund-
~~Seventy percent of such proceeds shall be and~~ allocated in the
 same proportion as the allocation of total receipts of the half-
 cent sales tax under s. 218.61 and the emergency distribution
 under s. 218.65 in the prior state fiscal year. Thirty percent
~~of the remainder of such proceeds shall be transferred to the~~
~~General Revenue Fund distributed pursuant to s. 218.67.~~

2. The proportion of the proceeds allocated based on the
 emergency distribution under s. 218.65 shall be distributed
 pursuant to s. 218.65.

3. In each calendar year, the proportion of the proceeds
 allocated based on the half-cent sales tax under s. 218.61 shall
 be allocated to each county in the same proportion as the
 county's percentage of total sales tax allocation for the prior
 state fiscal year and distributed pursuant to s. 218.62.

4. The department shall distribute the appropriate amount
 to each municipality and county each month at the same time that
 local communications services taxes are distributed pursuant to
 subsection (3).

Section 5. Paragraph (d) of subsection (6) of section
 212.20, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

212.20 Funds collected, disposition; additional powers of
 department; operational expense; refund of taxes adjudicated
 unconstitutionally collected.-

(6) Distribution of all proceeds under this chapter and ss.
 202.18(1)(b) and (2)(b) and 203.01(1)(a)3. is as follows:

(d) The proceeds of all other taxes and fees imposed
 pursuant to this chapter or remitted pursuant to s. 202.18(1)(b)
 and (2)(b) shall be distributed as follows:

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1. In any fiscal year, the greater of \$500 million, minus
 an amount equal to 4.6 percent of the proceeds of the taxes
 collected pursuant to chapter 201, or 5.2 percent of all other
 taxes and fees imposed pursuant to this chapter or remitted
 pursuant to s. 202.18(1)(b) and (2)(b) shall be deposited in
 monthly installments into the General Revenue Fund.

2. After the distribution under subparagraph 1., 8.9744
 percent of the amount remitted by a sales tax dealer located
 within a participating county pursuant to s. 218.61 shall be
 transferred into the Local Government Half-cent Sales Tax
 Clearing Trust Fund. Beginning July 1, 2003, the amount to be
 transferred shall be reduced by 0.1 percent, and the department
 shall distribute this amount to the Public Employees Relations
 Commission Trust Fund less \$5,000 each month, which shall be
 added to the amount calculated in subparagraph 3. and
 distributed accordingly.

3. After the distribution under subparagraphs 1. and 2.,
 0.0966 percent shall be transferred to the Local Government
 Half-cent Sales Tax Clearing Trust Fund and distributed pursuant
 to s. 218.65.

4. After the distributions under subparagraphs 1., 2., and
 3., 2.0810 percent of the available proceeds shall be
 transferred monthly to the Revenue Sharing Trust Fund for
 Counties pursuant to s. 218.215.

5. After the distributions under subparagraphs 1., 2., and
 3., 1.3653 percent of the available proceeds shall be
 transferred monthly to the Revenue Sharing Trust Fund for
 Municipalities pursuant to s. 218.215. If the total revenue to
 be distributed pursuant to this subparagraph is at least as

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great as the amount due from the Revenue Sharing Trust Fund for Municipalities and the former Municipal Financial Assistance Trust Fund in state fiscal year 1999-2000, no municipality shall receive less than the amount due from the Revenue Sharing Trust Fund for Municipalities and the former Municipal Financial Assistance Trust Fund in state fiscal year 1999-2000. If the total proceeds to be distributed are less than the amount received in combination from the Revenue Sharing Trust Fund for Municipalities and the former Municipal Financial Assistance Trust Fund in state fiscal year 1999-2000, each municipality shall receive an amount proportionate to the amount it was due in state fiscal year 1999-2000.

6. After the distributions required under subparagraphs 1.-5., the greater of \$50 million or 0.1438 percent of the available proceeds shall be transferred to fiscally constrained counties pursuant to s. 218.67.

7. Of the remaining proceeds:

a. In each fiscal year, the sum of \$29,915,500 shall be divided into as many equal parts as there are counties in the state, and one part shall be distributed to each county. The distribution among the several counties must begin each fiscal year on or before January 5th and continue monthly for a total of 4 months. If a local or special law required that any moneys accruing to a county in fiscal year 1999-2000 under the then-existing provisions of s. 550.135 be paid directly to the district school board, special district, or a municipal government, such payment must continue until the local or special law is amended or repealed. The state covenants with holders of bonds or other instruments of indebtedness issued by

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local governments, special districts, or district school boards before July 1, 2000, that it is not the intent of this subparagraph to adversely affect the rights of those holders or relieve local governments, special districts, or district school boards of the duty to meet their obligations as a result of previous pledges or assignments or trusts entered into which obligated funds received from the distribution to county governments under then-existing s. 550.135. This distribution specifically is in lieu of funds distributed under s. 550.135 before July 1, 2000.

b. The department shall distribute \$166,667 monthly to each applicant certified as a facility for a new or retained professional sports franchise pursuant to s. 288.1162. Up to \$41,667 shall be distributed monthly by the department to each certified applicant as defined in s. 288.11621 for a facility for a spring training franchise. However, not more than \$416,670 may be distributed monthly in the aggregate to all certified applicants for facilities for spring training franchises. Distributions begin 60 days after such certification and continue for not more than 30 years, except as otherwise provided in s. 288.11621. A certified applicant identified in this sub-subparagraph may not receive more in distributions than expended by the applicant for the public purposes provided in s. 288.1162(5) or s. 288.11621(3).

c. The department shall distribute up to \$83,333 monthly to each certified applicant as defined in s. 288.11631 for a facility used by a single spring training franchise, or up to \$166,667 monthly to each certified applicant as defined in s. 288.11631 for a facility used by more than one spring training

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franchise. Monthly distributions begin 60 days after such certification or July 1, 2016, whichever is later, and continue for not more than 20 years to each certified applicant as defined in s. 288.11631 for a facility used by a single spring training franchise or not more than 25 years to each certified applicant as defined in s. 288.11631 for a facility used by more than one spring training franchise. A certified applicant identified in this sub-subparagraph may not receive more in distributions than expended by the applicant for the public purposes provided in s. 288.11631(3).

d. The department shall distribute \$15,333 monthly to the State Transportation Trust Fund.

e.(I) On or before July 25, 2021, August 25, 2021, and September 25, 2021, the department shall distribute \$324,533,334 in each of those months to the Unemployment Compensation Trust Fund, less an adjustment for refunds issued from the General Revenue Fund pursuant to s. 443.131(3)(e)3. before making the distribution. The adjustments made by the department to the total distributions shall be equal to the total refunds made pursuant to s. 443.131(3)(e)3. If the amount of refunds to be subtracted from any single distribution exceeds the distribution, the department may not make that distribution and must subtract the remaining balance from the next distribution.

(II) Beginning July 2022, and on or before the 25th day of each month, the department shall distribute \$90 million monthly to the Unemployment Compensation Trust Fund.

(III) If the ending balance of the Unemployment Compensation Trust Fund exceeds \$4,071,519,600 on the last day of any month, as determined from United States Department of the

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Treasury data, the Office of Economic and Demographic Research shall certify to the department that the ending balance of the trust fund exceeds such amount.

(IV) This sub-subparagraph is repealed, and the department shall end monthly distributions under sub-sub-subparagraph (II), on the date the department receives certification under sub-sub-subparagraph (III).

f. Beginning July 1, 2023, in each fiscal year, the department shall distribute \$27.5 million to the Florida Agricultural Promotional Campaign Trust Fund under s. 571.26, for further distribution in accordance with s. 571.265.

~~8.7-~~ All other proceeds must remain in the General Revenue Fund.

Section 6. 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)1. 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), a provision allowing the agency to provide for the payment of invoices to the county, municipality, or rural area of opportunity as that term is defined in s.

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288.0656(2), for verified and eligible performance that has been completed in accordance with the terms and conditions set forth in the agreement. This provision is not intended to require reimbursement to the county, municipality, or rural area of opportunity for invoices paid, but to allow the agency to provide for the payment of invoices due. The agency shall expedite such payment requests in order to facilitate the timely payment of invoices received by the county, municipality, or rural area of opportunity. This provision is included to alleviate the financial hardships that certain rural counties and municipalities encounter when administering agreements, and must be exercised by the agency when a county or municipality demonstrates financial hardship, to the extent that federal or state law, rule, or other regulation allows such payments. This paragraph may not be construed to alter or limit any other provisions of federal or state law, rule, or other regulation.

2. By August 1, 2026, and each year thereafter, each state agency shall report to the Office of Rural Prosperity summarizing the implementation of this paragraph for the preceding fiscal year. The Office of Rural Prosperity shall summarize the information received pursuant to this paragraph in its annual report as required in s. 288.013.

Section 7. Section 218.67, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

218.67 Distribution for fiscally constrained counties.—

(1) Each county ~~that is entirely within a rural area of opportunity as designated by the Governor pursuant to s. 288.0656 or each county~~ for which the value of a mill will raise no more than \$10 \$5 million in revenue, based on the taxable

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value certified pursuant to s. 1011.62(4)(a)1.a., from the previous July 1, shall be considered a fiscally constrained county.

(2) Each fiscally constrained county government that participates in the local government half-cent sales tax shall be eligible to receive an additional distribution ~~from the Local Government Half-cent Sales Tax Clearing Trust Fund,~~ as provided in s. 212.20(6)(d)6. s. 202.18(2)(c)1., in addition to its regular monthly distribution provided under this part and any emergency or supplemental distribution under s. 218.65.

(3) The amount to be distributed to each fiscally constrained county shall be determined by the Department of Revenue at the beginning of the fiscal year, using the prior fiscal year's sales and use tax collections July 1 taxable value ~~certified pursuant to s. 1011.62(4)(a)1.a., tax data,~~ population as defined in s. 218.21, and the most current calendar year per capita personal income published by the Bureau of Economic Analysis of the United States Department of Commerce ~~millage rate levied for the prior fiscal year.~~ The amount distributed shall be allocated based upon the following factors:

(a) The ~~contribution-to-revenue relative revenue-raising-capacity~~ factor for each participating county shall equal 100 multiplied by a quotient, the numerator of which is the county's population and the denominator of which is the state sales and use tax collections attributable to the county ~~be the ability of the eligible county to generate ad valorem revenues from 1 mill of taxation on a per capita basis. A county that raises no more than \$25 per capita from 1 mill shall be assigned a value of 1; a county that raises more than \$25 but no more than \$30 per~~

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capita from 1 mill shall be assigned a value of 0.75; and a county that raises more than \$30 but no more than \$50 per capita from 1 mill shall be assigned a value of 0.5. No value shall be assigned to counties that raise more than \$50 per capita from 1 mill of ad valorem taxation.

(b) The personal-income local-effort factor shall equal a quotient, the numerator of which is the median per capita personal income of participating counties and the denominator of which is the county's per capita personal income be a measure of the relative level of local effort of the eligible county as indicated by the millage rate levied for the prior fiscal year. The local effort factor shall be the most recently adopted countywide operating millage rate for each eligible county multiplied by 0.1.

(c) Each eligible county's proportional allocation of the total amount available to be distributed to all of the eligible counties shall be in the same proportion as the sum of the county's two factors is to the sum of the two factors for all eligible counties. The proportional rate computation must be carried to the fifth decimal place, and the amount to distribute to each county must be rounded to the next whole dollar amount. The counties that are eligible to receive an allocation under this subsection and the amount available to be distributed to such counties ~~do shall~~ not include counties participating in the phaseout period under subsection (4) or the amounts they remain eligible to receive during the phaseout.

(4) For those counties that no longer qualify under the requirements of subsection (1) after the effective date of this act, there shall be a 2-year phaseout period. Beginning on July

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1 of the year following the year in which the value of a mill for that county exceeds ~~\$10~~ \$5 million in revenue, the county shall receive two-thirds of the amount received in the prior year, and beginning on July 1 of the second year following the year in which the value of a mill for that county exceeds ~~\$10~~ \$5 million in revenue, the county shall receive one-third of the amount received in the last year that the county qualified as a fiscally constrained county. Following the 2-year phaseout period, the county is shall no longer be eligible to receive any distributions under this section unless the county can be considered a fiscally constrained county as provided in subsection (1).

(5) (a) The revenues received under this section must be allocated may be used by a county to be used for the following purposes:

1. Fifty percent may be used for public safety, including salary expenditures for law enforcement officers or correctional officers, as those terms are defined in s. 943.10(1) and (2), respectively, firefighters as defined in s. 633.102, or emergency medical technicians or paramedics as those terms are defined in s. 401.23.

2. Thirty percent may be used for infrastructure needs.

3. Twenty percent may be expended for any public purpose.

(b) ~~The revenues received under this section any public purpose, except that such revenues~~ may not be used to pay debt service on bonds, notes, certificates of participation, or any other forms of indebtedness.

Section 8. Subsection (6) is added to section 288.0001, Florida Statutes, to read:

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288.0001 Economic Development Programs Evaluation.—The Office of Economic and Demographic Research and the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA) shall develop and present to the Governor, the President of the Senate, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and the chairs of the legislative appropriations committees the Economic Development Programs Evaluation.

(6) (a) The Office of Economic and Demographic Research and OPPAGA shall prepare a report on the impact of the Florida Statutes on rural communities. Specifically, the report must include the following:

1. A review of definitions in the Florida Statutes of terms such as "rural community," "rural area of opportunity," and other similar terms used to define rural areas of this state, including population-based references, to assess the adequacy of the current statutory framework in defining these areas. The analysis must include, but need not be limited to:

a. Evaluation of whether current provisions properly distinguish these communities or areas from more urban and suburban parts of this state;

b. Consideration of updates to the definitions and references to classify additional rural areas, such as growing communities, unincorporated areas, or rural communities by design; and

c. Study of appropriate metrics to be used to describe rural communities or areas, such as population, geographic, demographic, or other metrics, or combinations thereof.

2. A survey of local governments meeting the statutory definition of "rural community" or "rural area of opportunity"

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to assess the benefits to the local government of being identified as such and any perceived unmet needs in the implementation of current statutory provisions designed to support rural communities or areas.

3. An analysis of state grant programs and recurring appropriations that explicitly benefit rural communities or areas, including, but not limited to, program purpose, funding amounts, participation rates, and consistency with peer-reviewed studies on effective economic programs for these areas.

(b) Upon request, the Office of Economic and Demographic Research and OPPAGA must be provided with all data necessary to complete the report, including any confidential data, by any entity with information related to this review. The offices may collaborate on all data collection and analysis.

(c) The Office of Economic and Demographic Research and OPPAGA shall submit a report to the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives by December 31, 2025. The report must provide recommendations to address any findings, including any changes in statutory definitions or references to rural communities or areas, opportunities to enhance state support to rural communities or areas, outcome measures or other criteria that may be used to examine the effectiveness of state grant programs for rural communities or areas, and adjustments to program design, including changes to increase participation in state grant programs for rural communities or areas.

(d) This subsection expires July 1, 2026.

Section 9. Present paragraphs (d) and (e) of subsection (7) of section 288.001, Florida Statutes, are redesignated as

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paragraphs (e) and (f), respectively, and a new paragraph (d) is added to that subsection, to read:

288.001 The Florida Small Business Development Center Network.—

(7) ADDITIONAL STATE FUNDS; USES; PAY-PER-PERFORMANCE INCENTIVES; STATEWIDE SERVICE; SERVICE ENHANCEMENTS; BEST PRACTICES; ELIGIBILITY.—

(d) Notwithstanding paragraphs (a), (b), and (c), the network shall use funds directly appropriated for the specific purpose of expanding service in rural communities, as defined in s. 288.0656, in addition to any funds allocated by the network from other sources. The network shall use the funds to develop an activity plan focused on network consultants and resources in rural communities. In collaboration with regional economic development organizations as defined in s. 288.018, the plan must provide for either full- or part-time consultants to be available for at least 20 hours per week in rural areas or be permanently stationed in rural areas. This may include establishing a circuit in specific rural locations to ensure the consultants' availability on a regular basis. By using the funds to create a regular presence in rural areas, the network can strengthen community collaboration, raise awareness of available resources to provide opportunities for new business development or existing business growth, and make professional experience, education, and business information available in these essential communities. The network may dedicate funds to facilitate local or regional events that focus on small business topics, provide consulting services, and leverage partner organizations, such as the regional economic development organizations, local workforce

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development boards as described in s. 445.07, and Florida College System institutions.

Section 10. Section 288.007, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

288.007 Inventory of communities seeking to recruit businesses.—By September 30 of each year, a county or municipality that has a population of at least 25,000 or its local economic development organization, and each local government within a rural area of opportunity as defined in s. 288.0656 or its local economic development organization, shall ~~must~~ submit to the department a brief overview of the strengths, services, and economic development incentives that its community offers. The local government or its local economic development organization also shall ~~must~~ identify any industries that it is encouraging to locate or relocate to its area. Unless otherwise required pursuant to this section, a county or municipality having a population of 25,000 or less ~~fewer~~ or its local economic development organization seeking to recruit businesses may submit information as required in this section and may participate in any activity or initiative resulting from the collection, analysis, and reporting of the information to the department pursuant to this section.

Section 11. Section 288.013, Florida Statutes, is created to read:

288.013 Office of Rural Prosperity.—

(1) The Legislature finds that the unique characteristics and nature of the rural communities in this state are integral to making this state an attractive place to visit, work, and live. Further, the Legislature finds that building a prosperous

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987 rural economy and vibrant rural communities is in the best
 988 interest of this state. Rural prosperity is integral to
 989 supporting this state's infrastructure, housing, and
 990 agricultural and food-processing needs, as well as promoting the
 991 health and advancement of the overall economy of this state. It
 992 is of importance to the state that its rural areas are able to
 993 grow, whether locally or in regional partnerships. To better
 994 serve rural communities, and in recognition of rural Florida's
 995 unique challenges and opportunities, the Office of Rural
 996 Prosperity is established to ensure these efforts are
 997 coordinated, focused, and effective.

998 (2) The Office of Rural Prosperity is created within the
 999 Department of Commerce for the purpose of supporting rural
 1000 communities by helping rural stakeholders navigate available
 1001 programs and resources and representing rural interests across
 1002 state government.

1003 (3) The Governor shall appoint a director to lead the
 1004 office, subject to confirmation by the Senate. The director
 1005 shall report to the secretary of the department and shall serve
 1006 at the pleasure of the secretary.

1007 (4) The office shall do all of the following:

1008 (a) Serve as the state's point of contact for rural local
 1009 governments.

1010 (b) Administer the Rural Economic Development Initiative
 1011 ("REDI") pursuant to s. 288.0656.

1012 (c) Provide training and technical assistance to rural
 1013 local governments on a broad range of community and economic
 1014 development activities. The training and technical assistance
 1015 may be offered using communications technology or in person and

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1016 must be recorded and posted to the office's website. The
 1017 training and technical assistance must include, at a minimum,
 1018 the following topics:

1019 1. How to access state and federal resources, including
 1020 training on the online rural resource directory required under
 1021 paragraph (d).

1022 2. Best practices relating to comprehensive planning,
 1023 economic development, and land development in rural communities.

1024 3. Strategies to address management and administrative
 1025 capacity challenges unique to rural local governments.

1026 4. Requirements of, and updates on recent changes to, the
 1027 Community Planning Act under s. 163.3161.

1028 5. Updates on other recent state and federal laws affecting
 1029 rural local governments.

1030 (d) Create and maintain an online rural resource directory
 1031 to serve as an interactive tool to navigate the various state
 1032 and federal resources, tools, and services available to rural
 1033 local governments. The office shall regularly maintain the
 1034 resource directory and, to the greatest extent possible, include
 1035 up-to-date information on state and federal programs, resources,
 1036 tools, and services that address the needs of rural communities
 1037 in all areas of governance. Each state agency shall routinely
 1038 provide information and updates to the office for maintenance of
 1039 the resource directory. The resource directory must allow users
 1040 to search by indicators, such as agency name, resource type, or
 1041 topic, and include a notification function to allow users to
 1042 receive alerts when new or modified resources are available. To
 1043 the greatest extent possible, the resource directory must
 1044 include information on financial match requirements for the

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state and federal programs listed in the directory.

(5) (a) By October 1, 2025, the office shall establish and staff seven regional rural community liaison centers across this state for the purpose of providing specialized in-person state support to local governments in rural areas of opportunity as defined in s. 288.0656. The department shall by rule divide this state into seven regions and assign a regional rural community liaison center to each region. Each liaison center shall support the local governments within its geographic territory and shall be staffed with at least two full-time department personnel. At a minimum, liaison centers shall have the following powers, duties, and functions:

1. Work with local governments to plan and achieve goals for local or regional growth, economic development, and rural prosperity.

2. Facilitate local government access to state and federal resources, such as grants, loans, and other aid or resources.

3. Advise local governments on available waivers of program requirements, including financial match waivers or reductions, for projects using state or federal funds through the Rural Economic Development Initiative under s. 288.0656.

4. Coordinate local government technical assistance needs with the department and other state or federal agencies.

5. Promote model ordinances, policies, and strategies related to economic development.

6. Assist local governments with regulatory and reporting compliance.

(b) To the greatest extent possible, the regional rural community liaison centers shall coordinate with local and

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regional governmental entities, regional economic development organizations as defined in s. 288.018, and other appropriate entities to establish a network to foster community-driven solutions that promote viable and sustainable rural communities.

(c) The regional rural community liaison centers shall regularly engage with the Rural Economic Development Initiative established in s. 288.0656, and at least one staff member from each liaison center shall attend, either in person or by means of electronic communication, the monthly meetings required by s. 288.0656(6)(c).

(6) By December 1, 2025, and each year thereafter, the director of the office shall submit to the Administration Commission in the Executive Office of the Governor a written report describing the office's operations and accomplishments for the preceding year, inclusive of the Rural Economic Development Initiative report required by s. 288.0656(8). In consultation with the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, the office shall also include in the annual report recommendations for policies, programs, and funding to further support the needs of rural communities in this state. The office shall submit the annual report to the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives by December 1 of each year and publish the annual report on the office's website. The director shall present, in person at the next scheduled Administration Commission meeting, detailed information from the annual report required by this subsection.

(7) (a) The Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA) shall review the effectiveness of the office by December 15, 2026, and each year thereafter until

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1103 2028. Beginning in 2029, OPPAGA shall review and evaluate the
 1104 office every 3 years and shall submit a report based on its
 1105 findings. Each report must recommend policy and statutory
 1106 modifications for consideration by the Legislature. OPPAGA shall
 1107 submit each report to the President of the Senate and the
 1108 Speaker of the House of Representatives pursuant to the
 1109 schedule.

1110 (b) OPPAGA shall review strategies implemented by other
 1111 states on rural community preservation, enhancement, and
 1112 revitalization and report on their effectiveness and potential
 1113 for implementation in this state. OPPAGA shall include its
 1114 findings in its report to the President of the Senate and the
 1115 Speaker of the House of Representatives by December 15, 2027,
 1116 and every 3 years thereafter.

1117 (c)1. OPPAGA shall review each state-funded or state-
 1118 administered grant and loan program available to local
 1119 governments to:

1120 a. Identify any specified local government financial match
 1121 requirements and whether any portion of a match may be waived or
 1122 is required to be waived, pursuant to law, and programs where a
 1123 financial match waiver may be appropriate for rural local
 1124 government applicants, if not contemplated by law.

1125 b. Identify grant and loan application evaluation criteria,
 1126 including scoring procedures, for programs that may be perceived
 1127 to be overly burdensome for rural local government applicants,
 1128 and whether special accommodations or preferences for rural
 1129 local governments may be appropriate.

1130 2. OPPAGA shall produce a report based on its review and
 1131 submit the report to the President of the Senate and the Speaker

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1132 of the House of Representatives by December 15, 2026. This
 1133 paragraph expires June 30, 2027.

1134 Section 12. Section 288.014, Florida Statutes, is created
 1135 to read:

1136 288.014 Renaissance Grants Program.—

1137 (1) The Legislature finds that it has traditionally
 1138 provided programs to assist rural communities with economic
 1139 development and enhance their ability to attract businesses and
 1140 that, by providing that extra component of economic viability,
 1141 rural communities are able to attract new businesses and grow
 1142 existing ones. However, the Legislature finds that a subset of
 1143 rural communities has decreased in population over the past
 1144 decade, contributing to a decline in local business activity and
 1145 economic development. The Legislature further finds that the
 1146 state must transform its assistance to these specific rural
 1147 communities to help them achieve a necessary precursor of
 1148 economic viability. The Legislature further finds that the
 1149 approach intended by the creation of renaissance grants is to
 1150 focus on reversing the economic deterioration in rural
 1151 communities by retaining and attracting residents by giving them
 1152 a reason to stay, which is the impetus of natural economic
 1153 growth, business opportunities, and increased quality of life.

1154 (2) The Office of Rural Prosperity within the department
 1155 shall administer the Renaissance Grants Program to provide block
 1156 grants to eligible counties. By October 1, 2025, the Office of
 1157 Economic and Demographic Research shall certify to the Office of
 1158 Rural Prosperity which counties are growth-impeded. For the
 1159 purposes of this section, "growth-impeded" means a county that,
 1160 as of the most recent population estimate, has had a declining

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population over the last 10 years. After an initial certification, the Office of Economic and Demographic Research shall annually certify whether the county remains growth-impeded, until the county has 3 consecutive years of population growth. Upon such certification of population growth, the county is eligible to participate in the program for 1 additional year in order for the county to prepare for the end of block grant funding.

(3)(a) Each participating county shall enter into an agreement with the Office of Rural Prosperity to receive the block grant. Each county has broad authority to design its specific plan to achieve population growth within the broad parameters identified in this section. The Office of Rural Prosperity may not determine the manner in which the county implements the block grant. However, regional rural community liaison center staff shall provide assistance in developing the county's plan, upon request.

(b) Each participating county shall report annually to the Office of Rural Prosperity on activities undertaken, intergovernmental agreements entered into, and other information as required by the office.

(c) Each participating county shall receive \$1 million from the funds appropriated to the program. Counties participating in the program shall make all attempts to limit expenses for administrative costs, consistent with the need for prudent management and accountability in the use of public funds. Each county may contribute other funds for block grant purposes, including local, state, or federal grant funds, or seek out in-kind or financial contributions from private or public sources

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to assist in fulfilling the activities undertaken.

(4)(a) A participating county shall hire and retain a renaissance coordinator and may use block grant funds for this purpose. The renaissance coordinator is responsible for:

1. Ensuring that block grant funds are used as provided in this section;

2. Coordinating with other local governments, school boards, Florida College System institutions, or other entities; and

3. Reporting as necessary to the state, including information necessary pursuant to subsection (7).

(b) The Office of Rural Prosperity regional rural community liaison center staff shall provide assistance, upon request, and training to the renaissance coordinator to ensure successful implementation of the block grant.

(5) A participating county shall design a plan to make targeted investments in the community to achieve population growth and increase the economic vitality of the community. The plan must include the following key features for use of the state support:

(a) Technology centers with extended hours located within schools or on school premises, administered by the local school board, for such schools which provide extended hours and support for access by students.

(b) Facilities that colocate adult day care with child care facilities. The site-sharing facilities must be managed to also provide opportunities for direct interaction between generations and increase the health and well-being of both younger and older participants, reduce social isolation, and create cost and time

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efficiencies for working family members. The regional rural community liaison center staff of the Office of Rural Prosperity shall assist the county, upon request, with bringing to the Rural Economic Development Initiative or directly to the appropriate state agency recommendations necessary to streamline any required state permits, licenses, regulations, or other requirements.

(c) Technology labs managed in agreement with the nearest Florida College System institution or a career center as established under s. 1001.44. Repurposing vacant industrial sites or existing office space must be given priority in the selection of lab locations. Each local technology lab must be staffed and open for extended hours with the capacity to provide:

1. Access to trainers and equipment necessary for users to earn various certificates or online degrees in technology;

2. Hands-on assistance with applying for appropriate remote work opportunities; and

3. Studio space with equipment for graduates and other qualifying residents to perform remote work that is based on the use of technology. Collaboration with community partners, including the local workforce development board as described in s. 445.007, to provide training opportunities, in-kind support such as transportation to and from the lab, financing of equipment for in-home use, or basic maintenance of such equipment is required.

(6) In addition to the hiring of a renaissance coordinator, a participating county shall develop intergovernmental agreements for shared responsibilities with its municipalities,

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school board, and Florida College System institution or career center and enter into necessary contracts with providers and community partners in order to implement the plan.

(7) (a) Every 2 years, the Auditor General shall conduct an operational audit as defined in s. 11.45 of each county's grant activities, beginning in 2026.

(b) On December 31, 2026, and every year thereafter, the Office of Economic and Demographic Research shall submit an annual report of renaissance block grant recipients by county to the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives. The report must provide key economic indicators that measure progress in altering longer-term trends in the county. The Office of Rural Prosperity shall provide the Office of Economic and Demographic Research with information as requested to complete the report.

(8) Notwithstanding s. 216.301, funds appropriated for the purposes of this section are not subject to reversion.

(9) This section expires June 30, 2040.

Section 13. Section 288.0175, Florida Statutes, is created to read:

288.0175 Public Infrastructure Smart Technology Grant Program.—

(1) The Public Infrastructure Smart Technology Grant Program is established within the Office of Rural Prosperity within the department to fund and support the development of public infrastructure smart technology projects in communities located in rural areas of opportunity, subject to legislative appropriation.

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

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1277 (a) "Public infrastructure smart technology" means systems
 1278 and applications that use connectivity, data analytics, and
 1279 automation to improve public infrastructure by increasing
 1280 efficiency, enhancing public services, and promoting sustainable
 1281 development.

1282 (b) "Rural area of opportunity" has the same meaning as in
 1283 s. 288.0656.

1284 (c) "Smart technology lead organization" means a not-for-
 1285 profit corporation organized under s. 501(c)(3) of the Internal
 1286 Revenue Code which has been in existence for at least 3 years
 1287 and specializes in smart region planning.

1288 (3)(a) The Office of Rural Prosperity shall contract with
 1289 one or more smart technology lead organizations to administer
 1290 the grant program for the purpose of deploying public
 1291 infrastructure smart technology in rural communities. In
 1292 accordance with the terms required by the office, the smart
 1293 technology lead organization shall provide grants to counties
 1294 and municipalities located within a rural area of opportunity
 1295 for public infrastructure smart technology projects.

1296 (b) The office's contract with a smart technology lead
 1297 organization must specify the contract deliverables, including
 1298 financial reports and other reports due the office, timeframes
 1299 for achieving contractual obligations, and any other
 1300 requirements the office determines are necessary. The contract
 1301 must require the smart technology lead organization to do the
 1302 following:

1303 1. Collaborate with counties and municipalities located in
 1304 rural areas of opportunity to identify opportunities for local
 1305 governments to institute cost-effective smart technology

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1306 solutions for improving public services and infrastructure.

1307 2. Provide technical assistance to counties and
 1308 municipalities located in rural areas of opportunity in
 1309 developing plans for public infrastructure smart technology
 1310 projects.

1311 3. Assist counties and municipalities located in rural
 1312 areas of opportunity in connecting with other communities,
 1313 companies, and other entities to leverage the impact of each
 1314 public infrastructure smart technology project.

1315 (4) The office shall include in its annual report required
 1316 by s. 288.013(6) a description of the projects funded under this
 1317 section.

1318 Section 14. Subsections (1), (2), and (4) of section
 1319 288.018, Florida Statutes, are amended to read:

1320 288.018 Regional Rural Development Grants Program.—

1321 (1)(a) For the purposes of this section, the term "regional
 1322 economic development organization" means an economic development
 1323 organization located in or contracted to serve a rural area of
 1324 opportunity, as defined in s. 288.0656 ~~s. 288.0656(2)(d).~~

1325 (b) Subject to appropriation, the Office of Rural
 1326 Prosperity department shall establish a grant program to provide
 1327 funding to regional economic development organizations for the
 1328 purpose of building the professional capacity of those
 1329 organizations. Building the professional capacity of a regional
 1330 economic development organization includes hiring professional
 1331 staff to develop, deliver, and provide needed economic
 1332 development professional services, including technical
 1333 assistance, education and leadership development, marketing, and
 1334 project recruitment. Grants may also be used by a regional

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economic development organization to provide technical assistance to local governments, local economic development organizations, and existing and prospective businesses.

(c) A regional economic development organization may apply annually to the office department for a grant. The office department is authorized to approve, on an annual basis, grants to such regional economic development organizations. The office may award a maximum amount of \$50,000 in a year to maximum amount an organization may receive in any year will be \$50,000, or \$250,000 each to for any three regional economic development organizations that serve an entire region of a rural area of opportunity designated pursuant to s. 288.0656(7) if they are recognized by the office department as serving such a region.

(2) In approving the participants, the office department shall require the following:

(a) Documentation of official commitments of support from each of the units of local government represented by the regional organization.

(b) Demonstration that the organization is in existence and actively involved in economic development activities serving the region.

(c) Demonstration of the manner in which the organization is or will coordinate its efforts with those of other local and state organizations.

(4) Except as otherwise provided in the General Appropriations Act, the department may expend up to \$750,000 each fiscal year from funds appropriated to the Rural Community Development Revolving Loan Fund for the purposes outlined in this section.

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Section 15. Section 288.019, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

288.019 Rural considerations in grant review and evaluation processes; financial match waiver or reduction.—

(1) Notwithstanding any other law, and to the fullest extent possible, each agency and organization the member agencies and organizations of the Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI) as defined in s. 288.0656 ~~s. 288.0656(6)~~ (a) shall review:

(a) All grant and loan application evaluation criteria and scoring procedures to ensure the fullest access for rural communities ~~counties~~ as defined in s. 288.0656 ~~s. 288.0656(2)~~ to resources available throughout the state; and

(b) The financial match requirements for projects in rural communities.

(2) ~~(1)~~ Each REDI agency and organization shall consider the impact on and ability of rural communities to meet and be competitive under such criteria, scoring, and requirements. Upon review, each REDI agency and organization shall review all evaluation and scoring procedures and develop a proposal for modifications to those procedures which minimize the financial and resource impact to a rural community, including waiver or reduction of any required financial match requirements impact of a project within a rural area.

(a) ~~(2)~~ Evaluation criteria and scoring procedures must provide for an appropriate ranking, when ranking is a component of the program, based on the proportionate impact that projects have on a rural area when compared with similar project impacts on an urban area. Additionally,

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1393 ~~(3)~~ evaluation criteria and scoring procedures must
 1394 recognize the disparity of available fiscal resources for an
 1395 equal level of financial support from an urban county or
 1396 municipality and a rural county or municipality.
 1397 ~~(a)~~ The evaluation criteria should weight contribution in
 1398 proportion to the amount of funding available at the local
 1399 level.
 1400 (b) Match requirements must be waived or reduced for rural
 1401 communities. When appropriate, an in-kind match must ~~should~~ be
 1402 allowed and applied as a financial match when a rural community
 1403 county is experiencing economic financial distress as defined in
 1404 s. 288.0656 through elevated unemployment at a rate in excess of
 1405 the state's average by 5 percentage points or because of the
 1406 loss of its ad valorem base. Donations of land, though usually
 1407 not recognized as an in-kind match, may be treated as such. As
 1408 appropriate, each agency and organization that applies for or
 1409 receives federal funding must request federal approval to waive
 1410 or reduce the financial match requirements, if any, for projects
 1411 in rural communities.
 1412 ~~(3)(4) For existing programs, The proposal modified~~
 1413 ~~evaluation criteria and scoring procedure must be submitted~~
 1414 ~~delivered to the Office of Rural Prosperity department for~~
 1415 ~~distribution to the REDI agencies and organizations. The REDI~~
 1416 ~~agencies and organizations shall review and make comments and~~
 1417 ~~recommendations that. Future rules, programs, evaluation~~
 1418 ~~criteria, and scoring processes must be brought before a REDI~~
 1419 ~~meeting for review, discussion, and recommendation to allow~~
 1420 ~~rural communities counties~~ fuller access to the state's
 1421 resources.

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1422 (4) Each REDI agency and organization shall ensure that
 1423 related administrative rules or policies are modified, as
 1424 necessary, to reflect the finalized proposal and that
 1425 information about the authorized wavier or reduction is included
 1426 in the online rural resource directory of the Office of Rural
 1427 Prosperity required in s. 288.013(4)(d).
 1428 (5) The rural liaison from the related regional district
 1429 shall assist the rural community to make requests of waiver or
 1430 reduction of match.
 1431 Section 16. Subsection (3) is added to section 288.021,
 1432 Florida Statutes, to read:
 1433 288.021 Economic development liaison.-
 1434 (3) When practicable, the staff member appointed as the
 1435 economic development liaison shall also serve as the agency
 1436 representative for the Rural Economic Development Initiative
 1437 pursuant to s. 288.0656.
 1438 Section 17. Section 288.065, Florida Statutes, is amended
 1439 to read:
 1440 288.065 Rural Community Development Revolving Loan Fund.-
 1441 (1) The Rural Community Development Revolving Loan Fund
 1442 Program is established within the Office of Rural Prosperity
 1443 department to facilitate the use of existing federal, state, and
 1444 local financial resources by providing local governments with
 1445 financial assistance to further promote the economic viability
 1446 of rural communities. These funds may be used to finance
 1447 initiatives directed toward maintaining or developing the
 1448 economic base of rural communities, especially initiatives
 1449 addressing employment opportunities for residents of these
 1450 communities.

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(2) (a) The program shall provide for long-term loans, loan guarantees, and loan loss reserves to units of local governments, or economic development organizations substantially underwritten by a unit of local government.

(b) For purposes of this section, the term "unit of local government" means:

1. A county within counties with a population populations of 75,000 or less. ~~fewer, or within any~~

2. A county with a population of 125,000 or less fewer which is contiguous to a county with a population of 75,000 or less. ~~fewer~~

3. A municipality within a county described in subparagraph 1. or subparagraph 2.

4. A county or municipality within a rural area of opportunity.

For purposes of this paragraph, population is determined in accordance with the most recent official estimates pursuant to s. 186.901 and must include those residing in incorporated and unincorporated areas of a county, based on the most recent official population estimate as determined under s. 186.901, including those residing in incorporated areas and those residing in unincorporated areas of the county, or to units of local government, or economic development organizations substantially underwritten by a unit of local government, within a rural area of opportunity.

(c) (b) Requests for loans must ~~shall~~ be made by application to the office department. Loans must ~~shall~~ be made pursuant to agreements specifying the terms and conditions agreed to between

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the applicant and the department. The loans are ~~shall be~~ the legal obligations of the applicant.

(d) (e) All repayments of principal and interest shall be returned to the loan fund and made available for loans to other applicants. However, in a rural area of opportunity designated under s. 288.0656 by the Governor, and upon approval by the office department, repayments of principal and interest may be retained by the applicant if such repayments are dedicated and matched to fund regionally based economic development organizations representing the rural area of opportunity.

(3) The office department shall manage the fund, establishing loan practices that must include, but are not limited to, procedures for establishing loan interest rates, uses of funding, application procedures, and application review procedures. The office has department ~~shall have~~ final approval authority for any loan under this section.

(4) Notwithstanding ~~the provisions of~~ s. 216.301, funds appropriated for this loan fund may purpose ~~shall~~ not be subject to reversion.

(5) The office shall include in its annual report required under s. 288.013 detailed information about the fund, including loans made during the previous fiscal year, loans active, loans terminated or repaid, and the amount of funds not obligated as of 14 days before the date the report is due.

Section 18. Subsections (1), (2), and (3) of section 288.0655, Florida Statutes, are amended, and subsection (6) is added to that section, to read:

288.0655 Rural Infrastructure Fund.—

(1) There is created within the Office of Rural Prosperity

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1509 ~~department~~ the Rural Infrastructure Fund to facilitate the
 1510 planning, preparing, and financing of infrastructure projects in
 1511 rural communities which will encourage job creation, capital
 1512 investment, and the strengthening and diversification of rural
 1513 economies by promoting tourism, trade, and economic development.

1514 (2) (a) Funds appropriated by the Legislature shall be
 1515 distributed by the office ~~department~~ through grant programs that
 1516 maximize the use of federal, local, and private resources,
 1517 including, but not limited to, those available under the Small
 1518 Cities Community Development Block Grant Program.

1519 (b) To facilitate access of rural communities and rural
 1520 areas of opportunity as defined by the Rural Economic
 1521 Development Initiative to infrastructure funding programs of the
 1522 Federal Government, such as those offered by the United States
 1523 Department of Agriculture and the United States Department of
 1524 Commerce, and state programs, including those offered by Rural
 1525 Economic Development Initiative agencies, and to facilitate
 1526 local government or private infrastructure funding efforts, the
 1527 office ~~department~~ may award grants for up to 75 percent of the
 1528 total infrastructure project cost, or up to 100 percent of the
 1529 total infrastructure project cost for a project located in a
 1530 rural community as defined in s. 288.0656(2) which is also
 1531 located in a fiscally constrained county as defined in s.
 1532 218.67(1) or a rural area of opportunity as defined in s.
 1533 288.0656(2). Eligible uses of funds may include improving any
 1534 inadequate infrastructure that has resulted in regulatory action
 1535 that prohibits economic or community growth and reducing the
 1536 costs to community users of proposed infrastructure improvements
 1537 that exceed such costs in comparable communities. Eligible uses

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1538 of funds include improvements to public infrastructure for
 1539 industrial or commercial sites and upgrades to or development of
 1540 public tourism infrastructure. Authorized infrastructure may
 1541 include the following public or public-private partnership
 1542 facilities: storm water systems; telecommunications facilities;
 1543 roads or other remedies to transportation impediments; nature-
 1544 based tourism facilities; or other physical requirements
 1545 necessary to facilitate tourism, trade, and economic development
 1546 activities in the community. Authorized infrastructure may also
 1547 include publicly or privately owned self-powered nature-based
 1548 tourism facilities, publicly owned telecommunications
 1549 facilities, and additions to the distribution facilities of the
 1550 existing natural gas utility as defined in s. 366.04(3)(c), the
 1551 existing electric utility as defined in s. 366.02, or the
 1552 existing water or wastewater utility as defined in s.
 1553 367.021(12), or any other existing water or wastewater facility,
 1554 which owns a gas or electric distribution system or a water or
 1555 wastewater system in this state when:

1556 1. A contribution-in-aid of construction is required to
 1557 serve public or public-private partnership facilities under the
 1558 tariffs of any natural gas, electric, water, or wastewater
 1559 utility as defined herein; and

1560 2. Such utilities as defined herein are willing and able to
 1561 provide such service.

1562 (c) The office ~~department~~ may award grants of up to
 1563 \$300,000 for infrastructure feasibility studies, design and
 1564 engineering activities, or other infrastructure planning and
 1565 preparation or site readiness activities. Site readiness
 1566 expenses may include clearing title, surveys, permitting,

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environmental studies, and regulatory compliance costs. Grants awarded under this paragraph may be used in conjunction with grants awarded under paragraph (b). In evaluating applications under this paragraph, the ~~office department~~ shall consider the extent to which the application seeks to minimize administrative and consultant expenses.

(d) The ~~office department~~ shall participate in a memorandum of agreement with the United States Department of Agriculture under which state funds available through the Rural Infrastructure Fund may be advanced, in excess of the prescribed state share, for a project that has received from the United States Department of Agriculture a preliminary determination of eligibility for federal financial support. State funds in excess of the prescribed state share which are advanced pursuant to this paragraph and the memorandum of agreement shall be reimbursed when funds are awarded under an application for federal funding.

(e) To enable local governments to access the resources available pursuant to s. 403.973(17), the ~~office department~~ may award grants for surveys, feasibility studies, and other activities related to the identification and preclearance review of land which is suitable for preclearance review. Authorized grants under this paragraph may not exceed \$75,000 each, except in the case of a project in a rural area of opportunity, in which case the grant may not exceed \$300,000. Any funds awarded under this paragraph must be matched at a level of 50 percent with local funds, except that any funds awarded for a project in a rural area of opportunity do not require a match of local funds. ~~If an application for funding is for a catalyst site, as~~

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~~defined in s. 288.0656, the requirement for local match may be waived pursuant to the process in s. 288.06561.~~ In evaluating applications under this paragraph, the ~~office department~~ shall consider the extent to which the application seeks to minimize administrative and consultant expenses.

(3) The ~~office department~~, in consultation with the Department of Transportation Florida Tourism Industry Marketing Corporation, the Department of Environmental Protection, and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, as appropriate, shall review and certify applications pursuant to s. 288.061. The review must include an evaluation of the economic benefit and long-term viability. The office has ~~department shall have~~ final approval for any grant under this section.

(6) The office shall include in its annual report required under s. 288.013 detailed information about the fund, including grants made for the year, grants active, grants terminated or complete, and the amount of funds not obligated as of 14 days before the date the report is due.

Section 19. Subsection (1), paragraphs (a), (b), and (e) of subsection (2), subsections (3) and (6), paragraph (c) of subsection (7), and subsection (8) of section 288.0656, Florida Statutes, are amended to read:

288.0656 Rural Economic Development Initiative.—

(1)(a) Recognizing that rural communities and regions continue to face extraordinary challenges in their efforts to significantly improve their economies, specifically in terms of personal income, job creation, average wages, and strong tax bases, it is the intent of the Legislature to encourage and

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facilitate the location and expansion of major economic development projects of significant scale in such rural communities. The Legislature finds that rural communities are the essential conduits for the economy's distribution, manufacturing, and food supply.

(b) The Rural Economic Development Initiative, known as "REDI," is created within the Office of Rural Prosperity department, and all the participation of state and regional agencies listed in paragraph (6) (a) shall participate in this initiative is authorized.

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

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

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

(c)(e) "Rural community" means:

1. A county with a population of 75,000 or less ~~fewer~~.

2. A county with a population of 125,000 or less ~~fewer~~

which is contiguous to a county with a population of 75,000 or less ~~fewer~~.

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3. A municipality within a county described in subparagraph 1. or subparagraph 2.

4. An unincorporated federal enterprise community or an incorporated rural city with a population of 25,000 or less ~~fewer~~ and an employment base focused on traditional agricultural or 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 (a) ~~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.

(3) REDI shall be responsible for coordinating and focusing the efforts and resources of state and regional agencies on the problems which affect the fiscal, economic, and community viability of Florida's ~~economically distressed~~ rural communities, working with local governments, community-based organizations, and private organizations that have an interest in the growth and development of these communities to find ways to balance environmental and growth management issues with local needs.

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

1. The Department of Transportation.

2. The Department of Environmental Protection.

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1683 3. The Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.
 1684 4. The Department of State.
 1685 5. The Department of Health.
 1686 6. The Department of Children and Families.
 1687 7. The Department of Corrections.
 1688 8. The Department of Education.
 1689 9. The Department of Juvenile Justice.
 1690 10. The Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.
 1691 11. Each water management district.
 1692 12. CareerSource Florida, Inc.
 1693 13. VISIT Florida.
 1694 14. The Florida Regional Planning Council Association.
 1695 15. The Agency for Health Care Administration.
 1696 16. The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS).
 1697 (b) An alternate for each designee must ~~shall~~ also be
 1698 chosen, who must also be a deputy secretary or higher-level
 1699 staff person, and the names of the designees and alternates must
 1700 shall be reported sent to the director of the Office of Rural
 1701 Prosperity. At least one rural liaison from each regional rural
 1702 community liaison center must participate in the REDI meetings
 1703 Secretary of Commerce.
 1704 (c) REDI shall meet at least each month, but may meet more
 1705 often as necessary. Each REDI representative, or his or her
 1706 designee, shall be physically present or available by means of
 1707 electronic communication for each meeting.
 1708 (d) ~~(b)~~ Each REDI representative must have comprehensive
 1709 knowledge of his or her agency's functions, both regulatory and
 1710 service in nature, and of the state's economic goals, policies,
 1711 and programs. This person shall be the primary point of contact

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1712 for his or her agency with REDI on issues and projects relating
 1713 to ~~economically distressed~~ rural communities and with regard to
 1714 expediting project review, shall ensure a prompt effective
 1715 response to problems arising with regard to rural issues, and
 1716 shall work closely with the other REDI representatives in the
 1717 identification of opportunities for preferential awards of
 1718 program funds, contractual or other agreement provisions which
 1719 meet the requirements of s. 215.971, and allowances and waiver
 1720 of program requirements when necessary to encourage and
 1721 facilitate ~~long-term private~~ capital investment and job
 1722 creation.
 1723 (e) ~~(e)~~ The REDI representatives shall work with REDI in the
 1724 review and evaluation of statutes and rules for adverse impact
 1725 on rural communities and the development of alternative
 1726 proposals to mitigate that impact.
 1727 (f) ~~(d)~~ Each REDI representative shall be responsible for
 1728 ensuring that each district office or facility of his or her
 1729 agency is informed quarterly about the Rural Economic
 1730 Development Initiative and for providing assistance throughout
 1731 the agency in the implementation of REDI activities.
 1732 (7)
 1733 ~~(e) Each rural area of opportunity may designate catalyst~~
 1734 ~~projects, provided that each catalyst project is specifically~~
 1735 ~~recommended by REDI and confirmed as a catalyst project by the~~
 1736 ~~department. All state agencies and departments shall use all~~
 1737 ~~available tools and resources to the extent permissible by law~~
 1738 ~~to promote the creation and development of each catalyst project~~
 1739 ~~and the development of catalyst sites.~~
 1740 (8) REDI shall submit a report to the Office of Rural

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Prosperity department on all REDI activities for the previous fiscal year as a supplement to the office's department's annual report required under s. 288.013 s. 20.60. This supplementary report must include:

(a) A status report on every project all projects currently being coordinated through REDI, the number of preferential awards and allowances made pursuant to this section in detail by award, allowance, or match type, the dollar amount of such awards, and the names of the recipients.

(b) A description of all waivers of program requirements granted, including a list by program of each waiver that was granted. If waivers were requested but were not granted, a list of ungranted waivers, including reasons why the waivers were not granted, must be included.

(c) Detailed information as to the economic impact of the projects coordinated by REDI.

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

(e) Legislative recommendations for statutory waivers or reductions of specified economic development program requirements, including financial match waivers or reductions, for applicants within rural areas of opportunity.

(f) Outcomes of proposals submitted pursuant to s. 288.019.

Section 20. Section 288.06561, Florida Statutes, is repealed.

Section 21. Subsections (2), (3), and (4) of section 288.0657, Florida Statutes, are amended to read:

288.0657 Florida rural economic development strategy

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grants.-

(2) The Office of Rural Prosperity shall provide ~~department~~ may accept and administer moneys appropriated to the department ~~for providing~~ grants to assist rural communities to develop and implement strategic economic development plans. Grants may be provided to assist with costs associated with marketing a site to business and site selectors for an economic development project that is part of an economic development plan, either as part of funding to develop and implement a plan or related to an already adopted plan.

(3) A rural community, an economic development organization in a rural area, or a regional organization representing at least one rural community or such economic development organizations may apply for such grants. The rural liaison for the rural community shall assist those applying for such grants.

(4) The ~~office department~~ shall establish criteria for reviewing grant applications. These criteria must ~~shall~~ include, but are not limited to, the degree of participation and commitment by the local community and the application's consistency with local comprehensive plans or the application's proposal to ensure such consistency. Grants for marketing may include funding for advertising campaign materials and costs associated with meetings, trade missions, and professional development affiliated with site preparation and marketing. The ~~office department~~ shall review each application for a grant. ~~The department may approve grants only to the extent that funds are appropriated for such grants by the Legislature.~~

Section 22. Paragraph (f) of subsection (2) and paragraphs (a), (b), and (c) of subsection (4) of section 288.9961, Florida

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1799 Statutes, are amended, and subsections (6) and (7) are added to
1800 that section, to read:

1801 288.9961 Promotion of broadband adoption; Florida Office of
1802 Broadband.—

1803 (2) DEFINITIONS.—As used in this section, the term:

1804 (f) "Underserved" means a geographic area of this state in
1805 which there is no provider of broadband Internet service that
1806 offers a connection to the Internet with a capacity for
1807 transmission at a consistent speed of at least 100 megabits per
1808 second downstream and at least 20 ~~10~~ megabits per second
1809 upstream.

1810 (4) FLORIDA OFFICE OF BROADBAND.—The Florida Office of
1811 Broadband is created within the Division of Community
1812 Development in the department for the purpose of developing,
1813 marketing, and promoting broadband Internet services in this
1814 state. The office, in the performance of its duties, shall do
1815 all of the following:

1816 (a) Create a strategic plan that has goals and strategies
1817 for increasing and improving the availability of, access to, and
1818 use of broadband Internet service in this state. In development
1819 of the plan, the department shall incorporate applicable federal
1820 broadband activities, including any efforts or initiatives of
1821 the Federal Communications Commission, to improve broadband
1822 Internet service in this state. The plan must identify available
1823 federal funding sources for the expansion or improvement of
1824 broadband. The strategic plan must be submitted to the Governor,
1825 the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of
1826 Representatives by June 30, 2022. The strategic plan must be
1827 updated biennially thereafter. The plan must include a process

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1828 to review and verify public input regarding transmission speeds
1829 and availability of broadband Internet service throughout this
1830 state. The office shall consult with each regional rural
1831 community liaison center within the Office of Rural Prosperity
1832 on the development and update of the plan.

1833 (b) Build and facilitate local technology planning teams or
1834 partnerships with members representing cross-sections of the
1835 community, which may include, but are not limited to,
1836 representatives from the following organizations and industries:
1837 libraries, K-12 education, colleges and universities, local
1838 health care providers, private businesses, community
1839 organizations, economic development organizations, local
1840 governments, tourism, parks and recreation, and agriculture. The
1841 local technology planning teams or partnerships shall work with
1842 rural communities to help the communities understand their
1843 current broadband availability, locate unserved and underserved
1844 businesses and residents, identify assets relevant to broadband
1845 deployment, build partnerships with broadband service providers,
1846 and identify opportunities to leverage assets and reduce
1847 barriers to the deployment of broadband Internet services in the
1848 community. The teams or partnerships must be proactive in rural
1849 communities as defined in s. 288.0656 ~~fiscally constrained~~
1850 ~~counties~~ in identifying and providing assistance, in
1851 coordination with the regional rural community liaison centers
1852 within the Office of Rural Prosperity, with applying for federal
1853 grants for broadband Internet service.

1854 (c) Provide technical and planning assistance to rural
1855 communities in coordination with the regional rural community
1856 liaison centers within the Office of Rural Prosperity.

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(6) The office shall submit to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives a quarterly report detailing the implementation of broadband activities in rural, unserved, and underserved communities. Such information must be listed by county and include the amount of state and federal funds allocated and expended in the county by program; the progress toward deploying broadband in the county; any technical assistance provided; the activities of the local technology planning teams and partnerships; and the fulfillment of any other duties of the office required by this part.

(7) By December 31 each year, the office shall submit to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives an annual report on the office's operations and accomplishments for that calendar year and the status of broadband Internet service access and use in this state. The report must also incorporate the quarterly reports on rural, unserved, and underserved communities required by subsection (6).

Section 23. Section 290.06561, Florida Statutes, is repealed.

Section 24. Paragraph (a) of subsection (5) of section 319.32, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

319.32 Fees; service charges; disposition.—

(5) (a) Forty-seven dollars of each fee collected, except for fees charged on a certificate of title for a motor vehicle for hire registered under s. 320.08(6), for each applicable original certificate of title and each applicable duplicate copy of a certificate of title shall be deposited as follows: into ~~the State Transportation Trust Fund. Deposits to the State~~

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~~Transportation Trust Fund pursuant to this paragraph may not exceed \$200 million in any fiscal year, and from any collections in excess of that amount during the fiscal year.~~

1. The first \$30 million collected shall be deposited into the Highway Safety Operating Trust Fund;~~7~~ and

2. Any remaining collections shall be paid into the State Transportation Trust General Revenue Fund.

Section 25. Subsection (37) is added to section 334.044, Florida Statutes, to read:

334.044 Powers and duties of the department.—The department shall have the following general powers and duties:

(37) To provide technical assistance and support from the appropriate district of the department to counties that are not located in a metropolitan planning organization created pursuant to s. 339.175.

Section 26. Section 339.0801, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

339.0801 Allocation of increased revenues derived from amendments to s. 319.32(5) (a) ~~by ch. 2012-128.~~

(1) The first \$200 million of funds that result from increased revenues to the State Transportation Trust Fund derived from the amendments to s. 319.32(5) (a) made by s. 11, chapter 2012-128, Laws of Florida, this act must be used annually, first as set forth in paragraph (a) ~~subsection (1)~~ and then as set forth in paragraphs (b), (c), and (d) ~~subsections (2)-(4)~~, notwithstanding any other provision of law:

(a) ~~1. (1) (a)~~ Beginning in the 2013-2014 fiscal year and annually for 30 years thereafter, \$10 million shall be for the purpose of funding any seaport project identified in the adopted

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work program of the Department of Transportation, to be known as the Seaport Investment Program.

~~2.(b)~~ The revenues may be assigned, pledged, or set aside as a trust for the payment of principal or interest on revenue bonds, or other forms of indebtedness issued by an individual port or appropriate local government having jurisdiction thereof, or collectively by interlocal agreement among any of the ports, or used to purchase credit support to permit such borrowings. Alternatively, revenue bonds shall be issued by the Division of Bond Finance at the request of the Department of Transportation under the State Bond Act and shall be secured by such revenues as are provided in this subsection.

~~3.(e)~~ Revenue bonds or other indebtedness issued hereunder are not a general obligation of the state and are secured solely by a first lien on the revenues distributed under this subsection.

~~4.(d)~~ The state covenants with holders of the revenue bonds or other instruments of indebtedness issued pursuant to this subsection that it will not repeal this subsection; nor take any other action, including but not limited to amending this subsection, that will materially and adversely affect the rights of such holders so long as revenue bonds or other indebtedness authorized by this subsection are outstanding.

~~5.(e)~~ The proceeds of any revenue bonds or other indebtedness, after payment of costs of issuance and establishment of any required reserves, shall be invested in projects approved by the Department of Transportation and included in the department's adopted work program, by amendment if necessary. As required under s. 11(f), Art. VII of the State

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Constitution, the Legislature approves projects included in the department's adopted work program, including any projects added to the work program by amendment under s. 339.135(7).

~~6.(f)~~ Any revenues that are not used for the payment of bonds as authorized by this subsection may be used for purposes authorized under the Florida Seaport Transportation and Economic Development Program. This revenue source is in addition to any amounts provided for and appropriated in accordance with ss. 311.07 and 320.20(3) and (4).

~~(b)(2)~~ Beginning in the 2013-2014 fiscal year and annually thereafter, \$10 million shall be transferred to the Transportation Disadvantaged Trust Fund, to be used as specified in s. 427.0159.

~~(c)(3)~~ Beginning in the 2013-2014 fiscal year and annually thereafter, \$10 million shall be allocated to the Small County Outreach Program to be used as specified in s. 339.2818. These funds are in addition to the funds provided for the program pursuant to s. 201.15(4)(a)2.

~~(d)(4)~~ After the distributions required pursuant to paragraphs (a), (b), and (c) subsections (1)-(3), the remaining funds shall be used annually for transportation projects within this state for existing or planned strategic transportation projects which connect major markets within this state or between this state and other states, which focus on job creation, and which increase this state's viability in the national and global markets.

(2) The remaining funds that result from increased revenue to the State Transportation Trust Fund derived pursuant to s. 319.32(5)(a) must be used annually, notwithstanding any other

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1973 law, beginning in the 2025-2026 fiscal year and annually
 1974 thereafter, for the Small County Road Assistance Program as
 1975 prescribed in s. 339.2816.

1976 ~~(3)(5)~~ Pursuant to s. 339.135(7), the department shall
 1977 amend the work program to add the projects provided for in this
 1978 section.

1979 Section 27. Subsection (3) and paragraph (a) of subsection
 1980 (4) of section 339.2816, Florida Statutes, are amended, and
 1981 paragraph (c) of subsection (4) of that section is reenacted, to
 1982 read:

1983 339.2816 Small County Road Assistance Program.—

1984 (3) Beginning with fiscal year ~~1999-2000 until fiscal year~~
 1985 ~~2009-2010, and beginning again with fiscal year 2012-2013, up to~~
 1986 ~~\$25 million annually from the State Transportation Trust Fund~~
 1987 ~~must may~~ be used for the purposes of funding the Small County
 1988 Road Assistance Program as described in this section. In
 1989 addition, beginning with fiscal year 2025-2026, the department
 1990 must use the additional revenues allocated by s. 339.0801 for
 1991 the Small County Road Assistance Program.

1992 (4)(a) Small counties shall be eligible to compete for
 1993 funds that have been designated for the Small County Road
 1994 Assistance Program for resurfacing or reconstruction projects on
 1995 county roads that were part of the county road system on June
 1996 10, 1995. Capacity improvements on county roads are shall not be
 1997 eligible for funding under the program unless a safety issue
 1998 exists or the department finds it necessary to widen existing
 1999 lanes as part of a resurfacing or reconstruction project.

2000 (c) The following criteria must be used to prioritize road
 2001 projects for funding under the program:

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2002 1. The primary criterion is the physical condition of the
 2003 road as measured by the department.

2004 2. As secondary criteria the department may consider:

2005 a. Whether a road is used as an evacuation route.

2006 b. Whether a road has high levels of agricultural travel.

2007 c. Whether a road is considered a major arterial route.

2008 d. Whether a road is considered a feeder road.

2009 e. Whether a road is located in a fiscally constrained
 2010 county, as defined in s. 218.67(1).

2011 f. Other criteria related to the impact of a project on the
 2012 public road system or on the state or local economy as
 2013 determined by the department.

2014 Section 28. Subsections (1), (2), (3), (6), (7), and (8) of
 2015 section 339.2818, Florida Statutes, are amended to read:

2016 339.2818 Small County Outreach Program.—

2017 (1) There is created within the department ~~of~~
 2018 ~~Transportation~~ the Small County Outreach Program. The purpose of
 2019 this program is to assist small county governments in repairing
 2020 or rehabilitating county bridges, paving unpaved roads,
 2021 addressing road-related drainage improvements, resurfacing or
 2022 reconstructing county roads, or constructing capacity or safety
 2023 improvements to county roads.

2024 (2) For the purposes of this section, the term "small
 2025 county" means any county that has a population of 200,000 or
 2026 less as determined by the most recent official population census
 2027 determination estimate pursuant to s. 186.901.

2028 ~~(3) Funds allocated under this program, pursuant to s. 4,~~
 2029 ~~ch. 2000-257, Laws of Florida, are in addition to any funds~~
 2030 ~~provided pursuant to s. 339.2816, for the Small County Road~~

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~~Assistance Program.~~

~~(5)(6)~~ Funds paid into the State Transportation Trust Fund pursuant to ss. 201.15, 320.072, and 339.0801 ~~s. 201.15~~ for the purposes of the Small County Outreach Program are hereby annually appropriated for expenditure to support the Small County Outreach Program.

~~(6)(7)~~ Subject to a specific appropriation in addition to funds annually appropriated for projects under this section, a municipality within a rural area of opportunity or a rural area of opportunity community designated under s. 288.0656(7)(a) may compete for the additional project funding using the criteria listed in subsection (3) ~~(4)~~ at up to 100 percent of project costs, excluding capacity improvement projects.

~~(8) Subject to a specific appropriation in addition to funds appropriated for projects under this section, a local government either wholly or partially within the Everglades Agricultural Area as defined in s. 373.4592(15), the Peace River Basin, or the Suwannee River Basin may compete for additional funding using the criteria listed in paragraph (4)(c) at up to 100 percent of project costs on state or county roads used primarily as farm-to-market connections between rural agricultural areas and market distribution centers, excluding capacity improvement projects.~~

Section 29. Section 339.68 is amended to read:

(Substantial rewording of section.)

See s. 339.68, F.S., for present text.)

339.68 Florida Arterial Road Modernization Program.—

(1) The Legislature finds that increasing demands continue to be placed on rural arterial roads in this state by a fast-

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growing economy, continued population growth, and increased tourism. Investment in the rural arterial roads of this state is needed to maintain the safety, mobility, reliability, and resiliency of the transportation system in order to support the movement of people, goods, and commodities; to enhance economic prosperity and competitiveness; and to enrich the quality of life of the rural communities and the environment of this state.

(2) The Florida Arterial Road Modernization Program is created within the department to make capacity and safety improvements to two-lane arterial roads located in rural communities. For purposes of this section, the term "rural community" has the same meaning as provided in s. 288.0656.

(3) Beginning in the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the department shall allocate from the State Transportation Trust Fund a minimum of \$50 million in each fiscal year for purposes of funding the program. This funding is in addition to any other funding provided to the program by any other law.

(4) The department shall use the following criteria to prioritize projects for funding under the program:

(a) Whether the road has documented safety concerns or requires additional safety and design improvements. This may be evidenced by the number of fatalities or crashes per vehicle mile traveled.

(b) Whether the road has or is projected to have a significant amount of truck tractor traffic as determined by the department. For purposes of this paragraph, the term "truck tractor" has the same meaning as in s. 320.01(11).

(c) Whether the road is used to transport agricultural products and commodities from the farm to the market or other

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sale or distribution point.

(d) Whether the road is used to transport goods to or from warehouses, distribution centers, or intermodal logistics centers as defined in s. 311.101(2).

(e) Whether the road is used as an evacuation route.

(f) Whether the physical condition of the road meets department standards.

(g) Whether the road currently has, or is projected to have within the next 5 years, a level of service of D, E, or F.

(h) Any other criteria related to the impact of a project on the public road system or on the state or local economy as determined by the department.

(5) By January 1, 2027, and every 2 years thereafter, the department shall submit to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives a report regarding the use and condition of arterial roads located in rural communities, which report must include the following:

(a) A map of roads located in rural communities which are designated as arterial roads.

(b) A needs assessment that must include, but is not limited to, consideration of infrastructure improvements to improve capacity on arterial roads in rural communities.

(c) A synopsis of the department's project prioritization process.

(d) An estimate of the local and state economic impact of improving capacity on arterial roads in rural communities.

(e) A listing of the arterial roads and the associated improvements to be included in the program and a schedule or timeline for the inclusion of such projects in the work program.

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Section 30. (1) The Department of Transportation shall allocate the additional funds provided by this act to implement the Small County Road Assistance Program as created by s. 339.2816 and amend the current tentative work program for the 2025-2026 through 2031-2032 fiscal years to include additional projects. In addition, before adoption of the work program, the department shall submit a budget amendment pursuant to s. 339.135(7), Florida Statutes, requesting budget authority necessary to implement the additional projects.

(2) The department shall allocate sufficient funds to implement the Florida Arterial Road Modernization Program, develop a plan to expend the revenues as specified in s. 339.68, Florida Statutes, and, before its adoption, amend the current tentative work program for the 2025-2026 through 2031-2032 fiscal years to include the program's projects. In addition, before adoption of the work program, the department shall submit a budget amendment pursuant to s. 339.135(7), Florida Statutes, requesting budget authority necessary to implement the program as specified in s. 339.68, Florida Statutes.

(3) Notwithstanding any other law, the increase in revenue to the State Transportation Trust Fund derived from the amendments to ss. 201.15 and 319.32, Florida Statutes, made by this act and deposited into the trust fund pursuant to ss. 201.15 and 339.0801, Florida Statutes, shall be used by the department to fund the programs as specified in this section.

Section 31. Section 381.403, Florida Statutes, is created to read:

381.403 Rural Access to Primary and Preventive Care Grant Program.—The Legislature recognizes that access to primary and

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preventive health care is critical for the well-being of the residents of this state. The Legislature also recognizes that many rural areas of this state have significantly fewer available physicians and autonomous advanced practice registered nurses who serve those areas. To increase the availability of health care in such underserved rural areas, there is created the Rural Access to Primary and Preventive Care Grant Program within the Department of Health to use grants to incentivize physicians and autonomous advanced practice registered nurses to open or expand practices in those areas.

(1) As used in this section, the term:

(a) "Autonomous advanced practice registered nurse" means an advanced practice registered nurse who is registered under s. 464.0123 to engage in autonomous practice.

(b) "Majority ownership" means ownership of more than 50 percent of the interests in a private practice.

(c) "Physician" means a physician licensed under chapter 458 or chapter 459.

(d) "Preventive care" means routine health care services designed to prevent illness. The term includes, but is not limited to, general physical examinations provided on an annual basis, screenings for acute or chronic illnesses, and patient counseling to promote overall wellness and avoid the need for emergency services.

(e) "Primary care" means health care services focused primarily on preventive care, wellness care, and treatment for common illnesses. The term may include the health care provider serving as a patient's entry point into the overall health care system and coordinating a patient's care among specialists or

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acute care settings. The term does not include elective services provided solely for cosmetic purposes.

(f) "Program" means the Rural Access to Primary and Preventive Care Grant Program.

(g) "Qualifying rural area" means a rural community as defined in s. 288.0657 in this state which is also designated as a health professional shortage area by the Health Resources and Services Administration of the United States Department of Health and Human Services.

(2) The department shall award grants under the program to physicians and autonomous advanced practice registered nurses who intend to open a new private practice in a qualifying rural area or who intend to open a new location within a qualifying rural area if the current private practice is located in a different county. To qualify for a grant, an applicant must meet all of the following criteria:

(a) The practice must:

1. Have majority ownership by physicians or autonomous advanced practice registered nurses. Majority ownership may include up to five physicians or autonomous advanced practice registered nurses in partnership.

2. Be physically located in a qualifying rural area and serve at that location patients who live in that qualifying rural area or in other nearby qualifying rural areas. While the practice may use telehealth to supplement the services provided at the location, the majority of services provided by the practice must be provided at the physical location.

3. Accept Medicaid patients.

4. Provide services in one or more of the following

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2205 specialties:

2206 a. If the practice has majority ownership by one or more
 2207 autonomous advanced practice registered nurses, provide services
 2208 solely in primary or preventive care.

2209 b. If the practice has majority ownership by one or more
 2210 physicians, provide services in primary care, obstetrics,
 2211 gynecology, general and family practice, geriatrics, internal
 2212 medicine, pediatrics, or psychiatry.

2213 (b) The owners of the practice must commit to providing the
 2214 following information to the department on an annual basis, and
 2215 upon request by the department:

2216 1. Deidentified patient encounter data.

2217 2. A detailed report on the use of grant funds until such
 2218 funds are expended.

2219 (3) By March 1, 2026, the department shall create an
 2220 application process for eligible physicians and autonomous
 2221 advanced practice registered nurses to apply for grants under
 2222 the program. The application must require a detailed budget of
 2223 anticipated use of grant funds and how the new or existing
 2224 practice will meet the requirements of subsection (2). The
 2225 department shall establish a ranking system to determine which
 2226 applicants will be awarded grants if there are more applicants
 2227 for the program than can be awarded grants with available
 2228 appropriated funds.

2229 (4) Subject to specific appropriation, the department may
 2230 award grants of up to \$250,000 to eligible applicants. Only one
 2231 grant may be awarded per practice. Grant funds awarded for
 2232 establishing a new private practice or a new practice location
 2233 may be used for any of the following expenses:

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2234 (a) Facility construction, acquisition, renovation, or
 2235 lease.

2236 (b) Purchasing medical equipment.

2237 (c) Purchasing or implementing information technology
 2238 equipment or services.

2239 (d) Purchasing or implementing telehealth technology.

2240 (e) Training on the use of medical equipment, information
 2241 technology, or telehealth technology implemented under paragraph
 2242 (b), paragraph (c), or paragraph (d), respectively.

2243 (5) Grant funds may not be used for any of the following:

2244 (a) Salaries.

2245 (b) Utilities.

2246 (c) Internet or telecommunications services other than
 2247 those necessary for implementing telehealth technology under
 2248 paragraph (4) (d).

2249 (d) Insurance.

2250 (e) Incidental maintenance and repairs.

2251 (f) Disposable medical supplies.

2252 (g) Medicines or vaccines.

2253 (h) Licensing or certification fees, including costs for
 2254 continuing education other than training under paragraph (4) (e).

2255 (6) The department shall enter into a contract with each
 2256 grant recipient which details the requirements for the
 2257 expenditure of grant funds for that recipient. The contract must
 2258 include, at a minimum, all of the following:

2259 (a) The purpose of the contract.

2260 (b) Specific performance standards and responsibilities for
 2261 the recipient under the contract, including penalties for not
 2262 meeting such performance standards and responsibilities.

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2263 (c) A detailed project or contract budget, if applicable.
 2264 (d) Reporting requirements for grant recipients to provide
 2265 information to the department under paragraph (2)(b) as well as
 2266 any additional information the department deems necessary for
 2267 the administration of the program.
 2268 (7) The department may adopt rules to implement the
 2269 program.
 2270 (8) Beginning July 1, 2026, and each year thereafter in
 2271 which there are outstanding contracts with grant recipients
 2272 under subsection (6), the department shall provide a report to
 2273 the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of
 2274 the House of Representatives which includes, but need not be
 2275 limited to, all of the following:
 2276 (a) Each grant awarded, including the proposed uses for
 2277 each grant.
 2278 (b) The progress on each outstanding contract.
 2279 (c) The number of patients residing in rural areas who were
 2280 served by grant awardees.
 2281 (d) The number of Medicaid recipients who were served by
 2282 grant awardees.
 2283 (e) The number and types of services provided during
 2284 patient encounters in locations opened under the program.
 2285 (f) The number of health care practitioners, delineated by
 2286 licensure type, providing services in locations opened under the
 2287 program.
 2288 (9) This section is repealed July 1, 2035, unless reviewed
 2289 and saved from repeal through reenactment by the Legislature.
 2290 Section 32. Section 381.9856, Florida Statutes, is created
 2291 to read:

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2292 381.9856 Stroke, Cardiac, and Obstetric Response and
 2293 Education Grant Program.—
 2294 (1) PROGRAM CREATION.—The Stroke, Cardiac, and Obstetric
 2295 Response and Education (SCORE) Grant Program is created within
 2296 the Department of Health.
 2297 (2) PURPOSE.—The purpose of the program is to improve
 2298 patient outcomes and the coordination of emergency medical care
 2299 in rural communities by increasing access to high-quality
 2300 stroke, cardiac, and obstetric care through the application of
 2301 technology and innovative training, such as blended learning
 2302 training programs. Blended learning training programs ensure
 2303 that participants gain both the theoretical foundations of
 2304 diagnosis and management as well as real-world clinical
 2305 experience through scenario-based learning, ultimately enhancing
 2306 decisionmaking and patient outcomes.
 2307 (3) DEFINITIONS.—As used in this section, the term:
 2308 (a) "Blended learning training program" means a structured
 2309 educational model that uses blended learning methodologies,
 2310 including simulation-based training, virtual reality, and
 2311 distance learning technologies, in conjunction with hands-on
 2312 instruction, such as simulation-based practice, and in-person
 2313 skills sessions to provide comprehensive education.
 2314 (b) "High-risk care provider" means a licensed health care
 2315 facility or licensed ambulance service that regularly provides
 2316 emergency or ongoing care to patients experiencing a stroke,
 2317 heart attack, or pregnancy-related emergency.
 2318 (c) "Rural community" has the same meaning as provided in
 2319 s. 288.0657.
 2320 (4) GRANT PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS.—

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- 2321 (a) The department shall award grants to high-risk care
 2322 providers serving rural communities to accomplish at least one
 2323 of the following initiatives:
- 2324 1. Implement a blended learning training program for health
 2325 care providers in stroke care protocols and best practices.
- 2326 2. Purchase simulation equipment and technology for
 2327 training.
- 2328 3. Establish telehealth capabilities between prehospital
 2329 providers, such as paramedics or emergency medical technicians,
 2330 and in-hospital providers, such as neurologists, to expedite
 2331 emergency stroke care, emergency cardiac care, or emergency
 2332 obstetric care.
- 2333 4. Develop quality improvement programs in one or more of
 2334 the following specialty areas: emergency stroke care, emergency
 2335 cardiac care, or emergency obstetric care.
- 2336 (b) Priority must be given to proposals that:
- 2337 1. Demonstrate collaboration between prehospital and in-
 2338 hospital providers; or
- 2339 2. Show potential for significant improvement in patient
 2340 outcomes in rural communities.
- 2341 (5) FUNDING LIMITS; REPORTING.—
- 2342 (a) Individual grants may not exceed \$100,000 per year.
- 2343 (b) Grant recipients must submit quarterly reports to the
 2344 department documenting program activities, expenditures, and
 2345 outcomes.
- 2346 (6) ADMINISTRATION.—The department shall monitor program
 2347 implementation and outcomes. The department shall submit an
 2348 annual report to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and
 2349 the Speaker of the House of Representatives by December 1 of

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- 2350 each year, detailing program implementation and outcomes.
- 2351 (7) RULEMAKING.—The department may adopt rules to implement
 2352 this section.
- 2353 (8) IMPLEMENTATION.—This section may be implemented only to
 2354 the extent specifically funded by legislative appropriation.
- 2355 (9) REPEAL.—This section is repealed July 1, 2030, unless
 2356 reviewed and saved from repeal through reenactment by the
 2357 Legislature.
- 2358 Section 33. Subsection (2) of section 395.6061, Florida
 2359 Statutes, is amended to read:
- 2360 395.6061 Rural hospital capital improvement.—There is
 2361 established a rural hospital capital improvement grant program.
- 2362 (2)(a) Each rural hospital as defined in s. 395.602 shall
 2363 receive a minimum of \$100,000 annually, subject to legislative
 2364 appropriation, upon application to the Department of Health, for
 2365 projects to acquire, repair, improve, or upgrade systems,
 2366 facilities, or equipment. Such projects may include, but are not
 2367 limited to, the following:
- 2368 1. Establishing mobile care units to provide primary care
 2369 services, behavioral health services, or obstetric and
 2370 gynecological services in rural health professional shortage
 2371 areas.
- 2372 2. Establishing telehealth kiosks to provide urgent care
 2373 and primary care services remotely in rural health professional
 2374 shortage areas.
- 2375 (b) As used in this subsection, the term:
- 2376 1. "Preventive care" means routine health care services
 2377 designed to prevent illness. The term includes, but is not
 2378 limited to, general physical examinations provided on an annual

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basis, screenings for acute or chronic illnesses, and patient counseling to promote overall wellness and avoid the need for emergency services.

2. "Primary care" means health care services focused primarily on preventive care, wellness care, and treatment for common illnesses. The term may include the health care provider serving as a patient's entry point into the overall health care system and coordinating a patient's care among specialists or acute care settings. The term does not include elective services provided solely for cosmetic purposes.

3. "Rural health professional shortage area" means a rural community as defined in s. 288.0657 which is also designated as a health professional shortage area by the Health Resources and Services Administration of the United States Department of Health and Human Services.

Section 34. Subsection (3) of section 420.9073, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

420.9073 Local housing distributions.—

(3) Calculation of guaranteed amounts:

(a) The guaranteed amount under subsection (1) shall be calculated for each state fiscal year by multiplying \$1 million ~~\$350,000~~ by a fraction, the numerator of which is the amount of funds distributed to the Local Government Housing Trust Fund pursuant to s. 201.15(4)(c) and the denominator of which is the total amount of funds distributed to the Local Government Housing Trust Fund pursuant to s. 201.15.

(b) The guaranteed amount under subsection (2) shall be calculated for each state fiscal year by multiplying \$1 million ~~\$350,000~~ by a fraction, the numerator of which is the amount of

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funds distributed to the Local Government Housing Trust Fund pursuant to s. 201.15(4)(d) and the denominator of which is the total amount of funds distributed to the Local Government Housing Trust Fund pursuant to s. 201.15.

Section 35. Paragraph (n) of subsection (5) of section 420.9075, Florida Statutes, is amended, paragraph (o) is added to that subsection, and paragraph (b) of subsection (13) of that section is reenacted, to read:

420.9075 Local housing assistance plans; partnerships.—

(5) The following criteria apply to awards made to eligible sponsors or eligible persons for the purpose of providing eligible housing:

(n) Funds from the local housing distribution not used to meet the criteria established in paragraph (a), ~~or~~ paragraph (c), or paragraph (o), or not used for the administration of a local housing assistance plan must be used for housing production and finance activities, including, but not limited to, financing preconstruction activities or the purchase of existing units, providing rental housing, and providing home ownership training to prospective home buyers and owners of homes assisted through the local housing assistance plan.

1. Notwithstanding the provisions of paragraphs (a) and (c), program income as defined in s. 420.9071(26) may also be used to fund activities described in this paragraph.

2. When preconstruction due-diligence activities conducted as part of a preservation strategy show that preservation of the units is not feasible and will not result in the production of an eligible unit, such costs shall be deemed a program expense rather than an administrative expense if such program expenses

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do not exceed 3 percent of the annual local housing distribution.

3. If both an award under the local housing assistance plan and federal low-income housing tax credits are used to assist a project and there is a conflict between the criteria prescribed in this subsection and the requirements of s. 42 of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, as amended, the county or eligible municipality may resolve the conflict by giving precedence to the requirements of s. 42 of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, as amended, in lieu of following the criteria prescribed in this subsection with the exception of paragraphs (a) and (g) of this subsection.

4. Each county and each eligible municipality may award funds as a grant for construction, rehabilitation, or repair as part of disaster recovery or emergency repairs or to remedy accessibility or health and safety deficiencies. Any other grants must be approved as part of the local housing assistance plan.

(o) Notwithstanding paragraphs (a) and (c), up to 25 percent of the funds made available in each county and eligible municipality from the local housing distribution may be used to preserve multifamily affordable rental housing funded through United States Department of Agriculture loans. These funds may be used to rehabilitate housing, extend affordability periods, or acquire or transfer properties in partnership with private organizations. This paragraph expires on June 30, 2031.

(13)

(b) If, as a result of its review of the annual report, the corporation determines that a county or eligible municipality

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has failed to implement a local housing incentive strategy, or, if applicable, a local housing incentive plan, it shall send a notice of termination of the local government's share of the local housing distribution by certified mail to the affected county or eligible municipality.

1. The notice must specify a date of termination of the funding if the affected county or eligible municipality does not implement the plan or strategy and provide for a local response. A county or eligible municipality shall respond to the corporation within 30 days after receipt of the notice of termination.

2. The corporation shall consider the local response that extenuating circumstances precluded implementation and grant an extension to the timeframe for implementation. Such an extension shall be made in the form of an extension agreement that provides a timeframe for implementation. The chief elected official of a county or eligible municipality or his or her designee shall have the authority to enter into the agreement on behalf of the local government.

3. If the county or the eligible municipality has not implemented the incentive strategy or entered into an extension agreement by the termination date specified in the notice, the local housing distribution share terminates, and any uncommitted local housing distribution funds held by the affected county or eligible municipality in its local housing assistance trust fund shall be transferred to the Local Government Housing Trust Fund to the credit of the corporation to administer.

4.a. If the affected local government fails to meet the timeframes specified in the agreement, the corporation shall

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2495 terminate funds. The corporation shall send a notice of
 2496 termination of the local government's share of the local housing
 2497 distribution by certified mail to the affected local government.
 2498 The notice shall specify the termination date, and any
 2499 uncommitted funds held by the affected local government shall be
 2500 transferred to the Local Government Housing Trust Fund to the
 2501 credit of the corporation to administer.

2502 b. If the corporation terminates funds to a county, but an
 2503 eligible municipality receiving a local housing distribution
 2504 pursuant to an interlocal agreement maintains compliance with
 2505 program requirements, the corporation shall thereafter
 2506 distribute directly to the participating eligible municipality
 2507 its share calculated in the manner provided in ss. 420.9072 and
 2508 420.9073.

2509 c. Any county or eligible municipality whose local
 2510 distribution share has been terminated may subsequently elect to
 2511 receive directly its local distribution share by adopting the
 2512 ordinance, resolution, and local housing assistance plan in the
 2513 manner and according to the procedures provided in ss. 420.907-
 2514 420.9079.

2515 Section 36. Subsections (1), (2), and (5) of section
 2516 1001.451, Florida Statutes, are amended, and subsection (6) is
 2517 added to that section, to read:

2518 1001.451 Regional consortium service organizations.—In
 2519 order to provide a full range of programs to larger numbers of
 2520 students, minimize duplication of services, and encourage the
 2521 development of new programs and services:

2522 (1) School districts with 20,000 or fewer unweighted full-
 2523 time equivalent students, developmental research (laboratory)

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2524 schools established pursuant to s. 1002.32, and the Florida
 2525 School for the Deaf and the Blind may enter into cooperative
 2526 agreements to form a regional consortium service organization.
 2527 Each regional consortium service organization shall provide any
 2528 ~~of, at a minimum, three of~~ the following services determined
 2529 necessary and appropriate by the board of directors:

- 2530 (a) Exceptional student education;
- 2531 (b) Safe schools support ~~teacher education centers;~~
- 2532 ~~environmental education;~~
- 2533 (c) State and federal grant procurement and coordination;
- 2534 (d) Data services ~~processing~~; health
- 2535 (e) Insurance services;
- 2536 (f) Risk management insurance;
- 2537 (g) Professional learning;
- 2538 (h) College, career, and workforce development;
- 2539 (i) Business and operational services staff development;
- 2540 (j) Purchasing; or
- 2541 (k) Planning and accountability.

2542 (2) (a) Each regional consortium service organization that
 2543 consists of four or more school districts is eligible to
 2544 receive, through the Department of Education, subject to the
 2545 funds provided in the General Appropriations Act, an allocation
 2546 ~~incentive grant~~ of ~~\$150,000~~ \$50,000 per school district and
 2547 eligible member to be used for the delivery of services within
 2548 the participating school districts. The determination of
 2549 services and use of such funds must ~~shall~~ be established by the
 2550 board of directors of the regional consortium service
 2551 organization. The funds must ~~shall~~ be distributed to each
 2552 regional consortium service organization no later than 30 days

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following the release of the funds to the department. Each regional consortium service organization shall submit an annual report to the department regarding the use of funds for consortia services. Unexpended amounts in any fund in a consortium's current year operating budget must be carried forward and included as the balance forward for that fund in the approved operating budget for the following year. Each regional consortium service organization shall provide quarterly financial reports to member districts.

(b) Member districts shall designate a district that will serve as a fiscal agent for contractual and reporting purposes. Such fiscal agent district is entitled to reasonable compensation for accounting and other services performed. The regional consortium service organization shall retain all funds received from grants or contracted services to cover indirect or administrative costs associated with the provision of such services. The regional consortium service organization board of directors shall determine the products and services to be provided by the consortium; however, in all contractual matters, the school board of the fiscal agent district shall act on proposed actions of the regional consortium service organization.

(c) The regional consortium service organization board of directors shall recommend establishment of positions and individuals for appointment to the fiscal agent district. Personnel must be employed under the personnel policies of the fiscal agent district and are deemed to be public employees of the fiscal agent district. The regional consortium service organization board of directors may recommend a salary schedule

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and job descriptions specific to its personnel.

(d) The regional consortium service organization may purchase or lease property and facilities essential for its operations and is responsible for their maintenance and associated overhead costs.

(e) If a regional consortium service organization is dissolved, any revenue from the sale of assets must be distributed among the member districts as determined by the board of directors. Application for incentive grants shall be made to the Commissioner of Education by July 30 of each year for distribution to qualifying regional consortium service organizations by January 1 of the fiscal year.

(5) The board of directors of a regional consortium service organization may use various means to generate revenue in support of its activities, including, but not limited to, contracting for services to nonmember districts. The board of directors may acquire, enjoy, use, and dispose of patents, copyrights, and trademarks and any licenses and associated ~~other~~ rights or interests ~~thereunder or therein~~. Ownership of all such patents, copyrights, trademarks, licenses, and associated rights or interests ~~thereunder or therein~~ shall vest in the state, with the board of directors having full right of use and full right to retain associated ~~the revenues derived therefrom~~. Any funds realized from contracted services, patents, copyrights, trademarks, or licenses are ~~shall be~~ considered internal funds as provided in s. 1011.07. A fund balance must be established for maintaining or expanding services, facilities maintenance, terminal pay, and other liabilities. Such funds shall be used to support the organization's marketing and research and

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development activities in order to improve and increase services to its member districts.

(6) A regional consortium service organization is authorized to administer the Regional Consortia Service Organization Supplemental Services Program under s. 1001.4511.

Section 37. Section 1001.4511, Florida Statutes, is created to read:

1001.4511 Regional Consortia Service Organization Supplemental Services Program.—

(1) There is created the Regional Consortia Service Organization Supplemental Services Program to increase the ability of regional consortium service organizations under s. 1001.451 to provide programs and services to consortia members through cooperative agreements. Program funds may be used to supplement member needs related to transportation; district finance personnel services; property insurance; cybersecurity support; school safety; college, career, and workforce development; academic support; and behavior support within exceptional student education services.

(2) Each regional consortium service organization shall annually report to the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives the distribution of funds, including members awarded and services provided.

(3) Notwithstanding s. 216.301 and pursuant to s. 216.351, funds allocated for this purpose which are not disbursed by June 30 of the fiscal year in which the funds are allocated may be carried forward for up to 5 years after the effective date of the original appropriation.

Section 38. Section 1009.635, Florida Statutes, is created

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to read:

1009.635 Rural Incentive for Professional Educators.—

(1) ESTABLISHMENT.—The Rural Incentive for Professional Educators (RIPE) Program is established within the Department of Education to support the recruitment and retention of qualified instructional personnel in rural communities. The program shall provide financial assistance for the repayment of student loans for eligible participants who establish permanent residency and employment in rural areas of opportunity.

(2) ELIGIBILITY.—An individual is eligible to participate in the RIPE Program if he or she does all of the following:

(a) Establishes permanent residency on or after July 1, 2025, in a rural area of opportunity as designated pursuant to s. 288.0656. The address on an individual's state-issued identification card or driver license is evidence of residence.

(b) Secures full-time employment as a teacher or administrator in a private school as defined in s. 1002.01, or as instructional or administrative personnel as those terms are defined in s. 1012.01(2) and (3), respectively, in the public school district located within the same rural area of opportunity as he or she resides.

(c) Holds an associate degree, bachelor's degree, postgraduate degree, or certificate from an accredited institution earned before establishing residency.

(d) Has an active student loan balance incurred for the completion of the qualifying degree or certificate.

(3) LOAN REPAYMENT.—Eligible participants may receive up to \$15,000 in total student loan repayment assistance over 5 years, disbursed in annual payments not to exceed \$3,000 per year.

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Payments shall be made directly to the lender servicing the participant's student loan.

(4) AWARD DISTRIBUTION.—Before disbursement of an award, the department shall verify that the participant:

(a) Has maintained continuous employment with the school district in an instructional or administrative position;

(b) Has received a rating of effective or highly effective pursuant to s. 1012.34; and

(c) Has not been placed on probation, had his or her certificate suspended or revoked, or been placed on the disqualification list, pursuant to s. 1012.796.

(5) ADMINISTRATION.—The program shall be administered by the Office of Student Financial Assistance within the Department of Education, which shall:

(a) Develop application procedures requiring documentation, including proof of residency, verification of employment, official academic transcripts, and details of outstanding student loans.

(b) Monitor compliance with program requirements.

(6) RULEMAKING.—The State Board of Education shall adopt rules no later than January 31, 2026, to administer this section.

Section 39. Subsection (3) of section 1013.62, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

1013.62 Charter schools capital outlay funding.—

(3) If the school board levies the discretionary millage authorized in s. 1011.71(2), the department ~~must~~ shall use the following calculation methodology to determine the amount of revenue that a school district must distribute to each eligible

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charter school:

(a) Reduce the total discretionary millage revenue by the school district's annual debt service obligation incurred as of March 1, 2017, which has not been subsequently retired, and:

1. Beginning in the 2025-2026 fiscal year, for any district with an active project or an outstanding participation requirement balance, any amount of participation requirement pursuant to s. 1013.64(2)(a)8. that is being satisfied by revenues raised by the discretionary millage; or

2. For construction projects for which Special Facilities Construction Account funding is sought beginning in the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the value of 1 mill from the revenue generated pursuant to s. 1013.64(2)(a)8.b.

(b) Divide the school district's adjusted discretionary millage revenue by the district's total capital outlay full-time equivalent membership and the total number of full-time equivalent students of each eligible charter school to determine a capital outlay allocation per full-time equivalent student.

(c) Multiply the capital outlay allocation per full-time equivalent student by the total number of full-time equivalent students of each eligible charter school to determine the capital outlay allocation for each charter school.

(d) If applicable, reduce the capital outlay allocation identified in paragraph (c) by the total amount of state funds allocated to each eligible charter school in subsection (2) to determine the maximum calculated capital outlay allocation. The amount of funds a school district must distribute to charter schools shall be as follows:

1. For fiscal year 2023-2024, the amount is 20 percent of

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the amount calculated under this paragraph.

2. For fiscal year 2024-2025, the amount is 40 percent of the amount calculated under this paragraph.

3. For fiscal year 2025-2026, the amount is 60 percent of the amount calculated under this paragraph.

4. For fiscal year 2026-2027, the amount is 80 percent of the amount calculated under this paragraph.

5. For fiscal year 2027-2028, and each fiscal year thereafter, the amount is 100 percent of the amount calculated under this paragraph.

(e) School districts shall distribute capital outlay funds to eligible charter schools no later than February 1 of each year, as required by this subsection, based on the amount of funds received by the district school board. School districts shall distribute any remaining capital outlay funds, as required by this subsection, upon the receipt of such funds until the total amount calculated pursuant to this subsection is distributed.

By October 1 of each year, each school district shall certify to the department the amount of debt service ~~that and participation requirement that complies with the requirement of paragraph (a) and~~ can be reduced from the total discretionary millage revenue. Each school district shall also certify the amount of the participation requirement that complies with paragraph (a), or certify the value of 1 mill from revenue generated pursuant to s. 1013.64(2)(a)8.b. that can be reduced from the total discretionary millage revenue, as applicable. The Auditor General shall verify compliance with the requirements of

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paragraph (a) and s. 1011.71(2)(e) during scheduled operational audits of school districts.

Section 40. Paragraph (a) of subsection (2) of section 1013.64, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

1013.64 Funds for comprehensive educational plant needs; construction cost maximums for school district capital projects.—Allocations from the Public Education Capital Outlay and Debt Service Trust Fund to the various boards for capital outlay projects shall be determined as follows:

(2)(a) The department shall establish, as a part of the Public Education Capital Outlay and Debt Service Trust Fund, a separate account, in an amount determined by the Legislature, to be known as the "Special Facility Construction Account." The Special Facility Construction Account shall be used to provide necessary construction funds to school districts which have urgent construction needs but which lack sufficient resources at present, and cannot reasonably anticipate sufficient resources within the period of the next 3 years, for these purposes from currently authorized sources of capital outlay revenue. A school district requesting funding from the Special Facility Construction Account shall submit one specific construction project, not to exceed one complete educational plant, to the Special Facility Construction Committee. A district may not receive funding for more than one approved project in any 3-year period ~~or while any portion of the district's participation requirement is outstanding.~~ The first year of the 3-year period shall be the first year a district receives an appropriation. The department shall encourage a construction program that reduces the average size of schools in the district. The request

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2785 must meet the following criteria to be considered by the
2786 committee:

2787 1. The project must be deemed a critical need and must be
2788 recommended for funding by the Special Facility Construction
2789 Committee. Before developing construction plans for the proposed
2790 facility, the district school board must request a
2791 preapplication review by the Special Facility Construction
2792 Committee or a project review subcommittee convened by the chair
2793 of the committee to include two representatives of the
2794 department and two staff members from school districts not
2795 eligible to participate in the program. A school district may
2796 request a preapplication review at any time; however, if the
2797 district school board seeks inclusion in the department's next
2798 annual capital outlay legislative budget request, the
2799 preapplication review request must be made before February 1.
2800 Within 90 days after receiving the preapplication review
2801 request, the committee or subcommittee must meet in the school
2802 district to review the project proposal and existing facilities.
2803 To determine whether the proposed project is a critical need,
2804 the committee or subcommittee shall consider, at a minimum, the
2805 capacity of all existing facilities within the district as
2806 determined by the Florida Inventory of School Houses; the
2807 district's pattern of student growth; the district's existing
2808 and projected capital outlay full-time equivalent student
2809 enrollment as determined by the demographic, revenue, and
2810 education estimating conferences established in s. 216.136; the
2811 district's existing satisfactory student stations; the use of
2812 all existing district property and facilities; grade level
2813 configurations; and any other information that may affect the

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2814 need for the proposed project.

2815 2. The construction project must be recommended in the most
2816 recent survey or survey amendment cooperatively prepared by the
2817 district and the department, and approved by the department
2818 under the rules of the State Board of Education. If a district
2819 employs a consultant in the preparation of a survey or survey
2820 amendment, the consultant may not be employed by or receive
2821 compensation from a third party that designs or constructs a
2822 project recommended by the survey.

2823 3. The construction project must appear on the district's
2824 approved project priority list under the rules of the State
2825 Board of Education.

2826 4. The district must have selected and had approved a site
2827 for the construction project in compliance with s. 1013.36 and
2828 the rules of the State Board of Education.

2829 5. The district shall have developed a district school
2830 board adopted list of facilities that do not exceed the norm for
2831 net square feet occupancy requirements under the State
2832 Requirements for Educational Facilities, using all possible
2833 programmatic combinations for multiple use of space to obtain
2834 maximum daily use of all spaces within the facility under
2835 consideration.

2836 6. Upon construction, the total cost per student station,
2837 including change orders, must not exceed the cost per student
2838 station as provided in subsection (6) unless approved by the
2839 Special Facility Construction Committee. At the discretion of
2840 the committee, costs that exceed the cost per student station
2841 for special facilities may include legal and administrative
2842 fees, the cost of site improvements or related offsite

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improvements, the cost of complying with public shelter and hurricane hardening requirements, cost overruns created by a disaster as defined in s. 252.34(2), costs of security enhancements approved by the school safety specialist, and unforeseeable circumstances beyond the district's control.

7. There shall be an agreement signed by the district school board stating that it will advertise for bids within 30 days of receipt of its encumbrance authorization from the department.

8.a.(I) For construction projects for which Special Facilities Construction Account funding is sought before the 2019-2020 fiscal year, the district shall, at the time of the request and for a continuing period necessary to meet the district's participation requirement, levy the maximum millage against its nonexempt assessed property value as allowed in s. 1011.71(2) or shall raise an equivalent amount of revenue from the school capital outlay surtax authorized under s. 212.055(6).

(II) Beginning with construction projects for which Special Facilities Construction Account funding is sought in the 2019-2020 fiscal year, the district shall, for a minimum of 3 years before submitting the request and for a continuing period necessary to meet its participation requirement, levy the maximum millage against the district's nonexempt assessed property value as authorized under s. 1011.71(2) or shall raise an equivalent amount of revenue from the school capital outlay surtax authorized under s. 212.055(6).

(III) Beginning with the 2025-2026 fiscal year, any district with an a-new or active project or an outstanding participation requirement balance, funded under the provisions

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~~of~~ this subsection, shall be required to budget no more than the value of 1 mill per year to the project until the district's participation requirement relating to the local discretionary capital improvement millage or the equivalent amount of revenue from the school capital outlay surtax is satisfied.

b. For construction projects for which Special Facilities Construction Account funding is sought beginning in the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the district shall, for a minimum of 3 years before submitting the request and for the initial year of the appropriation and the two years following the initial appropriation, levy the maximum millage against the district's nonexempt assessed property value as authorized under s. 1011.71(2) or shall raise an equivalent amount of revenue from the school capital outlay surtax authorized under s. 212.055(6). The district is not required to budget the funds toward the project, but must use the funds as authorized pursuant to s. 1011.71 or s. 212.055(6), as applicable.

9. If a contract has not been signed 90 days after the advertising of bids, the funding for the specific project must ~~shall~~ revert to the Special Facility New Construction Account to be reallocated to other projects on the list. However, an additional 90 days may be granted by the commissioner.

10. The department shall certify the inability of the district to fund the survey-recommended project over a continuous 3-year period using projected capital outlay revenue derived from s. 9(d), Art. XII of the State Constitution, as amended, paragraph (3)(a) of this section, and s. 1011.71(2).

11.a. For projects funded before the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the district shall have on file with the department an adopted

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resolution acknowledging its commitment to satisfy its participation requirement, which is equivalent to all unencumbered and future revenue acquired from s. 9(d), Art. XII of the State Constitution, as amended, paragraph (3)(a) of this section, and s. 1011.71(2), in the year of the initial appropriation and for the 2 years immediately following the initial appropriation.

b. For projects funded during the 2025-2026 fiscal year, and thereafter, the district shall have on file with the department an adopted resolution acknowledging its commitment to comply with the requirements of this paragraph.

12. Phase I plans must be approved by the district school board as being in compliance with the building and life safety codes before June 1 of the year the application is made.

Section 41. For the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the sum of \$1 million in recurring funds from the General Revenue Fund is appropriated to the Florida Small Business Development Center Network under s. 288.001, Florida Statutes, to expand services in rural communities. The funds shall be allocated to the Office of Rural Prosperity budget entity within the Department of Commerce in the Special Categories-SBDCN Rural Services specific appropriation category.

Section 42. (1) For the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the sums of \$1,827,591 in recurring funds and \$652,327 in nonrecurring funds are appropriated from the General Revenue Fund to the Department of Commerce.

(2) The recurring general revenue funds shall be allocated to the Office of Rural Prosperity budget entity in the following specific appropriations categories: \$1,585,823 in Salaries and

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Benefits, \$175,961 in Expenses, \$50,000 in Contracted Services, \$10,000 in Operating Capital Outlay, and \$5,807 in Transfer to the Department of Management Services/Statewide Human Resources Contract.

(3) The nonrecurring general revenue funds shall be allocated to the Office of Rural Prosperity budget entity in the following specific appropriations categories: \$92,327 in Expenses and \$560,000 in Acquisition of Motor Vehicles.

(4) The Department of Commerce is authorized to establish 17.00 full-time equivalent positions with associated salary rate of 1,060,000 in the Office of Rural Prosperity for the purpose of implementing this act. The following specific positions, classifications, and pay plans are authorized: 1.00 Director of General Operation, Class Code 9327, Pay Grade 940; 15.00 Government Analyst II, Class Code 2225, Pay Grade 026; and 1.00 Administrative Assistant II, Class Code 0712, Pay Grade 018.

Section 43. For the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the recurring sum of \$8 million from the General Revenue Fund is appropriated to the Office of Rural Prosperity within the Department of Commerce to implement the Renaissance Grants Program created by s. 288.014, Florida Statutes. No funds may be used by the state for administrative costs.

Section 44. For the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the recurring sum of \$500,000 from the Grants and Donations Trust Fund is appropriated to the Office of Rural Prosperity within the Department of Commerce to implement the Public Infrastructure Smart Technology Grant Program created by s. 288.0175, Florida Statutes.

Section 45. For the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the sums of \$4

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2959 million in nonrecurring funds and \$1 million in recurring funds
 2960 from the General Revenue Fund are appropriated to the Office of
 2961 Rural Prosperity within the Department of Commerce to implement
 2962 the Rural Community Development Revolving Loan Fund under s.
 2963 288.065, Florida Statutes, as amended by this act.

2964 Section 46. For the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the sums of \$40
 2965 million in nonrecurring funds and \$5 million in recurring funds
 2966 from the General Revenue Fund are appropriated to the Office of
 2967 Rural Prosperity within the Department of Commerce to implement
 2968 the Rural Infrastructure Fund under s. 288.0655, Florida
 2969 Statutes, as amended by this act.

2970 Section 47. For the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the sum of
 2971 \$250,000 in recurring funds from the Grants and Donations Trust
 2972 Fund is appropriated to the Office of Rural Prosperity within
 2973 the Department of Commerce to implement s. 288.0657, Florida
 2974 Statutes, as amended by this act.

2975 Section 48. For the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the sum of \$30
 2976 million in nonrecurring funds from the General Revenue Fund is
 2977 appropriated to the Florida Housing Finance Corporation to be
 2978 used to preserve affordable multifamily rental housing in rural
 2979 communities funded through United States Department of
 2980 Agriculture loans. The funds provided in this appropriation
 2981 shall be used to issue competitive requests for application for
 2982 the rehabilitation or acquisition of such properties to ensure
 2983 continued affordability. By October 1, 2026, the Florida Housing
 2984 Finance Corporation shall submit a report to the President of
 2985 the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives on
 2986 projects funded pursuant to this section, which report must
 2987 include the number of units preserved and the financing

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2988 portfolio for each project.

2989 Section 49. For the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the sum of \$25
 2990 million in nonrecurring funds from the General Revenue Fund is
 2991 appropriated to the Department of Health for the purpose of
 2992 implementing the Rural Access to Primary and Preventive Care
 2993 Grant Program created under s. 381.403, Florida Statutes. Grant
 2994 funds shall be awarded over a 5-year period. Notwithstanding s.
 2995 216.301, Florida Statutes, and pursuant to s. 216.351, Florida
 2996 Statutes, the unexpended balance of funds appropriated pursuant
 2997 to this section which is not disbursed by June 30 of the fiscal
 2998 year in which funds are appropriated may be carried forward
 2999 through the 2033-2034 fiscal year.

3000 Section 50. For the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the sum of \$5
 3001 million in nonrecurring funds from the General Revenue Fund is
 3002 appropriated to the Department of Health for the purpose of
 3003 implementing the Stroke, Cardiac, and Obstetric Response and
 3004 Education Grant Program under s. 381.9856, Florida Statutes.
 3005 Notwithstanding s. 216.301, Florida Statutes, and pursuant to s.
 3006 216.351, Florida Statutes, the unexpended balance of funds
 3007 appropriated pursuant to this section which is not disbursed by
 3008 June 30 of the fiscal year in which funds are appropriated may
 3009 be carried forward through the 2029-2030 fiscal year.

3010 Section 51. For the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the sum of \$25
 3011 million in nonrecurring funds from the General Revenue Fund is
 3012 appropriated in fixed capital outlay to the Department of Health
 3013 for the purpose of implementing the rural hospital capital
 3014 improvement grant program under s. 395.6061, Florida Statutes.

3015 Section 52. For the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the sums of
 3016 \$1,499,261 in recurring funds from the General Revenue Fund and

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 3017 \$1,933,112 in recurring funds from the Medical Care Trust Fund
 3018 are appropriated to the Agency for Health Care Administration to
 3019 establish a Diagnosis-Related Grouping (DRG) reimbursement
 3020 methodology for critical access hospitals, as defined in s.
 3021 408.07, Florida Statutes, for the purpose of providing inpatient
 3022 reimbursement to such a hospital in amounts comparable to the
 3023 reimbursement the hospital would receive for inpatient services
 3024 from the federal Medicare program. The 2025-2026 fiscal year
 3025 General Appropriations Act shall establish the DRG reimbursement
 3026 methodology for critical access hospital inpatient services as
 3027 directed in s. 409.905(5)(c), Florida Statutes.

Section 53. For the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the sums of
 3029 \$4,840,182 in recurring funds from the General Revenue Fund and
 3030 \$6,240,820 in recurring funds from the Medical Care Trust Fund
 3031 are appropriated to the Agency for Health Care Administration to
 3032 establish an Enhanced Ambulatory Patient Grouping (EAPG)
 3033 reimbursement methodology for critical access hospitals, as
 3034 defined in s. 408.07, Florida Statutes, for the purpose of
 3035 providing outpatient reimbursement to such a hospital in amounts
 3036 comparable to the reimbursement the hospital would receive for
 3037 outpatient services from the federal Medicare program. The 2025-
 3038 2026 fiscal year General Appropriations Act shall establish the
 3039 EAPG reimbursement methodology for critical access hospital
 3040 outpatient services as directed in s. 409.905(6)(b), Florida
 3041 Statutes.

Section 54. For the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the sum of \$3.6
 3043 million in recurring funds from the General Revenue Fund is
 3044 appropriated to the Department of Education to implement s.
 3045 1001.451, Florida Statutes, as amended by this act.

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 3046 Section 55. For the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the sum of \$25
 3047 million in recurring funds is appropriated from the General
 3048 Revenue Fund to the Department of Education to be distributed to
 3049 regional consortium service organizations under s. 1001.451,
 3050 Florida Statutes, in order to provide funds pursuant to s.
 3051 1001.4511, Florida Statutes. These funds shall be allocated as
 3052 follows: \$5,555,149 to the Heartland Educational Consortium;
 3053 \$11,912,923 to the North East Florida Educational Consortium;
 3054 and \$7,531,928 to the Panhandle Area Educational Consortium. The
 3055 funds must be distributed to each regional consortium service
 3056 organization no later than 30 days following the release of the
 3057 funds to the department.

Section 56. For the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the sum of \$7
 3059 million in recurring funds from the General Revenue Fund is
 3060 appropriated to the Department of Education to implement the
 3061 Rural Incentive for Professional Educators (RIPE) Program, s.
 3062 1009.635, Florida Statutes, as created by this act.

Section 57. Subsection (3) of section 163.3187, Florida
 3064 Statutes, is amended to read:

163.3187 Process for adoption of small scale comprehensive
 3066 plan amendment.—

(3) If the small scale development amendment involves a
 3068 site within a rural area of opportunity as defined under s.
 3069 288.0656 ~~s. 288.0656(2)-(d)~~ for the duration of such designation,
 3070 the acreage limit listed in subsection (1) shall be increased by
 3071 100 percent. The local government approving the small scale plan
 3072 amendment shall certify to the state land planning agency that
 3073 the plan amendment furthers the economic objectives set forth in
 3074 the executive order issued under s. 288.0656(7), and the

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property subject to the plan amendment shall undergo public review to ensure that all concurrency requirements and federal, state, and local environmental permit requirements are met.

Section 58. Section 212.205, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

212.205 Sales tax distribution reporting.—By March 15 of each year, each person who received a distribution pursuant to s. 212.20(6)(d)7.b. and c. ~~s. 212.20(6)(d)6.b. and c.~~ in the preceding calendar year shall report to the Office of Economic and Demographic Research the following information:

(1) An itemized accounting of all expenditures of the funds distributed in the preceding calendar year, including amounts spent on debt service.

(2) A statement indicating what portion of the distributed funds have been pledged for debt service.

(3) The original principal amount and current debt service schedule of any bonds or other borrowing for which the distributed funds have been pledged for debt service.

Section 59. Section 257.191, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

257.191 Construction grants.—The Division of Library and Information Services may accept and administer library construction moneys appropriated to it and shall allocate such appropriation to municipal, county, and regional libraries in the form of library construction grants on a matching basis. The local matching portion shall be no less than the grant amount, on a dollar-for-dollar basis, up to the maximum grant amount, unless the matching requirement is waived pursuant to s. 288.019 ~~by s. 288.06561~~. Initiation of a library construction project 12

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months or less prior to the grant award under this section does ~~shall~~ not affect the eligibility of an applicant to receive a library construction grant. The division shall adopt rules for the administration of library construction grants. For the purposes of this section, s. 257.21 does not apply.

Section 60. Subsection (2) of section 257.193, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

257.193 Community Libraries in Caring Program.—

(2) The purpose of the Community Libraries in Caring Program is to assist libraries in rural communities, as defined in s. 288.0656(2) and subject to the provisions of s. 288.019 ~~s. 288.06561~~, to strengthen their collections and services, improve literacy in their communities, and improve the economic viability of their communities.

Section 61. Subsection (17) of section 265.283, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

265.283 Definitions.—The following definitions shall apply to ss. 265.281-265.703:

(17) "Underserved arts community assistance program grants" means grants used by qualified organizations under the Rural Economic Development Initiative, pursuant to s. 288.0656 and subject to the provisions of s. 288.019 ~~ss. 288.0656 and 288.06561~~, for the purpose of economic and organizational development for underserved cultural organizations.

Section 62. Paragraphs (a) and (d) of subsection (3) of section 288.11621, Florida Statutes, are amended to read:

288.11621 Spring training baseball franchises.—

(3) USE OF FUNDS.—

(a) A certified applicant may use funds provided under s.

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212.20(6)(d)7.b. ~~s. 212.20(6)(d)6.b.~~ only to:

1. Serve the public purpose of acquiring, constructing, reconstructing, or renovating a facility for a spring training franchise.

2. Pay or pledge for the payment of debt service on, or to fund debt service reserve funds, arbitrage rebate obligations, or other amounts payable with respect thereto, bonds issued for the acquisition, construction, reconstruction, or renovation of such facility, or for the reimbursement of such costs or the refinancing of bonds issued for such purposes.

3. Assist in the relocation of a spring training franchise from one unit of local government to another only if the governing board of the current host local government by a majority vote agrees to relocation.

(d)1. All certified applicants must place unexpended state funds received pursuant to s. 212.20(6)(d)7.b. ~~s. 212.20(6)(d)6.b.~~ in a trust fund or separate account for use only as authorized in this section.

2. A certified applicant may request that the Department of Revenue suspend further distributions of state funds made available under s. 212.20(6)(d)7.b. ~~s. 212.20(6)(d)6.b.~~ for 12 months after expiration of an existing agreement with a spring training franchise to provide the certified applicant with an opportunity to enter into a new agreement with a spring training franchise, at which time the distributions shall resume.

3. The expenditure of state funds distributed to an applicant certified before July 1, 2010, must begin within 48 months after the initial receipt of the state funds. In addition, the construction of, or capital improvements to, a

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spring training facility must be completed within 24 months after the project's commencement.

Section 63. Paragraph (c) of subsection (2) and paragraphs (a), (c), and (d) of subsection (3) of section 288.11631, Florida Statutes, are amended to read:

288.11631 Retention of Major League Baseball spring training baseball franchises.—

(2) CERTIFICATION PROCESS.—

(c) Each applicant certified on or after July 1, 2013, shall enter into an agreement with the department which:

1. Specifies the amount of the state incentive funding to be distributed. The amount of state incentive funding per certified applicant may not exceed \$20 million. However, if a certified applicant's facility is used by more than one spring training franchise, the maximum amount may not exceed \$50 million, and the Department of Revenue shall make distributions to the applicant pursuant to s. 212.20(6)(d)7.c. ~~s. 212.20(6)(d)6.e.~~

2. States the criteria that the certified applicant must meet in order to remain certified. These criteria must include a provision stating that the spring training franchise must reimburse the state for any funds received if the franchise does not comply with the terms of the contract. If bonds were issued to construct or renovate a facility for a spring training franchise, the required reimbursement must be equal to the total amount of state distributions expected to be paid from the date the franchise violates the agreement with the applicant through the final maturity of the bonds.

3. States that the certified applicant is subject to

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3191 decertification if the certified applicant fails to comply with
 3192 this section or the agreement.

3193 4. States that the department may recover state incentive
 3194 funds if the certified applicant is decertified.

3195 5. Specifies the information that the certified applicant
 3196 must report to the department.

3197 6. Includes any provision deemed prudent by the department.

3198 (3) USE OF FUNDS.—

3199 (a) A certified applicant may use funds provided under s.
 3200 212.20(6)(d)7.c. ~~s. 212.20(6)(d)6.e.~~ only to:

3201 1. Serve the public purpose of constructing or renovating a
 3202 facility for a spring training franchise.

3203 2. Pay or pledge for the payment of debt service on, or to
 3204 fund debt service reserve funds, arbitrage rebate obligations,
 3205 or other amounts payable with respect thereto, bonds issued for
 3206 the construction or renovation of such facility, or for the
 3207 reimbursement of such costs or the refinancing of bonds issued
 3208 for such purposes.

3209 (c) The Department of Revenue may not distribute funds
 3210 under s. 212.20(6)(d)7.c. ~~s. 212.20(6)(d)6.e.~~ until July 1,
 3211 2016. Further, the Department of Revenue may not distribute
 3212 funds to an applicant certified on or after July 1, 2013, until
 3213 it receives notice from the department that:

3214 1. The certified applicant has encumbered funds under
 3215 either subparagraph (a)1. or subparagraph (a)2.; and

3216 2. If applicable, any existing agreement with a spring
 3217 training franchise for the use of a facility has expired.

3218 (d)1. All certified applicants shall place unexpended state
 3219 funds received pursuant to s. 212.20(6)(d)7.c. ~~s.~~

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3220 ~~212.20(6)(d)6.e.~~ in a trust fund or separate account for use
 3221 only as authorized in this section.

3222 2. A certified applicant may request that the department
 3223 notify the Department of Revenue to suspend further
 3224 distributions of state funds made available under s.
 3225 212.20(6)(d)7.c. ~~s. 212.20(6)(d)6.e.~~ for 12 months after
 3226 expiration of an existing agreement with a spring training
 3227 franchise to provide the certified applicant with an opportunity
 3228 to enter into a new agreement with a spring training franchise,
 3229 at which time the distributions shall resume.

3230 3. The expenditure of state funds distributed to an
 3231 applicant certified after July 1, 2013, must begin within 48
 3232 months after the initial receipt of the state funds. In
 3233 addition, the construction or renovation of a spring training
 3234 facility must be completed within 24 months after the project's
 3235 commencement.

3236 Section 64. Subsection (1) of section 443.191, Florida
 3237 Statutes, is amended to read:

3238 443.191 Unemployment Compensation Trust Fund; establishment
 3239 and control.—

3240 (1) There is established, as a separate trust fund apart
 3241 from all other public funds of this state, an Unemployment
 3242 Compensation Trust Fund, which shall be administered by the
 3243 Department of Commerce exclusively for the purposes of this
 3244 chapter. The fund must consist of:

3245 (a) All contributions and reimbursements collected under
 3246 this chapter;

3247 (b) Interest earned on any moneys in the fund;

3248 (c) Any property or securities acquired through the use of

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3249 moneys belonging to the fund;

3250 (d) All earnings of these properties or securities;

3251 (e) All money credited to this state's account in the
3252 federal Unemployment Compensation Trust Fund under 42 U.S.C. s.
3253 1103;

3254 (f) All money collected for penalties imposed pursuant to
3255 s. 443.151(6)(a);

3256 (g) Advances on the amount in the federal Unemployment
3257 Compensation Trust Fund credited to the state under 42 U.S.C. s.
3258 1321, as requested by the Governor or the Governor's designee;
3259 and

3260 (h) All money deposited in this account as a distribution
3261 pursuant to s. 212.20(6)(d)7.e. ~~s. 212.20(6)(d)6.e.~~

3262

3263 Except as otherwise provided in s. 443.1313(4), all moneys in
3264 the fund must be mingled and undivided.

3265 Section 65. Section 571.26, Florida Statutes, is amended to
3266 read:

3267 571.26 Florida Agricultural Promotional Campaign Trust
3268 Fund.—There is hereby created the Florida Agricultural
3269 Promotional Campaign Trust Fund within the Department of
3270 Agriculture and Consumer Services to receive all moneys related
3271 to the Florida Agricultural Promotional Campaign. Moneys
3272 deposited in the trust fund shall be appropriated for the sole
3273 purpose of implementing the Florida Agricultural Promotional
3274 Campaign, except for money deposited in the trust fund pursuant
3275 to s. 212.20(6)(d)7.h. ~~s. 212.20(6)(d)6.h.~~, which shall be held
3276 separately and used solely for the purposes identified in s.
3277 571.265.

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3278 Section 66. Subsection (2) of section 571.265, Florida
3279 Statutes, is amended to read:

3280 571.265 Promotion of Florida thoroughbred breeding and of
3281 thoroughbred racing at Florida thoroughbred tracks; distribution
3282 of funds.—

3283 (2) Funds deposited into the Florida Agricultural
3284 Promotional Campaign Trust Fund pursuant to s. 212.20(6)(d)7.f.
3285 ~~s. 212.20(6)(d)6.f.~~ shall be used by the department to encourage
3286 the agricultural activity of breeding thoroughbred racehorses in
3287 this state and to enhance thoroughbred racing conducted at
3288 thoroughbred tracks in this state as provided in this section.
3289 If the funds made available under this section are not fully
3290 used in any one fiscal year, any unused amounts shall be carried
3291 forward in the trust fund into future fiscal years and made
3292 available for distribution as provided in this section.

3293 Section 67. For the purpose of incorporating the amendment
3294 made by this act to section 20.60, Florida Statutes, in a
3295 reference thereto, subsection (8) of section 288.9935, Florida
3296 Statutes, is reenacted to read:

3297 288.9935 Microfinance Guarantee Program.—

3298 (8) The department must, in the department's report
3299 required under s. 20.60(10), include an annual report on the
3300 program. The report must, at a minimum, provide:

3301 (a) A comprehensive description of the program, including
3302 an evaluation of its application and guarantee activities,
3303 recommendations for change, and identification of any other
3304 state programs that overlap with the program;

3305 (b) An assessment of the current availability of and access
3306 to credit for entrepreneurs and small businesses in this state;

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3307 (c) A summary of the financial and employment results of
 3308 the entrepreneurs and small businesses receiving loan
 3309 guarantees, including the number of full-time equivalent jobs
 3310 created as a result of the guaranteed loans and the amount of
 3311 wages paid to employees in the newly created jobs;
 3312 (d) Industry data about the borrowers, including the six-
 3313 digit North American Industry Classification System (NAICS)
 3314 code;
 3315 (e) The name and location of lenders that receive loan
 3316 guarantees;
 3317 (f) The number of loan guarantee applications received;
 3318 (g) The number, duration, location, and amount of
 3319 guarantees made;
 3320 (h) The number and amount of guaranteed loans outstanding,
 3321 if any;
 3322 (i) The number and amount of guaranteed loans with payments
 3323 overdue, if any;
 3324 (j) The number and amount of guaranteed loans in default,
 3325 if any;
 3326 (k) The repayment history of the guaranteed loans made; and
 3327 (l) An evaluation of the program's ability to meet the
 3328 financial performance measures and objectives specified in
 3329 subsection (3).
 3330 Section 68. For the purpose of incorporating the amendment
 3331 made by this act to section 218.67, Florida Statutes, in a
 3332 reference thereto, paragraph (c) of subsection (5) of section
 3333 125.0104, Florida Statutes, is reenacted to read:
 3334 125.0104 Tourist development tax; procedure for levying;
 3335 authorized uses; referendum; enforcement.—

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3336 (5) AUTHORIZED USES OF REVENUE.—
 3337 (c) A county located adjacent to the Gulf of Mexico or the
 3338 Atlantic Ocean, except a county that receives revenue from taxes
 3339 levied pursuant to s. 125.0108, which meets the following
 3340 criteria may use up to 10 percent of the tax revenue received
 3341 pursuant to this section to reimburse expenses incurred in
 3342 providing public safety services, including emergency medical
 3343 services as defined in s. 401.107(3), and law enforcement
 3344 services, which are needed to address impacts related to
 3345 increased tourism and visitors to an area. However, if taxes
 3346 collected pursuant to this section are used to reimburse
 3347 emergency medical services or public safety services for tourism
 3348 or special events, the governing board of a county or
 3349 municipality may not use such taxes to supplant the normal
 3350 operating expenses of an emergency medical services department,
 3351 a fire department, a sheriff's office, or a police department.
 3352 To receive reimbursement, the county must:
 3353 1.a. Generate a minimum of \$10 million in annual proceeds
 3354 from any tax, or any combination of taxes, authorized to be
 3355 levied pursuant to this section;
 3356 b. Have at least three municipalities; and
 3357 c. Have an estimated population of less than 275,000,
 3358 according to the most recent population estimate prepared
 3359 pursuant to s. 186.901, excluding the inmate population; or
 3360 2. Be a fiscally constrained county as described in s.
 3361 218.67(1).
 3362
 3363 The board of county commissioners must by majority vote approve
 3364 reimbursement made pursuant to this paragraph upon receipt of a

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recommendation from the tourist development council.

Section 69. For the purpose of incorporating the amendment made by this act to section 218.67, Florida Statutes, in a reference thereto, subsection (3) of section 193.624, Florida Statutes, is reenacted to read:

193.624 Assessment of renewable energy source devices.—

(3) This section applies to the installation of a renewable energy source device installed on or after January 1, 2013, to new and existing residential real property. This section applies to a renewable energy source device installed on or after January 1, 2018, to all other real property, except when installed as part of a project planned for a location in a fiscally constrained county, as defined in s. 218.67(1), and for which an application for a comprehensive plan amendment or planned unit development zoning has been filed with the county on or before December 31, 2017.

Section 70. For the purpose of incorporating the amendment made by this act to section 218.67, Florida Statutes, in a reference thereto, subsection (2) of section 196.182, Florida Statutes, is reenacted to read:

196.182 Exemption of renewable energy source devices.—

(2) The exemption provided in this section does not apply to a renewable energy source device that is installed as part of a project planned for a location in a fiscally constrained county, as defined in s. 218.67(1), and for which an application for a comprehensive plan amendment or planned unit development zoning has been filed with the county on or before December 31, 2017.

Section 71. For the purpose of incorporating the amendment

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made by this act to section 218.67, Florida Statutes, in a reference thereto, subsection (1) of section 218.12, Florida Statutes, is reenacted to read:

218.12 Appropriations to offset reductions in ad valorem tax revenue in fiscally constrained counties.—

(1) Beginning in fiscal year 2008-2009, the Legislature shall appropriate moneys to offset the reductions in ad valorem tax revenue experienced by fiscally constrained counties, as defined in s. 218.67(1), which occur as a direct result of the implementation of revisions of Art. VII of the State Constitution approved in the special election held on January 29, 2008. The moneys appropriated for this purpose shall be distributed in January of each fiscal year among the fiscally constrained counties based on each county's proportion of the total reduction in ad valorem tax revenue resulting from the implementation of the revision.

Section 72. For the purpose of incorporating the amendment made by this act to section 218.67, Florida Statutes, in a reference thereto, subsection (1) of section 218.125, Florida Statutes, is reenacted to read:

218.125 Offset for tax loss associated with certain constitutional amendments affecting fiscally constrained counties.—

(1) Beginning in the 2010-2011 fiscal year, the Legislature shall appropriate moneys to offset the reductions in ad valorem tax revenue experienced by fiscally constrained counties, as defined in s. 218.67(1), which occur as a direct result of the implementation of revisions of ss. 3(f) and 4(b), Art. VII of the State Constitution which were approved in the general

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election held in November 2008. The moneys appropriated for this purpose shall be distributed in January of each fiscal year among the fiscally constrained counties based on each county's proportion of the total reduction in ad valorem tax revenue resulting from the implementation of the revisions.

Section 73. For the purpose of incorporating the amendment made by this act to section 218.67, Florida Statutes, in a reference thereto, subsection (1) of section 218.135, Florida Statutes, is reenacted to read:

218.135 Offset for tax loss associated with reductions in value of certain citrus fruit packing and processing equipment.—

(1) For the 2018-2019 fiscal year, the Legislature shall appropriate moneys to offset the reductions in ad valorem tax revenue experienced by fiscally constrained counties, as defined in s. 218.67(1), which occur as a direct result of the implementation of s. 193.4516. The moneys appropriated for this purpose shall be distributed in January 2019 among the fiscally constrained counties based on each county's proportion of the total reduction in ad valorem tax revenue resulting from the implementation of s. 193.4516.

Section 74. For the purpose of incorporating the amendment made by this act to section 218.67, Florida Statutes, in a reference thereto, subsection (1) of section 218.136, Florida Statutes, is reenacted to read:

218.136 Offset for ad valorem revenue loss affecting fiscally constrained counties.—

(1) Beginning in fiscal year 2025-2026, the Legislature shall appropriate moneys to offset the reductions in ad valorem tax revenue experienced by fiscally constrained counties, as

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defined in s. 218.67(1), which occur as a direct result of the implementation of revisions of s. 6(a), Art. VII of the State Constitution approved in the November 2024 general election. The moneys appropriated for this purpose shall be distributed in January of each fiscal year among the fiscally constrained counties based on each county's proportion of the total reduction in ad valorem tax revenue resulting from the implementation of the revision of s. 6(a), Art. VII of the State Constitution.

Section 75. For the purpose of incorporating the amendment made by this act to section 218.67, Florida Statutes, in a reference thereto, paragraph (cc) of subsection (2) of section 252.35, Florida Statutes, is reenacted to read:

252.35 Emergency management powers; Division of Emergency Management.—

(2) The division is responsible for carrying out the provisions of ss. 252.31-252.90. In performing its duties, the division shall:

(cc) Prioritize technical assistance and training to fiscally constrained counties as defined in s. 218.67(1) on aspects of safety measures, preparedness, prevention, response, recovery, and mitigation relating to natural disasters and emergencies.

Section 76. For the purpose of incorporating the amendment made by this act to section 218.67, Florida Statutes, in a reference thereto, subsection (4) of section 288.102, Florida Statutes, is reenacted to read:

288.102 Supply Chain Innovation Grant Program.—

(4) A minimum of a one-to-one match of nonstate resources,

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including local, federal, or private funds, to the state contribution is required. An award may not be made for a project that is receiving or using state funding from another state source or statutory program, including tax credits. The one-to-one match requirement is waived for a public entity located in a fiscally constrained county as defined in s. 218.67(1).

Section 77. For the purpose of incorporating the amendment made by this act to section 218.67, Florida Statutes, in a reference thereto, paragraph (g) of subsection (16) of section 403.064, Florida Statutes, is reenacted to read:

403.064 Reuse of reclaimed water.-

(16) By November 1, 2021, domestic wastewater utilities that dispose of effluent, reclaimed water, or reuse water by surface water discharge shall submit to the department for review and approval a plan for eliminating nonbeneficial surface water discharge by January 1, 2032, subject to the requirements of this section. The plan must include the average gallons per day of effluent, reclaimed water, or reuse water that will no longer be discharged into surface waters and the date of such elimination, the average gallons per day of surface water discharge which will continue in accordance with the alternatives provided for in subparagraphs (a)2. and 3., and the level of treatment that the effluent, reclaimed water, or reuse water will receive before being discharged into a surface water by each alternative.

(g) This subsection does not apply to any of the following:

1. A domestic wastewater treatment facility that is located in a fiscally constrained county as described in s. 218.67(1).
2. A domestic wastewater treatment facility that is located

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in a municipality that is entirely within a rural area of opportunity as designated pursuant to s. 288.0656.

3. A domestic wastewater treatment facility that is located in a municipality that has less than \$10 million in total revenue, as determined by the municipality's most recent annual financial report submitted to the Department of Financial Services in accordance with s. 218.32.

4. A domestic wastewater treatment facility that is operated by an operator of a mobile home park as defined in s. 723.003 and has a permitted capacity of less than 300,000 gallons per day.

Section 78. For the purpose of incorporating the amendment made by this act to section 218.67, Florida Statutes, in references thereto, subsections (2) and (3) of section 589.08, Florida Statutes, are reenacted to read:

589.08 Land acquisition restrictions.-

(2) The Florida Forest Service may receive, hold the custody of, and exercise the control of any lands, and set aside into a separate, distinct and inviolable fund, any proceeds derived from the sales of the products of such lands, the use thereof in any manner, or the sale of such lands save the 25 percent of the proceeds to be paid into the State School Fund as provided by law. The Florida Forest Service may use and apply such funds for the acquisition, use, custody, management, development, or improvement of any lands vested in or subject to the control of the Florida Forest Service. After full payment has been made for the purchase of a state forest to the Federal Government or other grantor, 15 percent of the gross receipts from a state forest shall be paid to the fiscally constrained

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county or counties, as described in s. 218.67(1), in which it is located in proportion to the acreage located in each county for use by the county or counties for school purposes.

(3) The Florida Forest Service shall pay 15 percent of the gross receipts from the Goethe State Forest to each fiscally constrained county, as described in s. 218.67(1), in which a portion of the respective forest is located in proportion to the forest acreage located in such county. The funds must be equally divided between the board of county commissioners and the school board of each fiscally constrained county.

Section 79. For the purpose of incorporating the amendment made by this act to section 218.67, Florida Statutes, in a reference thereto, paragraph (f) of subsection (1) of section 1011.62, Florida Statutes, is reenacted to read:

1011.62 Funds for operation of schools.—If the annual allocation from the Florida Education Finance Program to each district for operation of schools is not determined in the annual appropriations act or the substantive bill implementing the annual appropriations act, it shall be determined as follows:

(1) COMPUTATION OF THE BASIC AMOUNT TO BE INCLUDED FOR OPERATION.—The following procedure shall be followed in determining the annual allocation to each district for operation:

(f) *Small district factor.*—An additional value per full-time equivalent student membership is provided to each school district with a full-time equivalent student membership of fewer than 20,000 full-time equivalent students which is in a fiscally constrained county as described in s. 218.67(1). The amount of

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the additional value shall be specified in the General Appropriations Act.

Section 80. For the purpose of incorporating the amendment made by this act to sections 218.67 and 339.2818, Florida Statutes, in references thereto, paragraph (c) of subsection (6) of section 403.0741, Florida Statutes, is reenacted to read:

403.0741 Grease waste removal and disposal.—

(6) REGULATION BY LOCAL GOVERNMENTS.—

(c) Fiscally constrained counties as described in s. 218.67(1) and small counties as defined in s. 339.2818(2) may opt out of the requirements of this section.

Section 81. For the purpose of incorporating the amendment made by this act to section 288.0656, Florida Statutes, in a reference thereto, paragraph (e) of subsection (7) of section 163.3177, Florida Statutes, is reenacted to read:

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

(7)

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

Section 82. For the purpose of incorporating the amendment made by this act to section 288.9961, Florida Statutes, in a reference thereto, paragraph (a) of subsection (7) of section 288.9962, Florida Statutes, is reenacted to read:

288.9962 Broadband Opportunity Program.—

(7)(a) In evaluating grant applications and awarding grants, the office must give priority to applications that:

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3597 1. Offer broadband Internet service to important community
 3598 institutions, including, but not limited to, libraries,
 3599 educational institutions, public safety facilities, and health
 3600 care facilities;
 3601 2. Facilitate the use of telemedicine and electronic health
 3602 records;
 3603 3. Serve economically distressed areas of this state, as
 3604 measured by indices of unemployment, poverty, or population loss
 3605 that are significantly greater than the statewide average;
 3606 4. Provide for scalability to transmission speeds of at
 3607 least 100 megabits per second download and 10 megabits per
 3608 second upload;
 3609 5. Include a component to actively promote the adoption of
 3610 the newly available broadband Internet service in the community;
 3611 6. Provide evidence of strong support for the project from
 3612 citizens, government, businesses, and institutions in the
 3613 community;
 3614 7. Provide access to broadband Internet service to the
 3615 greatest number of unserved households and businesses;
 3616 8. Leverage greater amounts of funding for a project from
 3617 private sources; or
 3618 9. Demonstrate consistency with the strategic plan adopted
 3619 under s. 288.9961.
 3620 Section 83. For the purpose of incorporating the amendment
 3621 made by this act to section 319.32, Florida Statutes, in a
 3622 reference thereto, subsection (1) of section 215.211, Florida
 3623 Statutes, is reenacted to read:
 3624 215.211 Service charge; elimination or reduction for
 3625 specified proceeds.—

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3626 (1) Notwithstanding the provisions of s. 215.20(1) and
 3627 former s. 215.20(3), the service charge provided in s. 215.20(1)
 3628 and former s. 215.20(3), which is deducted from the proceeds of
 3629 the taxes distributed under ss. 206.606(1), 207.026,
 3630 212.0501(6), and 319.32(5), shall be eliminated beginning July
 3631 1, 2000.
 3632 Section 84. For the purpose of incorporating the amendment
 3633 made by this act to section 339.68, Florida Statutes, in
 3634 references thereto, subsections (5) and (6) of section 339.66,
 3635 Florida Statutes, are reenacted to read:
 3636 339.66 Upgrade of arterial highways with controlled access
 3637 facilities.—
 3638 (5) Any existing applicable requirements relating to
 3639 department projects shall apply to projects undertaken by the
 3640 department pursuant to this section. The department shall take
 3641 into consideration the guidance and recommendations of any
 3642 previous studies or reports relevant to the projects authorized
 3643 by this section and ss. 339.67 and 339.68, including, but not
 3644 limited to, the task force reports prepared pursuant to chapter
 3645 2019-43, Laws of Florida.
 3646 (6) Any existing applicable requirements relating to
 3647 turnpike projects apply to projects undertaken by the Turnpike
 3648 Enterprise pursuant to this section. The Turnpike Enterprise
 3649 shall take into consideration the guidance and recommendations
 3650 of any previous studies or reports relevant to the projects
 3651 authorized by this section and ss. 339.67 and 339.68, including,
 3652 but not limited to, the task force reports prepared pursuant to
 3653 chapter 2019-43, Laws of Florida, and with respect to any
 3654 extension of the Florida Turnpike from its northerly terminus in

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Section 85. For the purpose of incorporating the amendment made by this act to section 420.9073, Florida Statutes, in references thereto, subsections (4) and (6) of section 420.9072, Florida Statutes, are reenacted to read:

420.9072 State Housing Initiatives Partnership Program.—The State Housing Initiatives Partnership Program is created for the purpose of providing funds to counties and eligible municipalities as an incentive for the creation of local housing partnerships, to expand production of and preserve affordable housing, to further the housing element of the local government comprehensive plan specific to affordable housing, and to increase housing-related employment.

(4) Moneys in the Local Government Housing Trust Fund shall be distributed by the corporation to each approved county and eligible municipality within the county as provided in s. 420.9073. Distributions shall be allocated to the participating county and to each eligible municipality within the county according to an interlocal agreement between the county governing authority and the governing body of the eligible municipality or, if there is no interlocal agreement, according to population. The portion for each eligible municipality is computed by multiplying the total moneys earmarked for a county by a fraction, the numerator of which is the population of the eligible municipality and the denominator of which is the total population of the county. The remaining revenues shall be distributed to the governing body of the county.

(6) The moneys that otherwise would be distributed pursuant to s. 420.9073 to a local government that does not meet the

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program's requirements for receipts of such distributions shall remain in the Local Government Housing Trust Fund to be administered by the corporation.

Section 86. For the purpose of incorporating the amendment made by this act to section 420.9073, Florida Statutes, in a reference thereto, paragraph (b) of subsection (7) of section 420.9076, Florida Statutes, is reenacted to read:

420.9076 Adoption of affordable housing incentive strategies; committees.—

(7) The governing board of the county or the eligible municipality shall notify the corporation by certified mail of its adoption of an amendment of its local housing assistance plan to incorporate local housing incentive strategies. The notice must include a copy of the approved amended plan.

(b) If a county fails to timely adopt an amended local housing assistance plan to incorporate local housing incentive strategies but an eligible municipality receiving a local housing distribution pursuant to an interlocal agreement within the county does timely adopt an amended local housing assistance plan to incorporate local housing incentive strategies, the corporation, after issuance of a notice of termination, shall thereafter distribute directly to the participating eligible municipality its share calculated in the manner provided in s. 420.9073.

Section 87. For the purpose of incorporating the amendment made by this act to section 420.9073, Florida Statutes, in a reference thereto, subsection (2) of section 420.9079, Florida Statutes, is reenacted to read:

420.9079 Local Government Housing Trust Fund.—

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3713 (2) The corporation shall administer the fund exclusively
3714 for the purpose of implementing the programs described in ss.
3715 420.907-420.9076 and this section. With the exception of
3716 monitoring the activities of counties and eligible
3717 municipalities to determine local compliance with program
3718 requirements, the corporation shall not receive appropriations
3719 from the fund for administrative or personnel costs. For the
3720 purpose of implementing the compliance monitoring provisions of
3721 s. 420.9075(9), the corporation may request a maximum of one-
3722 quarter of 1 percent of the annual appropriation per state
3723 fiscal year. When such funding is appropriated, the corporation
3724 shall deduct the amount appropriated prior to calculating the
3725 local housing distribution pursuant to ss. 420.9072 and
3726 420.9073.

3727 Section 88. This act shall take effect July 1, 2025.

The Florida Senate

APPEARANCE RECORD

Deliver both copies of this form to
Senate professional staff conducting the meeting

3/13/25
Meeting Date

Fiscal Policy
Committee

SB 110
Bill Number or Topic

406258 STAKE ALL
Amendment Barcode (if applicable)

Name Ken Pruitt

Phone 772-971-5760

Address 2835 SHERRY BROOK LN
Street

Email KenPruitt5@gmail.com

Lutz
City

FL
State

33559
Zip

Speaking: ☐ For ☐ Against ☐ Information

OR

Waive Speaking: ☒ In Support ☐ Against

PLEASE CHECK ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:

☐ I am appearing without
compensation or sponsorship.

☒ I am a registered lobbyist,
representing:

Florida Association of Local
Housing Finance Authorities - Sadowski Capital

☐ I am not a lobbyist, but received
something of value for my appearance
(travel, meals, lodging, etc.),
sponsored by:

While it is a tradition to encourage public testimony, time may not permit all persons wishing to speak to be heard at this hearing. Those who do speak may be asked to limit their remarks so that as many persons as possible can be heard. If you have questions about registering to lobby please see Fla. Stat. §11.045 and Joint Rule 1. [2020-2022 Joint Rules.pdf \(flsenate.gov\)](#)

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3/13/25

Meeting Date

Fiscal Policy

Committee

SB 110

Bill Number or Topic

406258

Amendment Barcode (if applicable)

STRIKE
ALL

Name

Ken Pruitt

Phone

772-971-5760

Address

2835 SHERRY BROOK LN

Street

Lutz

City

FL

State

33559

Zip

Email

Kenpruitt95@gmail.com

Speaking:

☐

For

☐

Against

☐

Information

OR

Waive Speaking:

☒

In Support

☐

Against

PLEASE CHECK ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:

☐

I am appearing without
compensation or sponsorship.

☒

I am a registered lobbyist,
representing:

FLORIDA Emergency Medical
Physicians ~~Association~~ Alliance

☐

I am not a lobbyist, but received
something of value for my appearance
(travel, meals, lodging, etc.),
sponsored by:

While it is a tradition to encourage public testimony, time may not permit all persons wishing to speak to be heard at this hearing. Those who do speak may be asked to limit their remarks so that as many persons as possible can be heard. If you have questions about registering to lobby please see Fla. Stat. §11.045 and Joint Rule 1. [2020-2022 Joint Rules.pdf \(flsenate.gov\)](#)

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Deliver both copies of this form to
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Bill Number or Topic

110

406258

Amendment Barcode (if applicable)

Name

Corinne (Core-in) Nixon

Phone

Florida Academy of PA's

766-5755

Address

511 N. Adams

Street

Email

corinne.nixon@gmail.com

City

Tallahassee

State

32301

Zip

Speaking:

☐

For

☐

Against

☐

Information

OR

Waive Speaking:

☒

In Support

☐

Against

PLEASE CHECK ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:

☐

I am appearing without compensation or sponsorship.

☒

I am a registered lobbyist, representing:

☐

I am not a lobbyist, but received something of value for my appearance (travel, meals, lodging, etc.), sponsored by:

While it is a tradition to encourage public testimony, time may not permit all persons wishing to speak to be heard at this hearing. Those who do speak may be asked to limit their remarks so that as many persons as possible can be heard. If you have questions about registering to lobby please see Fla. Stat. §11.045 and Joint Rule 1. [2020-2022 Joint Rules.pdf \(flsenate.gov\)](#)

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FP
Committee

SB 110
Bill Number or Topic

Amendment Barcode (if applicable)

Name Kim Dinkins 1000 Friends of FL Phone 850-273-5055

Address 306 W Monroe Email kdinkins@1000fot.org
Street

Tallahassee FL 32301
City State Zip

Speaking: ☒ For ☐ Against ☐ Information **OR** Waive Speaking: ☐ In Support ☐ Against

PLEASE CHECK ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:

☐ I am appearing without
compensation or sponsorship.

☒ I am a registered lobbyist,
representing:
1000 Friends of FL

☐ I am not a lobbyist, but received
something of value for my appearance
(travel, meals, lodging, etc.),
sponsored by:

While it is a tradition to encourage public testimony, time may not permit all persons wishing to speak to be heard at this hearing. Those who do speak may be asked to limit their remarks so that as many persons as possible can be heard. If you have questions about registering to lobby please see Fla. Stat. §11.045 and Joint Rule 1. [2020-2022 Joint Rules.pdf \(flsenate.gov\)](#)

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3-10-25

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Deliver both copies of this form to
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Bill Number or Topic

Committee

Amendment Barcode (if applicable)

Name

Chris Doolin

Phone

850-508-5492

Address

1018 THOMASVILLE Rd

Email

cdoolin@doolinandassociates.com

Street

Talla

Fl.

32303

City

State

Zip

Speaking:

☒

For

☐

Against

☐

Information

OR

Waive Speaking:

☒

In Support

☐

Against

PLEASE CHECK ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:

☐

I am appearing without
compensation or sponsorship.

☒

I am a registered lobbyist,
representing:

☐

I am not a lobbyist, but received
something of value for my appearance
(travel, meals, lodging, etc.),
sponsored by:

SMALL COUNTY COALITION

SMALL SCHOOL DISTRICT COUNCIL CONSORTIUM

While it is a tradition to encourage public testimony, time may not permit all persons wishing to speak to be heard at this hearing. Those who do speak may be asked to limit their remarks so that as many persons as possible can be heard. If you have questions about registering to lobby please see Fla. Stat. §11.045 and Joint Rule 1. [2020-2022 Joint Rules.pdf \(flsenate.gov\)](#)

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S-001 (08/10/2021)

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3/13/25
Meeting Date

SB110 Rural Ren.
Bill Number or Topic

FP
Committee

Amendment Barcode (if applicable)

Name Joy Ryan Phone 850-339-8083

Address 300 S. Monroe, #410 Email _____
Street

32301
City State Zip

Speaking: ☐ For ☐ Against ☐ Information **OR** Waive Speaking: ☒ In Support ☐ Against

PLEASE CHECK ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:

☐ I am appearing without
compensation or sponsorship.

☒ I am a registered lobbyist,
representing: Teladoc

☐ I am not a lobbyist, but received
something of value for my appearance
(travel, meals, lodging, etc.),
sponsored by:

While it is a tradition to encourage public testimony, time may not permit all persons wishing to speak to be heard at this hearing. Those who do speak may be asked to limit their remarks so that as many persons as possible can be heard. If you have questions about registering to lobby please see Fla. Stat. §11.045 and Joint Rule 1. [2020-2022 Joint Rules.pdf \(flsenate.gov\)](#)

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Committee

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APPEARANCE RECORD

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SB 110

Bill Number or Topic

Amendment Barcode (if applicable)

Name

Tripp Hunter (Farm Bureau)

Phone

850-668-2825

Address

210 W College

Email

Street

TLH

City

FL

State

32301

Zip

Speaking:

☐ For

☐ Against

☐ Information

OR

Waive Speaking:

☒ In Support

☐ Against

PLEASE CHECK ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:

☐

I am appearing without
compensation or sponsorship.

☒

I am a registered lobbyist,
representing:

Farm Bureau

☐

I am not a lobbyist, but received
something of value for my appearance
(travel, meals, lodging, etc.),
sponsored by:

While it is a tradition to encourage public testimony, time may not permit all persons wishing to speak to be heard at this hearing. Those who do speak may be asked to limit their remarks so that as many persons as possible can be heard. If you have questions about registering to lobby please see Fla. Stat. §11.045 and Joint Rule 1. [2020-2022 Joint Rules.pdf \(flsenate.gov\)](#)

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Deliver both copies of this form to
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Committee

SB 110

Bill Number or Topic

Amendment Barcode (if applicable)

Name Jared Grigas

Phone (850) 322-0229

Address 100 S Monroe St

Email jgrigas@fl-counties.com

Tallahassee FL 32309

City

State

Zip

Speaking: ☐ For ☐ Against ☐ Information

OR

Waive Speaking: ☒ In Support ☐ Against

PLEASE CHECK ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:

☐ I am appearing without compensation or sponsorship.

☒ I am a registered lobbyist, representing:

FL. Assoc. of Counties

☐ I am not a lobbyist, but received something of value for my appearance (travel, meals, lodging, etc.), sponsored by:

While it is a tradition to encourage public testimony, time may not permit all persons wishing to speak to be heard at this hearing. Those who do speak may be asked to limit their remarks so that as many persons as possible can be heard. If you have questions about registering to lobby please see Fla. Stat. §11.045 and Joint Rule 1. [2020-2022 Joint Rules.pdf \(flsenate.gov\)](#)

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110

Bill Number or Topic

Amendment Barcode (if applicable)

Name

Tim Parson

Phone

800-940-2678

Address

113 E College Ave

Street

Email

tim@libertypartners.flc

City

Tallahassee

State

FL

Zip

3230

Speaking: ☐ For ☐ Against ☐ Information

OR

Waive Speaking: ☒ In Support ☐ Against

PLEASE CHECK ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:

☐

I am appearing without
compensation or sponsorship.

☒

I am a registered lobbyist,
representing:

Liberty
Partners

☐

I am not a lobbyist, but received
something of value for my appearance
(travel, meals, lodging, etc.),
sponsored by:

While it is a tradition to encourage public testimony, time may not permit all persons wishing to speak to be heard at this hearing. Those who do speak may be asked to limit their remarks so that as many persons as possible can be heard. If you have questions about registering to lobby please see Fla. Stat. §11.045 and Joint Rule 1. [2020-2022 Joint Rules.pdf \(flsenate.gov\)](#)

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Meeting Date

Bill Number or Topic

Fiscal Policy
Committee

Deliver both copies of this form to
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Amendment Barcode (if applicable)

Name

Antonio Jefferson Grefna
City of Grefna

Phone

850-519-0681

Address

14615 Main Street

Email

ajjefferson@mygrefna.com

Street

1 Grefna

FL

32332

City

State

Zip

Speaking:

☐ For

☐ Against

☐ Information

OR

Waive Speaking:

☒ In Support

☐ Against

PLEASE CHECK ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:



I am appearing without
compensation or sponsorship.



I am a registered lobbyist,
representing:



I am not a lobbyist, but received
something of value for my appearance
(travel, meals, lodging, etc.),
sponsored by:

While it is a tradition to encourage public testimony, time may not permit all persons wishing to speak to be heard at this hearing. Those who do speak may be asked to limit their remarks so that as many persons as possible can be heard. If you have questions about registering to lobby please see Fla. Stat. §11.045 and Joint Rule 1. [2020-2022 Joint Rules.pdf \(flsenate.gov\)](#)

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The Florida Senate

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110

Bill Number or Topic

Deliver both copies of this form to

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Amendment Barcode (if applicable)

Name

Colton Madill

Phone

850-766-7983

Address

136 S. Bronough St.

Email

cmadill@flchamber.com

Street

Tallahassee

State

FL

Zip

32301

Speaking:

☐

For

☐

Against

☐

Information

OR

Waive Speaking:

☒

In Support

☐

Against

PLEASE CHECK ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:

☐

I am appearing without compensation or sponsorship.

☒

I am a registered lobbyist, representing:

Florida Chamber of Commerce

☐

I am not a lobbyist, but received something of value for my appearance (travel, meals, lodging, etc.), sponsored by:

While it is a tradition to encourage public testimony, time may not permit all persons wishing to speak to be heard at this hearing. Those who do speak may be asked to limit their remarks so that as many persons as possible can be heard. If you have questions about registering to lobby please see Fla. Stat. §11.045 and Joint Rule 1. [2020-2022 Joint Rules.pdf \(flsenate.gov\)](#)

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S-001 (08/10/2021)

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SB 110

Bill Number or Topic

Meeting Date

Committee

Amendment Barcode (if applicable)

Name

DAVID MICA

Phone

Address

Street

Email

City

State

Zip

Speaking: ☐ For ☐ Against ☐ Information

OR

Waive Speaking: ☒ In Support ☐ Against

PLEASE CHECK ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:

☐ I am appearing without
compensation or sponsorship.

☒ I am a registered lobbyist,
representing:

☐ I am not a lobbyist, but received
something of value for my appearance
(travel, meals, lodging, etc.),
sponsored by:

FL HOSPITAL ASSN

While it is a tradition to encourage public testimony, time may not permit all persons wishing to speak to be heard at this hearing. Those who do speak may be asked to limit their remarks so that as many persons as possible can be heard. If you have questions about registering to lobby please see Fla. Stat. §11.045 and Joint Rule 1. [2020-2022 Joint Rules.pdf \(flsenate.gov\)](#)

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Committee

The Florida Senate

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Deliver both copies of this form to
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Bill Number or Topic

Amendment Barcode (if applicable)

Name Jessica Janasiewicz (Jan-ah-see-witz) Phone 850-567-7174

Address 119 South Monroe Street, Suite 202 Email jessica@rutledge-ecenia.com

Street

Tallahassee

City

FL

State

32308

Zip

Speaking: ☐ For ☐ Against ☐ Information **OR** Waive Speaking: ☒ In Support ☐ Against

PLEASE CHECK ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:

☐ I am appearing without
compensation or sponsorship.

☒ I am a registered lobbyist,
representing:

Heartland Educational Consortium

☐ I am not a lobbyist, but received
something of value for my appearance
(travel, meals, lodging, etc.),
sponsored by:

While it is a tradition to encourage public testimony, time may not permit all persons wishing to speak to be heard at this hearing. Those who do speak may be asked to limit their remarks so that as many persons as possible can be heard. If you have questions about registering to lobby please see Fla. Stat. §11.045 and Joint Rule 1. [2020-2022 Joint Rules.pdf \(flsenate.gov\)](#)

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Committee

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Bill Number or Topic

representing organization:

Amendment Barcode (if applicable)

Name Kevin Vaughn, Chair, Opportunity Florida

Phone (850) 545-7021

Address 68-C Feli Way

Email kevin.vaughn@hubinternational.com

Street

Crawfordville

Florida

32327

City

State

Zip

Speaking: ☐ For ☐ Against ☐ Information **OR** Waive Speaking: ☒ In Support ☐ Against

PLEASE CHECK ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:

☒ I am appearing without
compensation or sponsorship.

☐ I am a registered lobbyist,
representing:

☐ I am not a lobbyist, but received
something of value for my appearance
(travel, meals, lodging, etc.),
sponsored by:

While it is a tradition to encourage public testimony, time may not permit all persons wishing to speak to be heard at this hearing. Those who do speak may be asked to limit their remarks so that as many persons as possible can be heard. If you have questions about registering to lobby please see Fla. Stat. §11.045 and Joint Rule 1. [2020-2022 Joint Rules.pdf \(flsenate.gov\)](#)

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S-001 (08/10/2021)

3/13/25

Meeting Date

Fiscal Policy

Committee

Name

Cameron Fink

Phone

8509334665

Address

516 N Adams St

Email

cfink@aif.com

Street

Tallahassee

FL

32301

City

State

Zip

Speaking:

☐

For

☐

Against

☐

Information

OR

Waive Speaking:

☒

In Support

☐

Against

PLEASE CHECK ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:

☐

I am appearing without
compensation or sponsorship.

☒

I am a registered lobbyist,
representing:

Associated Industries of Florida

☐

I am not a lobbyist, but received
something of value for my appearance
(travel, meals, lodging, etc.),
sponsored by:

While it is a tradition to encourage public testimony, time may not permit all persons wishing to speak to be heard at this hearing. Those who do speak may be asked to limit their remarks so that as many persons as possible can be heard. If you have questions about registering to lobby please see Fla. Stat. §11.045 and Joint Rule 1. [2020-2022 Joint Rules.pdf \(fisenate.gov\)](#)

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S-001 (08/10/2021)

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APPEARANCE RECORD

SB 110

Bill Number or Topic

Amendment Barcode (if applicable)

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The Florida Senate

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Meeting Date

Senate Fiscal Policy

Committee

110

Bill Number or Topic

Amendment Barcode (if applicable)

Name

Patrick Wnek - NEFEC

Phone

352 221 4758

Address

6328 SW 84th Terr

Email

wnekp@nefec.org

Street

Gainesville

FL

32608

City

State

Zip

Speaking: ☐ For ☐ Against ☐ Information

OR

Waive Speaking: ☒ In Support ☐ Against

PLEASE CHECK ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:

☐

I am appearing without compensation or sponsorship.

☐

I am a registered lobbyist, representing:

☒

I am not a lobbyist, but received something of value for my appearance (travel, meals, lodging, etc.), sponsored by:

While it is a tradition to encourage public testimony, time may not permit all persons wishing to speak to be heard at this hearing. Those who do speak may be asked to limit their remarks so that as many persons as possible can be heard. If you have questions about registering to lobby please see Fla. Stat. §11.045 and Joint Rule 1. [2020-2022 Joint Rules.pdf \(flsenate.gov\)](#)

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S-001 (08/10/2021)

The Florida Senate

APPEARANCE RECORD

Deliver both copies of this form to
Senate professional staff conducting the meeting

3-13-25

Meeting Date

Fiscal Policy

Committee

110

Bill Number or Topic

Amendment Barcode (if applicable)

Name

Toni Large

Phone

(850) 556-1461

Address

1100 Brookwood DR

Street

Email

toni@largestrategies.com

Tallahassee, FL 32308

City

State

Zip

Speaking: ☐ For ☐ Against ☐ Information **OR** Waive Speaking: ☒ In Support ☐ Against

PLEASE CHECK ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:

☐ I am appearing without
compensation or sponsorship.

☒ I am a registered lobbyist,
representing:

☐ I am not a lobbyist, but received
something of value for my appearance
(travel, meals, lodging, etc.),
sponsored by:

Florida College of Emergency Physicians

While it is a tradition to encourage public testimony, time may not permit all persons wishing to speak to be heard at this hearing. Those who do speak may be asked to limit their remarks so that as many persons as possible can be heard. If you have questions about registering to lobby please see Fla. Stat. §11.045 and Joint Rule 1. [2020-2022 Joint Rules.pdf \(flsenate.gov\)](#)

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S-001 (08/10/2021)

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Senate professional staff conducting the meeting

SB 110

Bill Number or Topic

Amendment Barcode (if applicable)

Meeting Date

3/13/25
FISCAL Policy

Committee

Name

MIKE GRISSEM

Phone

Address

Street

Email

michael.grissem@bipc.com

City

State

Zip

Speaking:

☐

For

☐

Against

☐

Information

OR

Waive Speaking:

☒

In Support

☐

Against

PLEASE CHECK ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:

☐

I am appearing without
compensation or sponsorship.

☒

I am a registered lobbyist,
representing:

FLORIDA RURAL ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION

☐

I am not a lobbyist, but received
something of value for my appearance
(travel, meals, lodging, etc.),
sponsored by:

While it is a tradition to encourage public testimony, time may not permit all persons wishing to speak to be heard at this hearing. Those who do speak may be asked to limit their remarks so that as many persons as possible can be heard. If you have questions about registering to lobby please see Fla. Stat. §11.045 and Joint Rule 1. [2020-2022 Joint Rules.pdf \(flsenate.gov\)](#)

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S-001 (08/10/2021)

The Florida Senate

APPEARANCE RECORD

Deliver both copies of this form to
Senate professional staff conducting the meeting

3.13.25

Meeting Date

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Committee

110

Bill Number or Topic

Amendment Barcode (if applicable)

Name

Darwin Gilmore

Phone

850.693.6189

Address

4560 Cook Rd.

Email

executive@jacksonedc.com

Street

Marianna

FL

32448

City

State

Zip

Speaking:

☐ For

☐ Against

☐ Information

OR

Waive Speaking:

☒

In Support

☐ Against

PLEASE CHECK ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:



I am appearing without
compensation or sponsorship.



I am a registered lobbyist,
representing:



I am not a lobbyist, but received
something of value for my appearance
(travel, meals, lodging, etc.),
sponsored by:

While it is a tradition to encourage public testimony, time may not permit all persons wishing to speak to be heard at this hearing. Those who do speak may be asked to limit their remarks so that as many persons as possible can be heard. If you have questions about registering to lobby please see Fla. Stat. §11.045 and Joint Rule 1. [2020-2022 Joint Rules.pdf \(flsenate.gov\)](#)

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S-001 (08/10/2021)

The Florida Senate

APPEARANCE RECORD

Deliver both copies of this form to
Senate professional staff conducting the meeting

March 13, 2025

Meeting Date

Fiscal Policy

Committee

SB110

Bill Number or Topic

Amendment Barcode (if applicable)

Name Charissa Setzer (Suwannee County)

Phone 386-330-2220

Address 220 Pine Avenue

Email charissas@suwedofl.gov

Street

Live Oak

FL

32064

City

State

Zip

Speaking: ☐ For ☐ Against ☐ Information **OR** Waive Speaking: ☒ In Support ☐ Against

PLEASE CHECK ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:

☐ I am appearing without
compensation or sponsorship.

☐ I am a registered lobbyist,
representing:

☐ I am not a lobbyist, but received
something of value for my appearance
(travel, meals, lodging, etc.),
sponsored by:

While it is a tradition to encourage public testimony, time may not permit all persons wishing to speak to be heard at this hearing. Those who do speak may be asked to limit their remarks so that as many persons as possible can be heard. If you have questions about registering to lobby please see Fla. Stat. §11.045 and Joint Rule 1. [2020-2022 Joint Rules.pdf \(flsenate.gov\)](#)

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S-001 (08/10/2021)

March 13, 2025

Meeting Date

Fiscal Policy

Committee

The Florida Senate
APPEARANCE RECORD

Deliver both copies of this form to
Senate professional staff conducting the meeting

SB110

Bill Number or Topic

Amendment Barcode (if applicable)

Name Jason Furry (Suwannee County)

Phone 386-362-3004

Address 1201 Silas Drive

Email jmfurry@suwanneeparks.com

Street

Live Oak

FL

32064

City

State

Zip

Speaking: ☐ For ☐ Against ☐ Information **OR** Waive Speaking: ☒ In Support ☐ Against

PLEASE CHECK ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:

☐ I am appearing without
compensation or sponsorship.

☐ I am a registered lobbyist,
representing:

☐ I am not a lobbyist, but received
something of value for my appearance
(travel, meals, lodging, etc.),
sponsored by:

While it is a tradition to encourage public testimony, time may not permit all persons wishing to speak to be heard at this hearing. Those who do speak may be asked to limit their remarks so that as many persons as possible can be heard. If you have questions about registering to lobby please see Fla. Stat. §11.045 and Joint Rule 1. [2020-2022 Joint Rules.pdf \(flsenate.gov\)](#)

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S-001 (08/10/2021)

The Florida Senate

APPEARANCE RECORD

Deliver both copies of this form to
Senate professional staff conducting the meeting

Meeting Date

Bill Number or Topic

Committee

Amendment Barcode (if applicable)

Name

Phone

Address

Email

Street

City

State

Zip

Speaking:

☐

For

☐

Against

☐

Information

OR

Waive Speaking:

☒

In Support

☐

Against

PLEASE CHECK ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:

☒

I am appearing without
compensation or sponsorship.

☐

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S-001 (08/10/2021)

The Florida Senate

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3/13/25

Meeting Date

110

Bill Number or Topic

Fiscal Policy

Committee

Amendment Barcode (if applicable)

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Speaking: ☐ For ☐ Against ☐ Information

OR

Waive Speaking: ☒ In Support ☐ Against

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S-001 (08/10/2021)

3/13/25

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SB 0110

Bill Number or Topic

representing organization:

Amendment Barcode (if applicable)

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S-001 (08/10/2021)

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.)

Prepared By: The Professional Staff of the Committee on Fiscal Policy

BILL: CS/SB 7012

INTRODUCER: Fiscal Policy Committee and Children, Families, and Elder Affairs Committee

SUBJECT: Child Welfare

DATE: March 13, 2025

REVISED: _____

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
	<u>Rao</u>	<u>Tuszynski</u>	<u>CF</u>	CF Submitted as Committee Bill
1.	<u>Rao</u>	<u>Siples</u>	<u>FP</u>	Fav/CS

Please see Section IX. for Additional Information:

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE - Substantial Changes

I. Summary:

CS/SB 7012 addresses workforce issues in the child welfare system, creates a pilot program for treatment foster care, and enhances the data and information the state must collect and report related to commercial sexual exploitation of children.

The bill requires the Department of Children and Families (DCF) to create a Child Protective Investigator (CPI) and case manager recruitment program for individuals who have previously held public safety and service positions and have a continued desire to serve their communities. The bill also requires the DCF to collaborate with community-based care (CBC) lead agencies to create an employee referral system for case managers.

The bill requires the DCF to convene a case management workforce workgroup composed of child welfare professionals to address current policy gaps and develop actionable recommendations to improve case management.

The bill requires the DCF to create a pilot program for treatment foster care, or a substantially similar evidence-based program of professional foster care. This pilot program is intended to introduce a short-term, family-like placement option for children in foster care that have high resource indicators or children that are stepping down from a placement in an inpatient residential treatment. The bill requires specialized training requirements for foster parents and 24 hour on-call persons to provide crisis intervention and placement stabilization services if needed.

The bill creates additional requirements for the collection and maintenance of data on the commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) and requires a study of both residential bed capacity and non-residential services for victims of CSEC.

The bill has a significant, negative fiscal impact on state government and provides appropriations to implement the bill. *See* Section V. Fiscal Impact Statement.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2025, except as otherwise expressly provided in the bill.

II. Present Situation:

Florida's Child Welfare System – Generally

Chapter 39, F.S., creates Florida's dependency system charged with protecting children who have been abused, abandoned, or neglected.¹ Florida's child welfare system identifies children and families in need of services through reports to the central abuse hotline and child protective investigations. The Department of Children and Families (DCF) and community-based care lead agencies (CBCs) work with those families to address the problems endangering children, if possible. If the problems cannot be addressed, the child welfare system finds safe out-of-home placements for these children.²

Child welfare services are directed toward the prevention of child abuse, abandonment, and neglect.³ The DCF practice model is based on increasing the safety of the child within his or her home, using in-home services, such as parenting coaching and counseling to maintain and strengthen the child's natural supports in the home environment.⁴ These services are coordinated by DCF-contracted CBCs. The DCF is responsible for many child welfare services, including operating the central abuse hotline, performing child protective investigations, and providing children's legal services.⁵ Ultimately, the DCF is responsible for program oversight and the overall performance of the child welfare system.⁶

Department of Children and Families

The DCF's statutory mission is to work in partnership with local communities to protect the vulnerable, promote strong and economically self-sufficient families, and advance personal and family recovery and resiliency.⁷ The DCF must develop a strategic plan to fulfill this mission and

¹ Chapter 39, F.S.

² Chapter 39, F.S.

³ Section 39.001, F.S.

⁴ *See generally* The Department of Children and Families, *Florida's Child Welfare Practice Model*, available at: <https://www.myflfamilies.com/services/child-family/child-and-family-well-being/floridas-child-welfare-practice-model> (last visited 2/25/25).

⁵ Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability, *Child Welfare System Performance Mixed in First Year of Statewide Community-Based Care*, Report 06-50, June 2006, available at: <https://oppaga.fl.gov/Products/ReportDetail?rn=06-50> (last visited 2/25/25).

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ Section 20.19(1)(a), F.S.

establish measurable goals, objectives, performance standards, and quality assurance requirements to ensure the DCF is accountable to taxpayers.⁸

The DCF is required to provide services relating to:⁹

- Adult protection.
- Child care regulation.
- Child welfare.
- Domestic violence.
- Economic self-sufficiency.
- Homelessness.
- Mental health.
- Refugees.
- Substance abuse.

The DCF must deliver services by contract through private providers to the extent allowed by law and funding.¹⁰ These private providers include CBCs delivering child welfare services.¹¹

Community-Based Care System

The DCF, through CBCs, administer a system of care¹² to children and families that must focus on:

- Prevention of separation of children from their families;
- Intervention to allow children to remain safely in their own homes;
- Reunification of families who have had their children removed from their care;
- Safety for children who are separated from their families;
- Promoting the well-being of children through emphasis on educational stability and timely health care;
- Permanency, including providing adoption and postadoption services; and
- Transition to independence and self-sufficiency.¹³

The CBCs must give priority to services that are evidence-based and trauma informed.¹⁴ The CBCs contract with a number of subcontractors for case management and direct care services to children and their families. There are 16 CBCs statewide, which together serve the state's 20 judicial circuits.¹⁵

⁸ Section 20.19(1)(b), F.S.

⁹ Section 20.19(4)(a), F.S.

¹⁰ Section 20.19(1)(c), F.S.

¹¹ Part V of ch. 409, F.S. and s. 409.986 (1)(a), F.S.

¹² Section 409.145(1), F.S.

¹³ *Id.*; Also see generally s. 409.988, F.S.

¹⁴ Section 409.988(3), F.S.

¹⁵ The DCF, Lead Agency Information, available at: <https://www.myflfamilies.com/services/child-family/child-and-family-well-being/community-based-care/lead-agency-information> (last visited 2/25/25).

Child Protective Investigations

The DCF is required to operate and maintain a central abuse hotline (hotline)¹⁶ to receive reports of known or suspected instances of child abuse¹⁷, abandonment¹⁸, or neglect¹⁹, or instances when a child does not have a parent, legal custodian, or adult relative available to provide supervision and care.²⁰ The hotline must operate 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and accept reports through a single statewide toll-free telephone number or through electronic reporting.²¹

If the hotline determines a report meets the statutory criteria for child abuse, abandonment, or neglect, a DCF child protective investigator (CPI) must complete a child protective investigation.²² Through face-to-face interviews with the child and family members, and assessments of the immediate safety of the children in the home, the CPI determines further actions.

The CPI must either implement a safety plan for the child, which allows the child to remain in the home with in-home services or take the child into custody. If the child cannot safely remain in the home with a safety plan, the DCF must file a shelter petition and remove the child from his or her current home and temporarily place them in out-of-home care.²³

¹⁶ Hereinafter cited as “hotline.” The “Florida Abuse Hotline” is the DCF’s central abuse reporting intake assessment center, which receives and processes reports of known or suspected child abuse, neglect or abandonment 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Chapter 65C-30.001, F.A.C. and Section 39.101, F.S.

¹⁷ Section 39.01(2), F.S. defines “abuse” as any willful act or threatened act that results in any physical, mental, or sexual abuse, injury, or harm that causes or is likely to cause the child’s physical, mental, or emotional health to be significantly impaired.

¹⁸ Section 39.01(1), F.S. defines “abandoned” or “abandonment” as a situation in which the parent or legal custodian of a child or, in the absence of a parent or legal custodian, the caregiver, while being able, has made no significant contribution to the child’s care and maintenance or has made no significant contribution to the child’s care and maintenance or has failed to establish or maintain a substantial and positive relationship with the child, or both. “Establish or maintain a substantial and positive relationship” means, in part, frequent and regular contact with the child, and the exercise of parental rights and responsibilities.

¹⁹ Section 39.01(53), F.S. states “neglect” occurs when a child is deprived of, or is allowed to be deprived of, necessary food, clothing, shelter, or medical treatment or a child is permitted to live in an environment when such deprivation or environment causes the child’s physical, mental, or emotional health to be significantly impaired or to be in danger of being significantly impaired, except when such circumstances are caused primarily by financial inability unless services have been offered and rejected by such person.

²⁰ Section 39.201(1), F.S.

²¹ Section 39.101(1), F.S.

²² Prior to July 1, 2023, seven counties allowed the local sheriff’s office to perform child protective investigations. The 2023 legislative session transitioned this responsibility fully back to the Department after changes in Florida’s child welfare system aimed to integrate child protective investigations within existing crisis-oriented systems the DCF maintains. *See generally*: Laws of Fla. 2023-77.

²³ Section 39.301, F.S.

Case Management

CBCs provide case managers²⁴ or subcontract case managers from case management organizations to oversee the provision of services. Case managers are required to complete pre-service training during their certification as a Child Welfare Professional and may complete field activities and practical applications of concepts learned in pre-service training.²⁵

Once a case manager assumes the responsibility of a child's case, they are required to make regular face-to-face contact visits with the child to determine the progress of the child's health and well-being.²⁶ The frequency of these visits depends on the child's safety plan and placement.²⁷ Case managers maintain communication with service providers and the family throughout the provision of services to determine the sufficiency of services and the effectiveness of the safety plan.²⁸

The CBC lead agencies and their subcontractors provide both in-home and out-of-home services to children and families in the child welfare system.²⁹

Child Welfare Workforce

Turnover and Vacancies

The high-stress nature of child protective investigations often contributes to high turnover rates of child welfare professionals. The following table shows the turnover rate of DCF child protective investigation positions in recent years.³⁰

Turnover Rates of DCF Child Protective Investigation Positions			
Position	SFY 21-22	SFY 22-23	SFY 23-24
CPI	71.18%	64.00%	64.30%
Senior CPI	46.38%	14.47%	16.16%
Field Support Consultant	12.42%	16.37%	12.50%
Supervisor	20.21%	11.23%	8.40%
Total	55.40%	45.84%	45.98%

²⁴ Rule 65C-30.001, F.S.C. defines “case manager” as a child welfare professional who is responsible for ongoing safety management and service provision of children who, through assessment of a CPI, have been determined to be unsafe.

²⁵ 65C-33.003, F.A.C.

²⁶ 65C-30.007, F.A.C.

²⁷ 65C-30.007, F.A.C.

²⁸ *Id.*

²⁹ *See generally*, Section 409.988, F.S.

³⁰ DCF, *Child Protective Investigator and Child Protective Investigator Supervisor Annual Report 2023*, available at: https://www.myflfamilies.com/sites/default/files/2023-10/CPI_Workforce_2022-23.pdf (last visited 2/25/24).; and Florida Department of Children and Families, *Child Protective Investigator and Child Protective Investigator Supervisor Annual Report*, October 1, 2024, available at: https://www.myflfamilies.com/sites/default/files/2024-09/CPI_Workforce_2023-24.pdf (last visited 2/25/25).

The following chart shows the vacancy rates for child protective investigations staff from SFY 2022-2024.³¹

Vacancy Rates for Child Protective Investigations Staff			
Position	SFY 2022-2023	SFY 2023-2024	Difference in Vacancy Rates
CPI	13.66%	11.31%	-2.35%
Senior CPI	42.11%	16.33%	-25.78%
Field Support Consultant	30.7%	14.63%	-16.07%
Supervisor	18.3%	14.71%	-3.59%

These trends are similar in the case management workforce. In recent years, there has been a demonstrated challenge to retaining case managers. The following chart displays the percentages of case managers that have continued in their role, and the percentage of case workers that left their role.³²

Turnover Percentages of Case Managers Statewide	
Time Period	Case Manager Turnover Percentage
2023 - 2024	48.15%
2024 - 2025	45.13%

The vacancy rate for case managers is difficult to calculate as those positions are not set as Full-time Equivalents (FTE) in the annual budget or lead agency contracts with the DCF. The CBCs have the ability to contract for or hire case managers as needed to maintain a sufficient case manager to child ratio.³³

Caseload Average for Case Carrying Case Managers by CBC			
CBC	Number of Case Manager (CM)	Number of Primary ³⁴ Children (PC)	Average PC per CM
Family Integrity Program	16	89	5.56
Communities Connected for Kids	59	579	9.81
ChildNet Broward	124	1229	9.91
ChildNet Palm Beach	94	954	10.15
Children's Network of SW Florida	117	1365	11.67
Safe Children Coalition	64	781	12.20

³¹ *Id.*

³² E-mail from Brittany Lyons, Legislative Specialist with the Florida Department of Children and Families, February 21, 2025 (on file with the Senate Committee on Children, Families, and Elder Affairs).

³³ A case manager to child ratio is not set or defined in law. It is a dynamic number that takes many things into account such as the experience of the case manager; acuity of children on the caseload; administrative and non case-management support services provided by the employing agency; and other relevant factors.

³⁴ A “primary” child is the child subject to the child welfare proceedings or services.

Caseload Average for Case Carrying Case Managers by CBC			
CBC	Number of Case Manager (CM)	Number of Primary ³⁴ Children (PC)	Average PC per CM
Community Partnership for Children	86	1069	12.43
NWF Health Network-East	86	1101	12.80
Kids Central, Inc.	138	1861	13.49
Citrus Health Network	105	1550	14.76
Partnership for Strong Families	67	1022	15.25
Family Support Services of Suncoast	141	2167	15.37
Children's Network Hillsborough	133	2132	16.03
NWF Health Network-West	107	1803	16.85
Family Partnerships Central FL	155	2628	16.95
Kids First of Florida Inc	15	259	17.27
Family Support Services of North FL	114	2032	17.82
Heartland for Children	88	1595	18.13
Statewide Average	1709	24216	14.17

Recruitment Efforts

In recent years, the DCF has implemented several strategies to increase recruitment for child protection investigations staff to mitigate the high caseloads of staff.

Hiring Fairs

The DCF has increased the number of hiring fairs conducted, with some “on the spot” fairs allowing potential candidates to complete applications and employment screenings onsite.³⁵ Additionally, the DCF has utilized the digital platform Indeed to target the advertisement of hiring events to the appropriate populations. As of February 2024, 35% of attendees of one of the DCF’s virtual hiring events were recommended for interviews.³⁶

Continue the Mission

First Lady Casey DeSantis launched the DCF’s Continue the Mission program in 2022.³⁷ In collaboration with Florida’s Department of Veteran’s Affairs, the program recruits veterans, military spouses, and former law enforcement officers to further utilize their skills and

³⁵ Florida Department of Children and Families, *Child Protective Investigator and Child Protective Investigator Supervisor Annual Report*, October 1, 2024, available at: https://www.myflfamilies.com/sites/default/files/2024-09/CPI_Workforce_2023-24.pdf (last visited 2/25/25).

³⁶ *Id.*

³⁷ DCF, *Continue the Mission*, available at: <https://www.myflfamilies.com/continue-the-mission> (last visited 2/25/25).

experiences to become child protective investigators.³⁸ As of January 2025, 324 Continue the Mission applicants were hired to become child protective investigators.³⁹

Increased Base Rate of Pay

To increase recruitment efforts, the DCF has increased the base rate of pay for CPIs to remain competitive in the workforce.⁴⁰ The following chart shows the increase in base rates for CPIs, Senior CPIs, and CPI Supervisors.

Base Rate Increase for Child Protective Investigations Staff			
Position Title	Base Rate Prior to July 2022	Current Base Rate of Pay as of October 2024	% Increase
Child Protective Investigator (CPI)	\$39,600.08	\$50,000.08	26.26%
Senior CPI	\$41,500.16	\$54,500.16	31.33%
CPI Supervisor	\$49,200.06	\$57,200.00	16.26%

Retention Efforts

Career Advancement

In 2017, the DCF implemented a Child Protection Glide Path to increase the recruitment and retention of CPIs.⁴¹ The Glide Path had three salary levels for CPIs based on skills and core competencies achieved.⁴² CPIs that demonstrated specific skills and core competencies had the opportunity to achieve a competency-based salary increase.⁴³ However, the Glide Path model did not provide the expected career advancement outcomes, and the DCF ended the program in June 2019.⁴⁴

During the 2020 legislative session, the Legislature directed the DCF to collaborate with the Florida Institute of Child Welfare to develop a career ladder for CPIs and CPI Supervisors that included multiple levels of child protective investigator classifications; corresponding milestones and professional development opportunities for advancement; and compensation ranges.⁴⁵ The Career

³⁸ *Id.*

³⁹ The Department of Children and Families, Presentation to The Committee on Children, Families, and Elder Affairs, February 11, 2025, *Continue The Mission: An Update on Recruitment and Retention*, slide 6, available at: https://www.flsenate.gov/Committees/Show/CF/MeetingPacket/6308/11018_MeetingPacket_6308_2.pdf (last visited 3/1/25).

⁴⁰ DCF, *Child Protective Investigator and Child Protective Investigator Supervisor Annual Report*, October 1, 2024, available at: https://www.myflfamilies.com/sites/default/files/2024-09/CPI_Workforce_2023-24.pdf (last visited 2/24/25).

⁴¹ DCF, *Child Protective Investigator and Child Protective Investigator Supervisor Educational Qualifications, Turnover, and Working Conditions Status Report October 2019*, available at: <https://www.myflfamilies.com/sites/default/files/2023-06/CPI%20SuperCPI%20and%20CPI%20Supervisor%20%20Workforce%202019.docx.pdf> (last visited 2/25/25).

⁴² *Id.*

⁴³ *Id.*

⁴⁴ DCF, *Child Protective Investigations Career Ladder Report*, 2020, available at: https://www.myflfamilies.com/sites/default/files/2023-02/CPI_Career_Ladder_Report_2020.pdf (last visited 2/25/25).

⁴⁵ Ch. 2020-152, Laws of Fla.

Ladder provides employees with access to targeted training based on their specific career desires, monetary incentives for moving through the pathways, and supervisory training through mentoring and coaching, if desired.⁴⁶

Workforce Wellness Unit (WWU)

The DCF established the Workforce Wellness Unit (WWU) initiative to enhance the overall well-being of DCF staff and prevent secondary traumatic stress and burnout among CPI staff. Initiatives in the program include the Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) Team, wellness offerings aimed at promoting holistic wellness, and specialized training programs that address trauma and resilience.⁴⁷

The DCF reports that the recruitment and retention strategies implemented over the past 3 years have reduced the CPI vacancy rate from 13% to 11%, and the CPI Supervisor vacancy rate from 18% to 14%.⁴⁸

Licensed Placement Array

When a CPI determines that in-home services are not enough to ensure a child's safety, the CPI must remove the child from the home and place him or her in a safe and appropriate temporary out-of-home placement.⁴⁹ These placements are aimed to be the least restrictive, most family-like placements available.⁵⁰ The DCF is required to consider a child's placement in the following priority order:⁵¹

- Nonoffending parent.
- Relative caregiver.
- Adoptive parent of the child's sibling, when the DCF or CBC lead agency is aware of such sibling.
- Fictive kin with a close existing relationship to the child.
- Nonrelative caregiver that does not have an existing relationship with the child.
- Licensed foster care.
- Group or congregate care.

⁴⁶ DCF, Child Protective Investigator and Child Protective Investigator Supervisor Annual Report, October 1, 2024, available at: https://www.myflfamilies.com/sites/default/files/2024-09/CPI_Workforce_2023-24.pdf (last visited 1/14/25).

⁴⁷ Florida Department of Children and Families, Child Protective Investigator and Child Protective Investigator Supervisor Annual Report, October 1, 2024, available at: https://www.myflfamilies.com/sites/default/files/2024-09/CPI_Workforce_2023-24.pdf (last visited 2/24/25).

⁴⁸ *Supra* note 39, slide 8

⁴⁹ Section 39.4021, F.S.

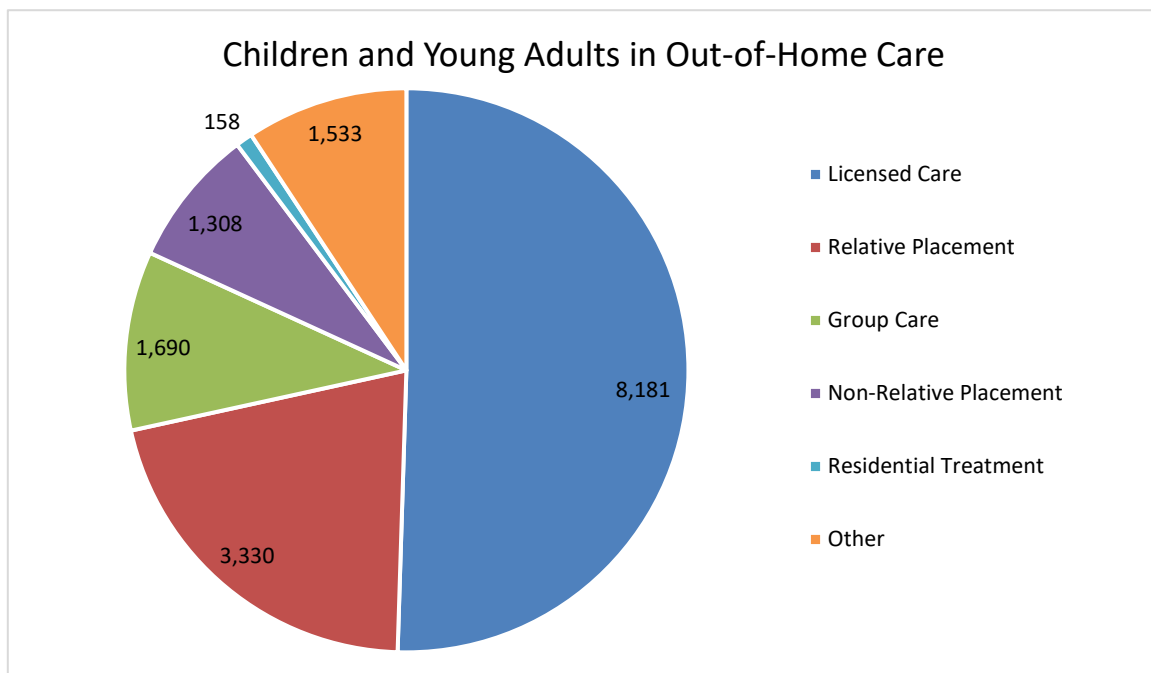
⁵⁰ *Id.*

⁵¹ *Id.*

Licensed foster care provides a range of placements for children in out-of-home care that vary in service level. The following chart displays the levels of licensed care.⁵²

Licensed Care Placements	
Placement Type	Description
Level I: Child-Specific Foster Home	Places a child with relatives or non-relatives who have an existing relationship with the child and is willing and able to provide care for the child.
Level II: Non-Child Specific Foster Home	Places a child with a foster parent without having a prior relationship between the child and foster parent.
Level III: Safe Foster Home for Victims of Human Trafficking	Places a victim of human trafficking in a safe and stable environment.
Level IV: Therapeutic Foster Home	Places a child with a foster parent that has received specialized training to care for children and adolescents that have significant emotional, behavioral, or social needs.
Group Homes	Places a child in a single family or multi-family community with no greater than 14 children to meet the physical, emotional, and social needs of the child.

The following chart demonstrates the number of children in out-of-home placement types as of February 28, 2025.⁵³



⁵² See generally The Department of Children and Families, *Foster Home Licensing*, available at: <https://www.myflfamilies.com/services/licensing/foster-care-licensing> (last visited 2/24/25); and Section 409.175, F.S.

⁵³ The Department of Children and Families, *Office of Child and Family Well-Being Dashboard*, available at: <https://www.myflfamilies.com/ocfw-dashboard> (last visited 3/13/25).

Treatment Foster Care / Professional Foster Care Model

Overview

Several state legislatures have implemented treatment or professionalized foster care programs as part of their child welfare systems in recent years. Often referred to as treatment foster care, professional foster care, therapeutic foster care, specialized foster care, or foster family-based treatment, these programs aim to place children with high acuity behavioral needs in settings that are less restrictive than placements such as residential treatment centers, psychiatric hospitals, or group care settings.⁵⁴

Treatment foster parents often receive full-time compensation due to the higher pre-service training requirements and the expectation that treatment foster parents are a vital part of the child's treatment team.⁵⁵ The requirements to become treatment foster parents vary by state, with some requiring one member of the household to stay home full-time,⁵⁶ whereas others require employed foster parents to have flexible work hours.⁵⁷

Program Outcomes

States that have implemented treatment or professionalized foster care programs have reported positive outcomes from these programs. Many children that spend a short period of time in a treatment or professional foster care program require less intense services in their next placement. This is often seen as “stepping down” into a placement level such as a traditional foster care that has less restrictions than professional foster care, or achieving reunification, adoption, or kinship.⁵⁸

Treatment and professional foster care has also been associated with higher rates of placement stability and positive discharges than other types of foster care, such as residential treatment.⁵⁹ Placement stability is important for children in foster care and has been shown to positively impact their safety, permanency, and well-being.⁶⁰ Experiencing multiple placements as a child has been associated with academic difficulties, social challenges, and may delay permanency.⁶¹

⁵⁴ Bustillos, Sheila; et.al, Treatment Foster Care in Texas: A Mixed Methods Descriptive Analysis, Texas Alliance of Child and Family Services and the Texas Center for Child and Family Studies, available at: <https://tacfs.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/TFC-Research-Report.pdf> (last accessed 11/18/24) and The Florida Institute for Child Welfare, *The Professionalization of Foster Caregiving: Empirical Evidence and Evidence Based Models* (on file with the Senate Committee on Children, Families, and Elder Affairs).

⁵⁵ Bishop-Fitzpatrick, Lauren; et.al. *Outcomes of an Agency-Developed Treatment Foster Care Model for Adolescents*, (2015), Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders, DOI:10.1177/1063426614530470 (last visited 1/17/25).

⁵⁶ The Florida Institute for Child Welfare, *The Professionalization of Foster Caregiving: Empirical Evidence and Evidence Based Models* (on file with the Senate Committee on Children, Families, and Elder Affairs).

⁵⁷ DFPS, Treatment Foster Family Care, available at: https://www.dfps.texas.gov/Child_Protection/Foster_Care/TFFC.asp (last visited 11/18/24).

⁵⁸ DFPS, Treatment Foster Family Care Model and Overview, available at: <https://texaschildrenscommission.gov/media/waler5zp/tffc-powerpoint-legal-final-combined.pdf> (last visited 2/18/25).

⁵⁹ DFPS, Treatment Foster Family Care DFPS Model and Overview, available at: <https://texaschildrenscommission.gov/media/waler5zp/tffc-powerpoint-legal-final-combined.pdf> (last visited 2/18/25).

⁶⁰ Casey Family Programs, *Placement Stability Impacts*, available at: <https://www.casey.org/placement-stability-impacts/> (last visited 2/24/25).

⁶¹ *Id.*

Funding Professional Foster Care

Due to increased training requirements and higher reimbursement amounts for professional foster parents, professional foster care can equal higher costs to the state than other types of foster care, including residential treatment.⁶² However, professional foster care has been associated with increased placement stability and an increase in likelihood of a positive discharge from placement.⁶³

States that have implemented professionalized foster care programs use a blend of matched federal funding from Title IV-E and Medicaid.⁶⁴

Title IV-E Funding

Title IV-E of the Social Security Act provides matching federal funding to states to reimburse certain out-of-home services for eligible children and youth in the child welfare system.⁶⁵ To receive these federal dollars, states are subject to Title IV-E reviews to determine the states' eligibility compliance and validate its reimbursement claims.⁶⁶ States can use these funds for room and board costs, administration costs, and recruiting and training treatment foster parents.⁶⁷

Medicaid Funding

Since states have varying Medicaid programs, each state utilizes Medicaid funds differently. States may utilize Medicaid funding to cover treatment services, pay foster parents a paraprofessional caregiver rate, or define treatment foster care as a rehabilitative service.⁶⁸

Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children

The Legislature recognizes the need for specialized care and services for children who are victims of commercial sexual exploitation.⁶⁹ Commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) is defined as the use of any person under the age of 18 years for sexual purposes in exchange for, or, in the promise of, money, goods, or services.⁷⁰

⁶² DFPS, Treatment Foster Family Care DFPS Model and Overview, available at: <https://texaschildrenscommission.gov/media/waler5zp/tffc-powerpoint-legal-final-combined.pdf> (last visited 2/23/25).

⁶³ DFPS, Treatment Foster Family Care DFPS Model and Overview, available at: <https://texaschildrenscommission.gov/media/waler5zp/tffc-powerpoint-legal-final-combined.pdf> (last visited 2/23/25).

⁶⁴ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Siebert, et. al, *State Practices in Treatment/Therapeutic Foster Care April 2018*, available at: <https://ncrapidresource.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/State-Practices-in-Treatment-Foster-Care.pdf> (last visited 1/21/25).

⁶⁵ Administration for Children and Families, *Title IV-E Foster Care*, available at: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/grant-funding/title-iv-e-foster-care> (last visited 1/21/25).

⁶⁶ Administration for Children and Families, *Title IV-E Foster Care Eligibility Reviews Fact Sheet*, available at: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/fact-sheet/title-iv-e-foster-care-eligibility-reviews-fact-sheet> (last visited 1/21/25).

⁶⁷ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Siebert, et. al, *State Practices in Treatment/Therapeutic Foster Care April 2018*, available at: <https://ncrapidresource.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/State-Practices-in-Treatment-Foster-Care.pdf> (last visited 1/21/25).

⁶⁸ *Id.*

⁶⁹ Section 39.001(5), F.S.

⁷⁰ Section 409.016, F.S.

When the DCF receives a report of human trafficking, the DCF investigates this report to determine if CSEC is suspected or verified. For each child who is a suspected or verified CSEC victim, the DCF conducts a multidisciplinary staffing.⁷¹ The staffing typically involves an array of professionals⁷² and is aimed at assessing what the child's needs are, including determining if the child needs placement in a "safe house" or "safe foster home" and what local services are available to the child.⁷³

Obtaining an accurate count of CSEC victims can be challenging since victims are not readily identifiable.⁷⁴ CSEC victims do not have immediately recognizable characteristics, many do not have identification, and they are often physically or psychologically controlled by adult traffickers; as such, they rarely disclose or provide information on exploitation.⁷⁵

In 2023, the DCF verified 339 youth as victims of commercial sexual exploitation from 3,358 reports alleging commercial sexual exploitation to the hotline.⁷⁶ Of the reports referred for investigation, most came from law enforcement and criminal justice personnel.⁷⁷ Many of the youth verified as a victim of CSEC were considered "dependent," meaning they were under the care of the child welfare system within six months prior to their CSE investigation.⁷⁸ Generally, dependent youth had higher incidences of maltreatment before their verification of CSEC than children who had no prior child welfare involvement. The following graph shows the percentages of dependent and community youth⁷⁹ that had prior maltreatments.⁸⁰

⁷¹ Section 409.1754, F.S.

⁷² Multidisciplinary staffings may include, but are not limited to, the child, if appropriate; the child's family or legal guardian; the child's guardian ad litem; Department of Juvenile Justice staff; school district staff; local health and human services providers; victim advocates; and any other persons who may be able to assist the child. See Section 409.1754, F.S.

⁷³ Section 409.1754, F.S.

⁷⁴ The Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability, *Annual Report on the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Florida, 2016*, p. 2, available at: <https://oppaga.fl.gov/Products/ReportDetail?rn=16-04> (last visited 2/23/25).

⁷⁵ U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, *Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children and Sex Trafficking*, available at: <https://ojjdp.ojp.gov/model-programs-guide/literature-reviews/commercial-sexual-exploitation-of-children-and-sex-trafficking.pdf> (last visited 2/23/25).

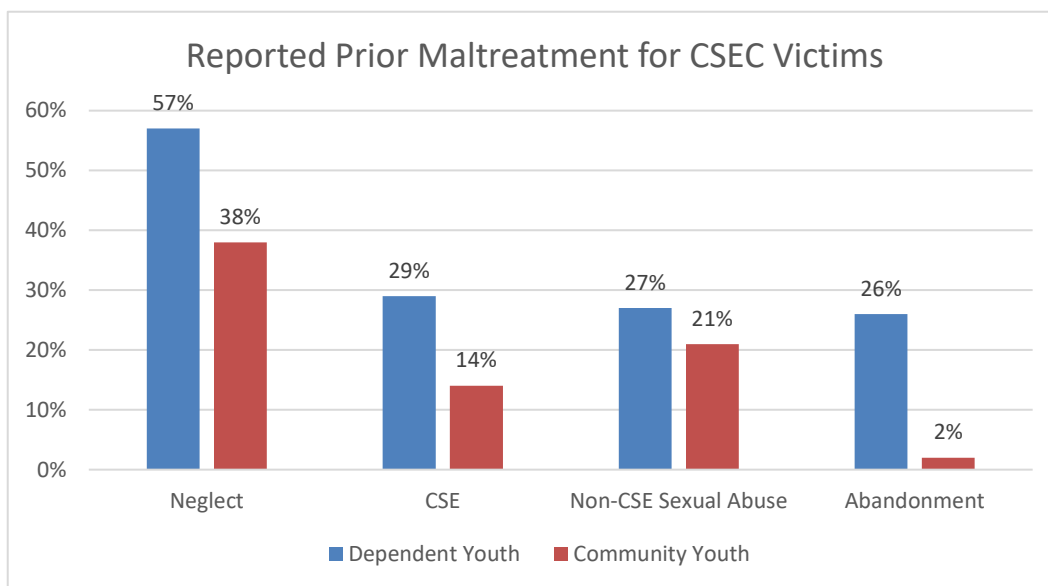
⁷⁶ The Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability, *Annual Report on the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Minors 2024*, available at: <https://oppaga.fl.gov/Products/ReportDetail?rn=24-04> (last visited 2/23/25).

⁷⁷ *Id.*

⁷⁸ *Id.*

⁷⁹ Community youth are referred to as youth who did not enter the child welfare system within six months of their CSEC investigation. See The Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability, *Annual Report on the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Florida, 2016, Report 16-04*, p. 2, available at: <https://oppaga.fl.gov/Products/ReportDetail?rn=16-04> (last visited 2/23/25).

⁸⁰ *Id.*



Safe Houses and Safe Foster Homes

Current law defines and provides for the certification of specialized residential options for CSEC victims.⁸¹ A “safe foster home” refers to a foster home certified by the DCF to care for sexually exploited children and a “safe house” refers to a group residential placement certified by the DCF to care for sexually exploited children.⁸² To be certified, a safe house must be licensed as a residential child-caring agency, and a safe foster home must be licensed as a family foster home.

Additionally, safe houses and safe foster homes must:

- Use strength-based and trauma-informed approaches to care, to the extent possible and appropriate.
- Serve exclusively one sex.
- Group child victims of commercial sexual exploitation by age or maturity level.
- Care for CSEC victims in a manner that separates those children from children with other needs. Safe houses and safe foster homes may care for other populations if the children who have not experienced commercial sexual exploitation do not interact with children who have experienced commercial sexual exploitation.
- Have awake staff members on duty 24 hours a day, if a safe house.
- Provide appropriate security through facility design, hardware, technology, staffing, and siting, including, but not limited to, external video monitoring or door exit alarms, a high staff-to-client ratio, or being situated in a remote location that is isolated from major transportation centers and common trafficking areas.
- Conspicuously place signs on the premises to warn children of the dangers of human trafficking and to encourage the reporting of individuals observed attempting to engage in human trafficking activity, if a safe house.

⁸¹ See generally Section 409.1678, F.S.

⁸² Section 409.1678(1), F.S.

- Meet other criteria established by department rule,⁸³ including personnel qualifications, staffing ratios, and types of services offered.⁸⁴

Safe Harbor Placement

If a dependent child aged 6 years or older is suspected of being or has been found to be a victim of commercial sexual exploitation, the DCF is required to determine the child's need for services and his or her need for placement in a safe house or safe foster home.⁸⁵

Current law requires the DCF to annually report to the Legislature the following information about the prevalence of CSEC:⁸⁶

- The specialized services provided and placements for victims of CSEC;
- The local service capacity to meet the specialized needs of CSEC victims;
- The placement of children in safe houses and safe foster homes during the year, including the criteria used to determine the placement of children;
- The number of children who were evaluated for placement;
- The number of children who were placed in safe houses or safe foster homes based upon the evaluation;
- The number of children who were not placed in safe houses or safe foster homes; and
- The DCF's response to the findings and recommendations made by the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability in its annual study on CSEC.

The DCF is also required to maintain data specifying the number of CSEC victims placed in a safe house or safe foster home as well as the number and county locations of safe harbor settings that were unable to meet the capacity demands of CSEC victims.⁸⁷

Annual Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children Report

The Legislature has directed the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA) is directed to conduct an annual study on the commercial sexual exploitation of children in Florida.⁸⁸ This review reports on the number of children that the DCF identified and tracked as victims of CSE. The study also describes specialized services provided and presents short and long-term outcomes for identified children; and presents recommendations to support better processes and policy regarding CSEC.

The multiple annual reports have identified issues regarding data collection for this population. The 2023 report found that the DCF's Level of Human Trafficking Placement Tool was a manual paper process that was scanned into the child welfare information system and did not

⁸³ Rule 65C-46.020, F.A.C.

⁸⁴ Section 409.1678(2)(c), F.S.

⁸⁵ Section 39.524, F.S.

⁸⁶ *Id.*

⁸⁷ *Id.*

⁸⁸ Section 409.16791, F.S.

allow for the easy extraction of data.⁸⁹ The OPPAGA has recommended that individual-level data be collected in a format that allows for easy extraction, aggregation, and analysis.⁹⁰

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

Section 1 of the bill amends s. 39.524, F.S., to use the term “commercial sexual exploitation of children” in place of “child commercial sexual exploitation.” This change aligns terminology between chs. 39 and 409, F.S.

The bill requires the DCF to maintain a copy of any paper-based assessments or tools used to assess a child for safe harbor placements, to be provided upon request of the Legislature.

The bill also requires the DCF to maintain individual-level data of children assessed for placement in a safe house or safe foster home. The DCF must maintain this data in an extractable format that allows for the extraction, aggregation, and analysis of anonymized individual-level data upon the Legislature’s request.

Section 2 of the bill amends s. 402.402, F.S., to require the DCF to develop and implement a child protective investigator and case manager recruitment program for the purpose of recruiting individuals who have previously held public safety and service positions. The recruitment program will aim to recruit individuals such as former law enforcement officers, first responders, military servicemembers, teachers, healthcare practitioners, and emergency management professionals that have a continued desire to serve their communities as child welfare personnel.

The bill requires the DCF to collaborate with CBC lead agencies to develop and distribute information regarding the child welfare system and how individuals who have previously held public safety and service positions can work within the child welfare system. The bill requires the DCF and CBC lead agencies to develop and implement an employment referral system for case managers.

The bill requires the DCF to collaborate with CBC lead agencies to collect data on the progress of the recruitment program and update this information quarterly. The DCF must collect the following data:

- The total number of individuals who sought information from the program;
- The total number of individuals who were hired by the DCF as CPIs;
- The total number of individuals who were referred by the program to a lead agency for case management positions and were hired by the lead agency as a case manager due to the referral; and
- The overall turnover rate for CPIs and case managers compared to the turnover rate for CPIs and case managers hired based upon the recruitment program.

The bill gives the DCF rulemaking authority to implement this recruitment program.

⁸⁹ Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability; *Annual Report on the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Florida, 2023; Report 23-08*, pg. 26, available at: <https://oppaga.fl.gov/Documents/Reports/23-08.pdf> (last visited 2/27/25).

⁹⁰ *Id.*

Section 3 of the bill amends s. 409.996, F.S., to require the DCF to develop and implement a 4-year pilot program of treatment foster care, or a substantially similar evidence-based program of professional foster care, subject to appropriation. The DCF is required to begin development of the pilot program by July 1, 2025, and start implementation by January 1, 2026.

The DCF is responsible for implementing and operating the treatment or professionalized foster care program. The DCF is required to develop processes for placing children in the treatment foster care homes and payment delivery to the licensed providers of pilot foster care homes. The DCF is required to collaborate with CBC lead agencies during this development process.

The bill requires the CBC lead agencies to work with the DCF to recruit individuals and families as licensed providers and identify potential eligible children for placement in pilot foster care homes.

The bill limits participation in the pilot program to children who:

- Are entering or continuing in foster care with high resource indicators, as determined by the DCF. High resource indicators may include, but are not limited to, the potential for frequent placement change due to current or past behavior or Department of Juvenile Justice involvement; or
- Are dependent and will require continued placement in foster care after discharge from inpatient residential treatment.

The bill requires the DCF to use relevant removal and placement data to implement the pilot program in the two judicial circuits with the greatest need for such a program.

The DCF is required to arrange for an independent evaluation of the pilot program to determine the appropriateness of placements and if there is a long-term cost benefit to continuing and expanding the pilot program statewide.

The DCF is required to set minimum standards for the pilot program that ensure:

- Treatment foster care homes are viewed as a temporary holistic treatment option and placement of a child in the treatment foster care home is limited to 9 months;
- Treatment foster parents receive specialized training in care coordination, de-escalation, crisis management, and other identified relevant skills to care for high acuity children;
- There are no more than two eligible children in a treatment foster care home at any time;
- There is at least one foster parent with specialized training available and dedicated to the care and treatment of placed children; and
- There is a 24 hour on-call crisis person available to provide in-home crisis intervention and placement stabilization services to the child and family.

The bill requires the DCF to submit a final report by January 1, 2030, to the Office of the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives that includes:

- The independent evaluation;
- The DCF's findings and evaluation;

- Recommendations as to whether the pilot program should be continued and expanded statewide; and if so,
- Fiscal and policy recommendations to ensure effective expansion and continued operation.

Section 4 of the bill requires the DCF to convene a case management workforce workgroup by July 1, 2025. The workgroup must have at least two representatives with subject matter expertise in case management from the DCF, CBC lead agencies, and contracted case management organizations.

The workgroup must collaborate with the Florida Institute for Child Welfare to do the following:

- Review and analyze existing statutes, rules, operating procedures, and federal requirements related to the provision of case management.
- Review and analyze legislative changes related to case management processes during the preceding 10 years
- Gather statewide data to assess compliance with statutory requirements, variations in case management practice, workforce capacity, and barriers to implementing statute, rule, and operating procedures to fidelity.
- Solicit insight from stakeholders, including frontline workers, supervisors, and administrators regarding challenges and potential solutions.
- Analyze findings to identify gaps in statutory requirements, determine whether the current structure, processes, and requirements of state, rule, and operating procedures are duplicative or unworkable, and evaluate how well case managers are implementing policy.
- Develop clear and actionable recommendations to streamline, clarify, standardize, and implement case management processes and practices that address workforce retention and allow for local community innovation.

The workgroup must operate through December 1, 2025, meeting as often as necessary. The bill requires the workgroup to submit a report to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House by December 1, 2025, that summarizes the work of the workgroup, the data analysis, and clear, actionable policy recommendations.

Section 5 of the bill requires the DCF to contract for a detailed study of bed capacity for residential treatment services and a gap analysis of non-residential treatment services for child victims of commercial sexual exploitation. The gap analysis must include what services are available for all child victims of commercial sexual exploitation, both those that are involved with the child welfare system, and those that did not have an involvement with the child welfare system prior to commercial sexual exploitation.

The study must be completed by December 31, 2025, and must, at a minimum, include all of the following:

- By DCF region, the current number of residential treatment beds in safe homes for treatment of child victims of commercial sexual exploitation, the number of individuals admitted and discharged annually, the types and frequency of diagnoses, and the lengths of stays.
- By DCF region, the current number of specialized safe therapeutic foster home placements for child victims of commercial sexual exploitation, the number of placements annually, and the lengths of stays.

- By DCF region, an analysis of non-residential treatment services for child victims of commercial sexual exploitation and the utilization of such services.
- Policy recommendations for ensuring sufficient bed capacity for residential treatment beds, specialized safe therapeutic foster home placements, and enhancing services for child victims of commercial sexual exploitation which could prevent the need for residential treatment beds.

Section 6 of the bill appropriates \$3 million in recurring General Revenue funds to the DCF to develop and implement the Treatment Foster Care Pilot Program for the 2025-2026 fiscal year.

Section 7 of the bill appropriates \$100,000 in recurring General Revenue funds and \$200,000 in nonrecurring General Revenue funds to the DCF to develop and implement the Child Protective Investigator and Case Manager Recruitment Program for the 2025-2026 fiscal year.

Section 8 of the bill provides an effective date of July 1, 2025, except for Sections 4 and 5, which become effective upon the act becoming law.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

The bill does not appear to require cities and counties to expend funds or limit their authority to raise revenue or receive state-shared revenues as specified by Article VII, s. 18, of the State Constitution.

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 bill appropriates \$3 million in recurring General Revenue funds to the DCF to develop and implement the Treatment Foster Care Pilot Program for the 2025-2026 fiscal year.

The bill appropriates \$100,000 in recurring General Revenue funds and \$200,000 in nonrecurring General Revenue funds to the DCF to develop and implement the Child Protective Investigator and Case Manager Recruitment Program for the 2025-2026 fiscal year.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Statutes Affected:

This bill substantially amends ss. 39.524, 402.402, and 409.996 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 Fiscal Policy on March 13, 2025:

- Removes the requirement that the DCF provide all redacted assessments for children who are assessed for safe harbor placements, instead requiring the DCF to maintain a copy of any paper-based assessment or tools used to assess a child for safe harbor placement, to be provided upon request of the Legislature.
- Appropriates \$3 million in recurring General Revenue funds to the DCF to develop and implement the Treatment Foster Care Pilot Program for the 2025-2026 fiscal year.
- Appropriates \$100,000 in recurring General Revenue funds and \$200,000 in nonrecurring General Revenue funds to the DCF to develop and implement the Child Protective Investigator and Case Manager Recruitment Program for the 2025-2026 fiscal year.

B. Amendments:

None.

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



912172

LEGISLATIVE ACTION

Senate	.	House
Comm: RCS	.	
03/13/2025	.	
	.	
	.	
	.	

The Committee on Fiscal Policy (Grall) recommended the following:

Senate Amendment (with title amendment)

Delete lines 74 - 76
and insert:
required by s. 409.16791; and must also maintain a copy of
any paper-based assessments or tools used to assess a child for
such placement, to be provided upon request of the Legislature.

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

And the title is amended as follows:



912172

11 Delete lines 3 - 7
12 and insert:
13 F.S.; requiring the Department of Children and
14 Families to maintain a copy of certain assessment
15 documents; requiring the department to maintain
16 certain



119236

LEGISLATIVE ACTION

Senate	.	House
Comm: RCS	.	
03/13/2025	.	
	.	
	.	
	.	

The Committee on Fiscal Policy (Grall) recommended the following:

Senate Amendment (with title amendment)

Between lines 281 and 282
insert:

Section 6. For the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the sum of \$3 million in recurring funds from the General Revenue Fund is appropriated to the Department of Children and Families to develop and implement the Treatment Foster Care Pilot Program established in s. 409.996(27), Florida Statutes, as created by this act.



119236

Section 7. For the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the sums of \$100,000 in recurring funds and \$200,000 in nonrecurring funds from the General Revenue Fund is appropriated to the Department of Children and Families to develop and implement the Child Protective Investigator and Case Manager Recruitment Program established in s. 402.402(4), Florida Statutes, as created by this act.

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

And the title is amended as follows:

Delete line 53

and insert:

requirements for the study; providing appropriations;
providing effective dates.

By the Committee on Children, Families, and Elder Affairs

586-02137-25

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1 A bill to be entitled
 2 An act relating to child welfare; amending s. 39.524,
 3 F.S.; requiring the Department of Children and
 4 Families to provide specified assessment data to the
 5 Legislature as part of a certain annual report
 6 relating to the commercial sexual exploitation of
 7 children; requiring the department to maintain certain
 8 related data in a specified format; amending s.
 9 402.402, F.S.; requiring the department to develop a
 10 child protective investigator and case manager
 11 recruitment program for a specified purpose;
 12 specifying requirements for the program; specifying
 13 duties of the department under the program, to be
 14 completed in collaboration with community-based care
 15 lead agencies; authorizing the department to adopt
 16 rules to implement the program; amending s. 409.996,
 17 F.S.; subject to an appropriation and beginning on a
 18 specified date, requiring the department to develop a
 19 4-year pilot program for treatment foster care;
 20 requiring the department to implement the pilot
 21 program by a specified date; requiring the department
 22 to implement and operate the pilot program and
 23 coordinate with community-based care lead agencies for
 24 specified purposes; requiring community-based care
 25 lead agencies to work with the department in
 26 recruiting licensed providers and identifying eligible
 27 participants in the program; limiting participation in
 28 the pilot program to children meeting specified
 29 criteria; requiring the department to identify two

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CODING: Words ~~stricken~~ are deletions; words underlined are additions.

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30 judicial circuits determined to have the greatest need
 31 for implementation of such a program; requiring the
 32 department to arrange for an independent evaluation of
 33 the pilot program to make specified determinations;
 34 requiring the department to establish certain minimum
 35 standards for the pilot program; requiring the
 36 department, by a specified date, to submit a final
 37 report to the Governor and the Legislature which
 38 includes specified evaluations, findings, and
 39 recommendations; requiring the department to convene a
 40 case management workforce workgroup by a specified
 41 date; providing for membership of the workgroup;
 42 specifying duties of the workgroup, to be completed in
 43 collaboration with the Florida Institute for Child
 44 Welfare; providing for meetings of the workgroup;
 45 providing for the operation of the workgroup until a
 46 specified date; requiring the workgroup to draft and
 47 submit a report to the Governor and the Legislature by
 48 a specified date; providing requirements for the
 49 report; requiring the department to contract for a
 50 detailed study of certain services for child victims
 51 of commercial sexual exploitation; requiring that the
 52 study be completed by a specified date; providing
 53 requirements for the study; providing effective dates.

54
 55 Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

56
 57 Section 1. Subsection (3) of section 39.524, Florida
 58 Statutes, is amended to read:

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CODING: Words ~~stricken~~ are deletions; words underlined are additions.

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39.524 Safe-harbor placement.—

(3) (a) By October 1 of each year, the department, with information from community-based care agencies, shall report to the Legislature on the prevalence of ~~child~~ commercial sexual exploitation of children; the specialized services provided and placement of such children; the local service capacity assessed pursuant to s. 409.1754; the placement of children in safe houses and safe foster homes during the year, including the criteria used to determine the placement of children; the number of children who were evaluated for placement; the number of children who were placed based upon the evaluation; the number of children who were not placed; and the department's response to the findings and recommendations made by the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability in its annual study on commercial sexual exploitation of children, as required by s. 409.16791; and shall also provide to the Legislature the redacted assessments for children who are assessed for such placement.

(b) The department shall maintain individual-level data of all children assessed for placement in a safe house or safe foster home and use this data to produce information that ~~specifies~~ specifying the number of children who were verified as victims of commercial sexual exploitation, who were referred to nonresidential services in the community, who were placed in a safe house or safe foster home, and who were referred to a safe house or safe foster home for whom placement was unavailable, and shall identify the counties in which such placement was unavailable. The department shall include this data in its report under this subsection so that the Legislature may

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consider this information in developing the General Appropriations Act. The department shall maintain collected individual-level data in a format that allows for extraction and analysis of anonymized individual-level and aggregate data upon request by the Legislature.

Section 2. Present subsections (4) and (5) of section 402.402, Florida Statutes, are redesignated as subsections (5) and (6), respectively, and a new subsection (4) is added to that section, to read:

402.402 Child protection and child welfare personnel; attorneys employed by the department.—

(4) RECRUITMENT PROGRAM.—The department shall develop and implement a child protective investigator and case manager recruitment program for the purpose of recruiting individuals who have previously held public safety and service positions, such as former law enforcement officers, first responders, military servicemembers, teachers, health care practitioners, and emergency management professionals. This recruitment program must focus on the education and recruitment of individuals who have held positions of public trust and who wish to further serve their communities as child welfare personnel.

(a) The department, in collaboration with community-based care lead agencies, shall:

1. Develop information pertaining to employment opportunities, application procedures, and training requirements for employment within the child welfare system and distribute that information to individuals who have previously held public safety and service positions.

2. Develop and implement an employment referral system with

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lead agencies for the case management population.

3. Collect the following information quarterly:

a. The total number of individuals who sought information from the program; were hired by the department as child protective investigators; were referred by the program to a lead agency for case management positions; and, based upon a referral by the program, were hired by the lead agency as a case manager; and

b. The overall turnover rate for child protective investigators and case managers compared to the turnover rate for child protective investigators and case managers hired based upon this program.

(b) The department may adopt rules to implement this subsection.

Section 3. Subsection (27) is added to section 409.996, Florida Statutes, to read:

409.996 Duties of the Department of Children and Families.—
The department shall contract for the delivery, administration, or management of care for children in the child protection and child welfare system. In doing so, the department retains responsibility for the quality of contracted services and programs and shall ensure that, at a minimum, services are delivered in accordance with applicable federal and state statutes and regulations and the performance standards and metrics specified in the strategic plan created under s. 20.19(1).

(27)(a) Subject to appropriation, beginning July 1, 2025, the department shall develop a 4-year pilot program of treatment foster care, or a substantially similar evidence-based program

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of professional foster care. The department shall implement the pilot program by January 1, 2026.

(b) The department shall implement and operate the pilot program and coordinate with community-based care lead agencies to develop a process for the placement of children in treatment foster care homes and deliver payment to the licensed providers operating the pilot treatment foster care homes.

(c) Community-based care lead agencies shall work with the department to recruit individuals and families as licensed providers and identify potential eligible children for placement in the pilot treatment foster care homes.

(d) Participation in the pilot program is limited to children who:

1. Are entering or continuing in foster care with high resource indicators, as determined by the department. These high resource indicators may include, but not be limited to, the potential for frequent placement change due to current or past behavior or Department of Juvenile Justice involvement; or

2. Are dependent and will require continued placement in foster care after discharge from inpatient residential treatment.

(e) The department shall identify two judicial circuits within which the pilot program will be implemented. The department shall use relevant removal and placement data to identify areas with the greatest need for such a program.

(f) The department shall arrange for an independent evaluation of the pilot program to determine whether:

1. The pilot program is maintaining children in the least restrictive and most appropriate family-like setting near the

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175 child's home while they are in department care; and

176 2. There is a long-term cost benefit associated with
 177 continuation and expansion of a treatment or professional foster
 178 care program.

179 (g) The department shall establish standards for the pilot
 180 program. Those standards must, at a minimum, ensure:

181 1. That placement of a child in a pilot treatment foster
 182 care home is a temporary holistic treatment option and may not
 183 exceed 9 months. A one-time 3-month extension may be granted if
 184 the department determines that the child is not ready for
 185 discharge from treatment foster care at 9 months;

186 2. Development and implementation of specialized training
 187 for treatment foster parents in care coordination, de-
 188 escalation, crisis management, and other identified relevant
 189 skills needed to care for children with high behavioral health
 190 needs that cannot be or have not been met in traditional foster
 191 care placements;

192 3. No more than two eligible children are placed at any
 193 time in a pilot treatment foster care home;

194 4. At least one foster parent with specialized training is
 195 available and dedicated to the care and treatment of placed
 196 children; and

197 5. A 24 hour on-call crisis person is available to provide
 198 in-home crisis intervention and placement stabilization services
 199 to the child and family.

200 (h) The department shall submit a final report by January
 201 1, 2030, to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the
 202 Speaker of the House of Representatives, including the
 203 independent evaluation, the department's findings and

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204 evaluation, recommendations as to whether the pilot program
 205 should be continued and expanded statewide, and, if so, fiscal
 206 and policy recommendations to ensure effective expansion and
 207 continued operation of the program.

208 Section 4. Effective upon this act becoming a law, the
 209 Department of Children and Families shall convene a case
 210 management workforce workgroup by July 1, 2025. The workgroup
 211 shall be composed of persons with subject-matter expertise in
 212 case management and child welfare policy.

213 (1) The department shall ensure the workgroup has at least
 214 two representatives with subject matter expertise in case
 215 management from each of the following:

216 (a) The Department of Children and Families.

217 (b) Community-based care lead agencies.

218 (c) Contracted case management organizations.

219 (2) In collaboration with the Florida Institute for Child
 220 Welfare, the workgroup shall do all of the following:

221 (a) Review and analyze existing statutes, rules, operating
 222 procedures, and federal requirements related to the provision of
 223 case management.

224 (b) Review and analyze legislative changes related to case
 225 management processes during the preceding 10 years and the
 226 impact that those changes have had on workload and workforce.

227 (c) Gather statewide data to assess all of the following:

228 1. Compliance with statutory requirements.

229 2. Variations in case management practice.

230 3. Current workforce capacity.

231 4. Barriers to successful implementation of any statutes,
 232 rules, and operating procedures.

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(d) Solicit insight from stakeholders, including frontline workers, supervisors, and administrators, regarding challenges and potential solutions.

(e) Analyze findings of the work conducted under paragraphs (a)-(d) to:

1. Identify any needed statutory changes;
2. Evaluate whether the current structure, processes, and requirements of statute, rule, and operating procedure are duplicative or unworkable; and
3. Evaluate how well case managers are implementing policy.

(f) Develop clear and actionable recommendations to streamline, clarify, standardize, and implement case management processes and practices that address workforce retention and allow for local community innovation.

(3) The workgroup shall meet as often as necessary to carry out these duties and responsibilities and shall operate until December 1, 2025, by which time it shall submit a report to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives which summarizes its work, describes and details its analysis of data, and recommends clear actionable policy.

Section 5. Effective upon this act becoming a law, the Department of Children and Families shall contract for a detailed study of bed capacity for residential treatment services and a gap analysis of nonresidential treatment services for child victims of commercial sexual exploitation identified by the child welfare systems of care and those not involved in the child welfare systems of care. The study must include analyses of current capacity, current and projected future

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demand, and the state's current and projected future ability to meet that demand. The study must be completed by December 31, 2025, and must, at a minimum, include all of the following:

(1) By department region, the current number of residential treatment beds in safe homes for treatment of child victims of commercial sexual exploitation, the number of individuals admitted and discharged annually, the types and frequency of diagnoses, and the lengths of stays.

(2) By department region, the current number of specialized safe therapeutic foster home placements for child victims of commercial sexual exploitation, the number of placements annually, and the lengths of stays.

(3) By department region, an analysis of nonresidential treatment services for child victims of commercial sexual exploitation and the utilization of such services.

(4) Policy recommendations for ensuring sufficient bed capacity for residential treatment beds, ensuring specialized safe therapeutic foster home placements, and enhancing services for child victims of commercial sexual exploitation which could prevent the need for residential treatment beds.

Section 6. Except as otherwise expressly provided in this act and except for this section, which shall take effect upon this act becoming a law, this act shall take effect July 1, 2025.

03/13/2025

Meeting Date

The Florida Senate
APPEARANCE RECORD

Deliver both copies of this form to
Senate professional staff conducting the meeting

7012

Bill Number or Topic

Committee

Name

Georgia McKeown

Phone

904 303 1611

Address

153 Deer Lake Circle

Email

georgia@gamckeown.com

Street

Ormond Beach, FL 32174

City

State

Zip

Speaking:



☐ Against

Against

☐ Information

Information

OR

Waive Speaking:



☐ Against

Against

PLEASE CHECK ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:

☐

I am appearing without
compensation or sponsorship.

☒

I am a registered lobbyist,
representing:

Family Support Services
Districts 4 & 6

☐

I am not a lobbyist, but received
something of value for my appearance
(travel, meals, lodging, etc.),
sponsored by:

While it is a tradition to encourage public testimony, time may not permit all persons wishing to speak to be heard at this hearing. Those who do speak may be asked to limit their remarks so that as many persons as possible can be heard. If you have questions about registering to lobby please see Fla. Stat. §11.045 and Joint Rule 1. [2020-2022 Joint Rules.pdf \(flsenate.gov\)](#)

This form is part of the public record for this meeting.

S-001 (08/10/2021)

3/13/2026

The Florida Senate
APPEARANCE RECORD

7012

Meeting Date

Fiscal Policy

Committee

Deliver both copies of this form to
Senate professional staff conducting the meeting

Bill Number or Topic

Amendment Barcode (if applicable)

Name

Victoria Zepp

Phone

850 241-6309

Address

310 W College

Email

victoriazepp@team180.com

Street

Tallahassee, FL 32102

City

State

Zip

Speaking:

☐

For

☐

Against

☐

Information

OR

Waive Speaking:

☒

In Support

☐

Against

PLEASE CHECK ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:

☐

I am appearing without
compensation or sponsorship.

☒

I am a registered lobbyist,
representing:

☐

I am not a lobbyist, but received
something of value for my appearance
(travel, meals, lodging, etc.),
sponsored by:

While it is a tradition to encourage public testimony, time may not permit all persons wishing to speak to be heard at this hearing. Those who do speak may be asked to limit their remarks so that as many persons as possible can be heard. If you have questions about registering to lobby please see Fla. Stat. §11.045 and Joint Rule 1. [2020-2022 Joint Rules.pdf \(flsenate.gov\)](#)

This form is part of the public record for this meeting.

S-001 (08/10/2021)

The Florida Senate

APPEARANCE RECORD

Deliver both copies of this form to
Senate professional staff conducting the meeting

3/13/25

Meeting Date

Fiscal Policy

Committee

7012

Bill Number or Topic

Amendment Barcode (if applicable)

Name

Victoria Zepp

Phone

833 618 8180

Address

310 W College

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Victoria@Team180.com

Street

City

State

32301

Zip

Speaking: ☐ For ☐ Against ☐ Information

OR

Waive Speaking: ☒ In Support ☐ Against

PLEASE CHECK ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:

☐

I am appearing without
compensation or sponsorship.

☒

I am a registered lobbyist,
representing:

FSS

☐

I am not a lobbyist, but received
something of value for my appearance
(travel, meals, lodging, etc.),
sponsored by:

While it is a tradition to encourage public testimony, time may not permit all persons wishing to speak to be heard at this hearing. Those who do speak may be asked to limit their remarks so that as many persons as possible can be heard. If you have questions about registering to lobby please see Fla. Stat. §11.045 and Joint Rule 1. [2020-2022 Joint Rules.pdf \(flsenate.gov\)](#)

This form is part of the public record for this meeting.

S-001 (08/10/2021)

CourtSmart Tag Report

Room: KB 412

Case No.: -

Type:

Caption: Senate Fiscal Policy Committee

Judge:

Started: 3/13/2025 8:30:12 AM

Ends: 3/13/2025 8:55:57 AM

Length: 00:25:46

8:30:15 AM Chair Gruters calls the meeting to order
8:30:16 AM Roll call
8:30:46 AM Chair Gruters makes opening remarks
8:31:01 AM Tab 2, SB 7012 by Children, Families, and Elder Affairs, Child Welfare
8:31:08 AM Senator Grall explains the bill
8:34:28 AM Amendment #912172 by Grall
8:34:35 AM Senator Grall explains the amendment
8:35:03 AM Senator Grall waives close on the amendment
8:35:05 AM Chair Gruters reports the amendment
8:35:06 AM Amendment #119236 by Grall
8:35:10 AM Senator Grall explains the amendment
8:35:22 AM Senator Grall waives close on the amendment
8:35:27 AM Chair Gruters reports the amendment
8:35:29 AM Back on the bill
8:35:31 AM Questions:
8:35:34 AM Vice Chair Osgood
8:36:00 AM Senator Grall
8:36:18 AM Vice Chair Osgood
8:36:21 AM Senator Grall
8:36:30 AM Chair Gruters recognizes those who waive speaking
8:36:56 AM Senator Grall closes on the bill
8:38:05 AM Roll call
8:38:38 AM Tab 1, SB 110 by Simon, Rural Communities
8:38:45 AM Senator Simon explains the bill
8:42:07 AM Amendment #406258 by Simon
8:42:11 AM Senator Simon explains the amendment
8:44:05 AM Chair Gruters recognizes those who waive speaking
8:44:36 AM Senator Simon waives close on the amendment
8:44:41 AM Chair Gruters reports the amendment
8:44:44 AM Back on the bill
8:44:50 AM Chair Gruters recognizes public appearances
8:45:14 AM Chair Gruters recognizes those who waive speaking
8:46:28 AM Chris Doolin
8:48:52 AM Kim Dinkins
8:50:39 AM Debate:
8:50:41 AM Senator Bradley
8:52:52 AM Senator Simon closes on the bill
8:54:59 AM Roll call
8:55:31 AM Chair Gruters recognizes Senators wishing to record votes
8:55:35 AM Senator Calatayud
8:55:46 AM Chair Gruters makes closing remarks
8:55:49 AM Senator Boyd moves to adjourn
8:55:50 AM Meeting adjourned