

1 A bill to be entitled
2 An act relating to regional rural development grants;
3 amending s. 288.018, F.S.; providing that regional
4 rural development grants may be used to hire regional
5 economic development organization professional staff;
6 authorizing the use of matching grant funds to provide
7 technical assistance to certain entities; providing a
8 maximum amount of grant funding that specified
9 economic development organizations may receive in a
10 year; revising the amount of required matching funds;
11 deleting a provision authorizing the Department of
12 Economic Opportunity to contract for the development
13 of certain enterprise zone web portals or websites;
14 requiring that contracts or agreements involving the
15 expenditure of grant funds be placed on a certain
16 website for a specified time period; requiring that
17 certain information be included in a contract or
18 agreement involving the expenditure of grant funds;
19 requiring that a plain language version of certain
20 contracts or agreements be placed on a certain
21 website; amending s. 288.0655, F.S.; increasing the
22 percent of the total infrastructure project cost for
23 which the department may award grants; providing that
24 improving access to and availability of broadband
25 Internet service may be included in a project that is

26 | eligible for rural infrastructure grant funds;
 27 | revising factors that the department must consider
 28 | when awarding grant funds; requiring that contracts or
 29 | agreements involving the expenditure of grant funds be
 30 | placed on a certain website for a specified time
 31 | period; requiring that certain information be included
 32 | in a contract or agreement involving the expenditure
 33 | of grant funds; requiring that a plain language
 34 | version of certain contracts or agreements be placed
 35 | on a certain website; providing an effective date.
 36 |

37 | Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:
 38 |

39 | Section 1. Subsections (1) and (3) of section 288.018,
 40 | Florida Statutes, are amended to read:

41 | 288.018 Regional Rural Development Grants Program.—

42 | (1) The department shall establish a matching grant
 43 | program to provide funding to regional ~~regionally based~~ economic
 44 | development organizations representing rural counties and
 45 | communities to build ~~for the purpose of building~~ the
 46 | professional capacity of such regional economic development
 47 | ~~their~~ organizations. Building the professional capacity of
 48 | regional economic development organizations includes hiring
 49 | professional staff to develop, facilitate the delivery of, and
 50 | directly provide needed economic development professional

51 services, including technical assistance, education and
52 leadership development, marketing and project recruitment, and
53 other services that are important for rural economic
54 development. ~~Such~~ Matching grants may also be used by a regional
55 ~~an~~ economic development organization to provide technical
56 assistance to local governments, local economic development
57 organizations, and existing and prospective businesses within
58 the rural counties and communities that it serves. The
59 department is authorized to approve, on an annual basis, grants
60 to such regional ~~regionally based~~ economic development
61 organizations. The maximum amount an organization may receive in
62 any year will be \$50,000, or \$250,000 for each of the three
63 regional economic development organizations serving rural areas
64 of opportunity designated pursuant to s. 288.0656. The three
65 regional economic development organizations include the North
66 Florida Economic Development Partnership, Opportunity Florida,
67 and Florida's Heartland Economic Region of Opportunity. Grant
68 funds received by a regional economic development organization
69 ~~\$150,000 in a rural area of opportunity recommended by the Rural~~
70 ~~Economic Development Initiative and designated by the Governor,~~
71 ~~and~~ must be matched each year by ~~an equivalent amount of~~
72 nonstate resources in an amount equal to 25 percent of the state
73 contribution.

74 (3) (a) A contract or agreement that involves the
75 expenditure of grant funds provided under this section shall be

76 | placed on the contracting regional economic development
 77 | organization's website for review at least 14 days before
 78 | execution.

79 | (b) A contract or agreement that involves the expenditure
 80 | of grant funds provided under this section, including a contract
 81 | or agreement entered into between another entity and a regional
 82 | economic development organization, a unit of local government,
 83 | or an economic development organization substantially
 84 | underwritten by a unit of local government, shall include:

- 85 | 1. The purpose of the contract or agreement.
- 86 | 2. Specific performance standards and responsibilities for
 87 | each entity.
- 88 | 3. A detailed project or contract budget, if applicable.
- 89 | 4. The value of any services provided.
- 90 | 5. The projected travel and entertainment expenses for
 91 | employees and board members, if applicable.

92 | (c) A plain language version of a contract or agreement
 93 | with a private entity, municipality, city, town, or vendor of
 94 | services, supplies, or programs, including marketing, or for the
 95 | purchase or lease or use of lands, facilities, or properties
 96 | which involves the expenditure of grant funds provided under
 97 | this section and which is estimated to exceed \$35,000 must be
 98 | posted on the contracting regional economic development
 99 | organization's website. ~~The department may also contract for the~~
 100 | ~~development of an enterprise zone web portal or websites for~~

101 ~~each enterprise zone which will be used to market the program~~
102 ~~for job creation in disadvantaged urban and rural enterprise~~
103 ~~zones. Each enterprise zone web page should include downloadable~~
104 ~~links to state forms and information, as well as local message~~
105 ~~boards that help businesses and residents receive information~~
106 ~~concerning zone boundaries, job openings, zone programs, and~~
107 ~~neighborhood improvement activities.~~

108 Section 2. Subsection (5) of section 288.0655, Florida
109 Statutes, is renumbered as subsection (6), paragraph (b) of
110 subsection (2) and subsection (4) are amended, and new
111 subsection (5) is added to that section, to read:

112 288.0655 Rural Infrastructure Fund.—

113 (2) (b) To facilitate access of rural communities and rural
114 areas of opportunity as defined by the Rural Economic
115 Development Initiative to infrastructure funding programs of the
116 Federal Government, such as those offered by the United States
117 Department of Agriculture and the United States Department of
118 Commerce, and state programs, including those offered by Rural
119 Economic Development Initiative agencies, and to facilitate
120 local government or private infrastructure funding efforts, the
121 department may award grants for up to 50 ~~30~~ percent of the total
122 infrastructure project cost. ~~If an application for funding is~~
123 ~~for a catalyst site, as defined in s. 288.0656, the department~~
124 ~~may award grants for up to 40 percent of the total~~
125 ~~infrastructure project cost.~~ Eligible projects must be related

126 to specific job-creation or job-retention opportunities.
127 Eligible projects may also include improving any inadequate
128 infrastructure that has resulted in regulatory action that
129 prohibits economic or community growth or reducing the costs to
130 community users of proposed infrastructure improvements that
131 exceed such costs in comparable communities, which includes
132 improving access to and the availability of broadband Internet
133 service. Eligible uses of funds shall include improvements to
134 public infrastructure for industrial or commercial sites, ~~and~~
135 upgrades to or development of public tourism infrastructure, and
136 improvements to broadband Internet service and access in
137 unserved or underserved rural communities. Authorized
138 infrastructure may include the following public or public-
139 private partnership facilities: storm water systems;
140 telecommunications facilities; broadband facilities; roads or
141 other remedies to transportation impediments; nature-based
142 tourism facilities; or other physical requirements necessary to
143 facilitate tourism, trade, and economic development activities
144 in the community. Authorized infrastructure may also include
145 publicly or privately owned self-powered nature-based tourism
146 facilities, publicly owned telecommunications facilities, and
147 broadband facilities, and additions to the distribution
148 facilities of the existing natural gas utility as defined in s.
149 366.04(3)(c), the existing electric utility as defined in s.
150 366.02, or the existing water or wastewater utility as defined

151 in s. 367.021(12), or any other existing water or wastewater
 152 facility, which owns a gas or electric distribution system or a
 153 water or wastewater system in this state where:

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

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

160 (4) By September 1, 2012, the department shall, in
 161 consultation with the organizations listed in subsection (3),
 162 and other organizations, reevaluate existing guidelines and
 163 criteria governing submission of applications for funding,
 164 review and evaluation of such applications, and approval of
 165 funding under this section. The department shall consider
 166 factors including, but not limited to, the project's potential
 167 for enhanced job creation or increased capital investment, the
 168 demonstration and level of local public and private commitment,
 169 whether the project is located ~~in an enterprise zone,~~ in a
 170 community development corporation service area~~,~~ or in an urban
 171 high-crime area as designated under s. 212.097, the unemployment
 172 rate of the county in which the project would be located, and
 173 the poverty rate of the community.

174 (5) (a) A contract or agreement that involves the
 175 expenditure of grant funds provided under this section shall be

176 placed on the department's website for review at least 14 days
177 before execution.

178 (b) A contract or agreement that includes the expenditure
179 of grant funds provided under this section, including a contract
180 or agreement entered into between an entity and a regional
181 economic development organization, a unit of local government,
182 or an economic development organization substantially
183 underwritten by a unit of local government shall include:

184 1. The purpose of the contract or agreement.

185 2. Specific performance standards and responsibilities for
186 each entity.

187 3. A detailed project or contract budget, if applicable.

188 4. The value of any services provided.

189 5. The projected travel and entertainment expenses for
190 employees and board members, if applicable.

191 (c) A plain language version of a contract or agreement
192 with a private entity, municipality, city, town, or vendor of
193 services, supplies, or programs, including marketing, or for the
194 purchase or lease or use of lands, facilities, or properties
195 which involves the expenditure of grant funds provided under
196 this section and which is estimated to exceed \$35,000 must be
197 posted on the department's website.

198 Section 3. This act shall take effect July 1, 2018.