

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 certain economic
9 development organizations may receive in a year;
10 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; authorizing the Department of Economic
22 Opportunity to establish a "Florida Site Readiness
23 Program" or "Ready Sites"; providing that the
24 department shall implement and manage the program;
25 amending s. 288.0655, F.S.; increasing the percent of

26 | the total infrastructure project cost for which the
 27 | department may award grants; providing that improving
 28 | access to and availability of broadband Internet
 29 | service may be included in a project that is eligible
 30 | for rural infrastructure grant funds; revising factors
 31 | that the department must consider when awarding grant
 32 | funds; requiring that contracts or agreements
 33 | involving the expenditure of grant funds be placed on
 34 | a certain website for a specified time period;
 35 | requiring that certain information be included in a
 36 | contract or agreement involving the expenditure of
 37 | grant funds; requiring that a plain language version
 38 | of certain contracts or agreements be placed on a
 39 | certain website; providing an effective date.

40 |

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

42 |

43 | Section 1. Subsections (1) and (3) of section 288.018,
 44 | Florida Statutes, are amended, and subsection (5) is added to
 45 | that section, to read:

46 | 288.018 Regional Rural Development Grants Program.—

47 | (1) The department shall establish a matching grant
 48 | program to provide funding to regional ~~regionally based~~ economic
 49 | development organizations representing rural counties and
 50 | communities to build ~~for the purpose of building~~ the

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

76 (3) (a) A contract or agreement that involves the
 77 expenditure of grant funds provided under this section shall be
 78 placed on the contracting regional economic development
 79 organization's website for review at least 14 days before
 80 execution.

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

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

94 (c) A plain language version of a contract or agreement
 95 with a private entity, municipality, city, town, or vendor of
 96 services, supplies, or programs, including marketing, or for the
 97 purchase or lease or use of lands, facilities, or properties
 98 which involves the expenditure of grant funds provided under
 99 this section and which is estimated to exceed \$35,000 must be
 100 posted on the contracting regional economic development

101 ~~organization's website. The department may also contract for the~~
102 ~~development of an enterprise zone web portal or websites for~~
103 ~~each enterprise zone which will be used to market the program~~
104 ~~for job creation in disadvantaged urban and rural enterprise~~
105 ~~zones. Each enterprise zone web page should include downloadable~~
106 ~~links to state forms and information, as well as local message~~
107 ~~boards that help businesses and residents receive information~~
108 ~~concerning zone boundaries, job openings, zone programs, and~~
109 ~~neighborhood improvement activities.~~

110 (5) In an effort to enhance and fortify Florida rural
111 communities' competitiveness and job creation, the department
112 may establish a "Florida Site Readiness Program" or
113 "ReadySites." Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the
114 implementation and management of this program shall rest within
115 the department. Prior to implementation, the department shall
116 identify the technical requirements governing program operation
117 and quality control standards of the program.

118 Section 2. Subsection (5) of section 288.0655, Florida
119 Statutes, is renumbered as subsection (6), paragraph (b) of
120 subsection (2) and subsection (4) are amended, and new
121 subsection (5) is added to that section, to read:

122 288.0655 Rural Infrastructure Fund.—

123 (2) (b) To facilitate access of rural communities and rural
124 areas of opportunity as defined by the Rural Economic
125 Development Initiative to infrastructure funding programs of the

126 Federal Government, such as those offered by the United States
127 Department of Agriculture and the United States Department of
128 Commerce, and state programs, including those offered by Rural
129 Economic Development Initiative agencies, and to facilitate
130 local government or private infrastructure funding efforts, the
131 department may award grants for up to 50 ~~30~~ percent of the total
132 infrastructure project cost. ~~If an application for funding is~~
133 ~~for a catalyst site, as defined in s. 288.0656, the department~~
134 ~~may award grants for up to 40 percent of the total~~
135 ~~infrastructure project cost.~~ Eligible projects must be related
136 to specific job-creation or job-retention opportunities.
137 Eligible projects may also include improving any inadequate
138 infrastructure that has resulted in regulatory action that
139 prohibits economic or community growth or reducing the costs to
140 community users of proposed infrastructure improvements that
141 exceed such costs in comparable communities, which includes
142 improving access to and the availability of broadband Internet
143 service. Eligible uses of funds shall include improvements to
144 public infrastructure for industrial or commercial sites, and
145 upgrades to or development of public tourism infrastructure, and
146 improvements to broadband Internet service and access in
147 unserved or underserved rural communities, provided such
148 improvements to broadband Internet service and access are
149 conducted through partnerships with dealers of communications
150 services, as defined in s. 202.11(2), established by a publicly

151 noticed and competitively selected process. Authorized
152 infrastructure may include the following public or public-
153 private partnership facilities: storm water systems;
154 telecommunications facilities; broadband facilities; roads or
155 other remedies to transportation impediments; nature-based
156 tourism facilities; or other physical requirements necessary to
157 facilitate tourism, trade, and economic development activities
158 in the community. Authorized infrastructure may also include
159 publicly or privately owned self-powered nature-based tourism
160 facilities, publicly owned telecommunications facilities, and
161 broadband facilities, and additions to the distribution
162 facilities of the existing natural gas utility as defined in s.
163 366.04(3)(c), the existing electric utility as defined in s.
164 366.02, or the existing water or wastewater utility as defined
165 in s. 367.021(12), or any other existing water or wastewater
166 facility, which owns a gas or electric distribution system or a
167 water or wastewater system in this state where:

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

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

174 (4) By September 1, 2012, the department shall, in
175 consultation with the organizations listed in subsection (3),

176 and other organizations, reevaluate existing guidelines and
177 criteria governing submission of applications for funding,
178 review and evaluation of such applications, and approval of
179 funding under this section. The department shall consider
180 factors including, but not limited to, the project's potential
181 for enhanced job creation or increased capital investment, the
182 demonstration and level of local public and private commitment,
183 whether the project is located ~~in an enterprise zone,~~ in a
184 community development corporation service area~~,~~ or in an urban
185 high-crime area as designated under s. 212.097, the unemployment
186 rate of the county in which the project would be located, and
187 the poverty rate of the community.

188 (5) (a) A contract or agreement that involves the
189 expenditure of grant funds provided under this section shall be
190 placed on the department's website for review at least 14 days
191 before execution.

192 (b) A contract or agreement that includes the expenditure
193 of grant funds provided under this section, including a contract
194 or agreement entered into between an entity and a regional
195 economic development organization, a unit of local government,
196 or an economic development organization substantially
197 underwritten by a unit of local government shall include:

- 198 1. The purpose of the contract or agreement.
199 2. Specific performance standards and responsibilities for
200 each entity.

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

202 4. The value of any services provided.

203 5. The projected travel and entertainment expenses for
 204 employees and board members, if applicable.

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

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