HB 1139

A bill to be entitled
An act relating to regional rural development grants;
amending s. 288.018, F.S.; defining the term "regional
economic development organization"; specifying the
duties of a regional economic development
organization; specifying authorized uses of matching
grants; increasing the maximum amount of annual grant
funding that specified economic development
organizations may receive; revising the required
amount of nonstate matching funds; requiring certain
information to be included in contracts or agreements
involving grant funds; specifying the information that
must be posted on a regional economic development
organizations website before execution of certain
contracts or agreements; deleting an obsolete
 provision; increasing the amount of funds the
Department of Economic Opportunity may expend each
fiscal year from the Rural Community Development
Revolving Loan Fund for certain purposes; amending s.
288.0655, F.S.; increasing the maximum percent of
total infrastructure project costs for which the
department may award a grant; repealing a provision
addressing increased certain maximum percentages;
specifying that improving availability of broadband
Internet services is an eligible project for certain

CODING: Words **stricken** are deletions; words *underlined* are additions.
grant funds; providing that grants for improvements to broadband Internet service and access must be conducted through certain partnerships; extending the date by which the department is required to reevaluate certain guidelines; requiring certain information to be included in contracts or agreements involving grant funds; specifying the information that must be posted on a regional economic development organizations website before execution of certain contracts or agreements; providing an effective date.

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

Section 1. Subsections (1), (3), 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(2)(d).

(b) The department shall establish a matching grant program to provide funding to regional, regionally based economic development organizations representing rural counties and communities for the 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. Such Matching 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 within the rural counties and communities that it serves.

(c) A regional economic development organization may apply annually to the department for a matching grant. The department is authorized to approve, on an annual basis, grants to such regionally based economic development organizations. The maximum amount an organization may receive in any year will be $50,000, or $250,000 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 department as serving such a region.

(d) Grant funds received by a regional economic development organization $150,000 in a rural area of opportunity recommended by the Rural Economic Development Initiative and designated by the Governor, and must be matched each year by an equivalent amount of nonstate resources in an amount equal to 25 percent of the state contribution.
(3)(a) A contract or agreement that involves the expenditure of grant funds provided under this section, including a contract or agreement entered into between another entity and a regional economic development organization, a unit of local government, or an economic development organization substantially underwritten by a unit of local government, must include:

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

(b) At least 14 days before executing a contract or agreement, the contracting regional economic development organization shall post on its website:

1. Any contract or agreement that involves the expenditure of grant funds provided under this section.
2. A plain-language version of any contract or agreement that is estimated to exceed $35,000 with a private entity, a municipality, or a vendor of services, supplies, or programs, including marketing, or for the purchase or lease or use of lands, facilities, or properties which involves the expenditure of grant funds provided under this section and which is...
estimated to exceed $35,000 The department may also contract for the development of an enterprise zone web portal or websites for each enterprise zone which will be used to market the program for job creation in disadvantaged urban and rural enterprise zones. Each enterprise zone web page should include downloadable links to state forms and information, as well as local message boards that help businesses and residents receive information concerning zone boundaries, job openings, zone programs, and neighborhood improvement activities.

(4) The department may expend up to $1 million $750,000 each fiscal year from funds appropriated to the Rural Community Development Revolving Loan Fund for the purposes outlined in this section. The department may contract with Enterprise Florida, Inc., for the administration of the purposes specified in this section. Funds released to Enterprise Florida, Inc., for this purpose shall be released quarterly and shall be calculated based on the applications in process.

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

288.0655 Rural Infrastructure Fund.—

(2)

(b) To facilitate access of rural communities and rural
areas of opportunity as defined by the Rural Economic Development Initiative to infrastructure funding programs of the Federal Government, such as those offered by the United States Department of Agriculture and the United States Department of Commerce, and state programs, including those offered by Rural Economic Development Initiative agencies, and to facilitate local government or private infrastructure funding efforts, the department may award grants for up to 50% of the total infrastructure project cost. If an application for funding is for a catalyst site, as defined in s. 288.0656, the department may award grants for up to 40 percent of the total infrastructure project cost. Eligible projects must be related to specific job-creation or job-retention opportunities. Eligible projects may also 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, and improving access to and the availability of broadband Internet service. Eligible uses of funds shall include improvements to public infrastructure for industrial or commercial sites, upgrades to or development of public tourism infrastructure, and improvements to broadband Internet service and access in unserved or underserved rural communities. Improvements to broadband Internet service and access must be conducted through
a partnership or partnerships with one or more dealers of communications services, as defined in s. 202.11(2), and the partnership or partnerships must be established by a publicly noticed and competitively selected process and upgrades to or development of public tourism infrastructure. Authorized infrastructure may include the following public or public-private partnership facilities: storm water systems; telecommunications facilities; broadband facilities; roads or other remedies to transportation impediments; nature-based tourism facilities; or other physical requirements necessary to facilitate tourism, trade, and economic development activities in the community. Authorized infrastructure may also include publicly or privately owned self-powered nature-based tourism facilities, publicly owned telecommunications facilities, and broadband 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 where:

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.

(4) By September 1, 2021, the department shall, in consultation with the organizations listed in subsection (3), and other organizations, reevaluate existing guidelines and criteria governing submission of applications for funding, review and evaluation of such applications, and approval of funding under this section. The department shall consider factors including, but not limited to, the project's potential for enhanced job creation or increased capital investment, the demonstration and level of local public and private commitment, whether the project is located in an enterprise zone, in a community development corporation service area, or in an urban high-crime area as designated under s. 212.097, the unemployment rate of the county in which the project would be located, and the poverty rate of the community.

(5)(a) A contract or agreement that involves the expenditure of grant funds provided under this section, including a contract or agreement entered into between another entity and a regional economic development organization, a unit of local government, or an economic development organization substantially underwritten by a unit of local government, must include:

1. The purpose of the contract or agreement.

2. Specific performance standards and responsibilities for
each entity.

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

4. The value of any services provided.

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

(b) At least 14 days before execution, the contracting regional economic development organization shall post on its website:

1. Any contract or agreement that involves the expenditure of grant funds provided under this section.

2. A plain-language version of a contract or agreement that is estimated to exceed $35,000 with a private entity, a municipality, or a vendor of services, supplies, or programs, including marketing, or for the purchase or lease or use of lands, facilities, or properties which involves the expenditure of grant funds provided under this section.

(6) For the 2019-2020 fiscal year, the funds appropriated for the grant program for Florida Panhandle counties shall be distributed pursuant to and for the purposes described in the proviso language associated with Specific Appropriation 2314 of the 2019-2020 General Appropriations Act. This subsection expires July 1, 2020.

Section 3. This act shall take effect July 1, 2020.