

By Senator Calatayud

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30 the Correctional Education Program to develop and
31 implement a vocational curriculum in which certain
32 inmates can earn specified commercial driver licenses;
33 amending s. 945.091, F.S.; conforming a provision to
34 changes made by the act; amending s. 945.0913, F.S.;
35 authorizing inmates to drive a state-owned vehicle
36 under certain circumstances; providing an effective
37 date.

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

41 Section 1. Subsection (35) of section 334.044, Florida
42 Statutes, is amended to read:

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

(35) To expend funds for a ~~construction~~ workforce development program, in consultation with affected stakeholders, for delivery of projects designated in the department's work program. The department may annually expend up to \$5 million from the State Transportation Trust Fund for fiscal years 2025-2026 through 2029-2030 in grants to state colleges, ~~and~~ school districts, and private educational providers, with priority given to state colleges and school districts in counties that are rural communities as defined in s. 288.0656(2), for certification and training opportunities within the Florida Transportation Academy, for the purchase of equipment simulators with authentic original equipment manufacturer controls and a companion curriculum, for the purchase of instructional aids for use in conjunction with the equipment simulators, and to support

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59 offering an elective course in heavy civil construction which
60 must, at a minimum, provide the student with an Occupational
61 Safety and Health Administration 10-hour certification and a
62 fill equipment simulator certification.

63 Section 2. Subsection (1) of section 334.62, Florida
64 Statutes, is amended to read:

65 334.62 Florida Transportation Academy.—The Legislature
66 finds that the growth and sustainability of the transportation
67 industry workforce is vital to the continued success and
68 efficiency of the state's supply chain and economic
69 competitiveness. In order to prioritize the continued need for
70 transportation industry workforce development programs, the
71 Florida Transportation Academy is established within the
72 department. In order to support, promote, and sustain workforce
73 development efforts in the transportation sector, the department
74 may do all of the following:

75 (1) Coordinate with the Department of Corrections to
76 identify and create certification and training opportunities for
77 nonviolent, scheduled-release inmates and inmates who have 2
78 years or less remaining on their sentence and create a
79 notification process between the Department of Corrections and
80 the department for nonviolent inmates with imminent scheduled-
81 release dates who are expected to seek employment upon release.
82 Such certification and training opportunities must include
83 programs within the state correctional institutions or
84 correctional facilities to train and license nonviolent,
85 scheduled-release inmates and inmates who have 2 years or less
86 remaining on their sentence to operate a commercial motor
87 vehicle. The curriculum for such programs must include training

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88 for Class A and Class B commercial driver licenses. The
89 department's workforce development funds as described in s.
90 334.044(35) may be used to fund such certification and training
91 opportunities.

92 Section 3. Section 446.55, Florida Statutes, is created to
93 read:

94 446.55 Reimbursement for insurance premiums.—

95 (1) For purposes of this section, the term "employer" means
96 an employer principally headquartered in this state which
97 employed 100 or fewer employees as of the end of the calendar
98 year immediately preceding the year in which reimbursement is
99 sought.

100 (2) Subject to appropriation, employers may apply to the
101 Department of Financial Services, in a format prescribed by the
102 department, for reimbursement of the proportionate cost of
103 workers' compensation and automobile liability premiums paid
104 during the fiscal year for former inmates who have less than 2
105 years of commercial driving experience and who were hired during
106 the previous fiscal year.

107 (a) An application for reimbursement must include all of
108 the following information:

109 1. The number of employees for whom reimbursement is
110 sought.

111 2. Each employee's name, the date he or she was hired, the
112 date on which he or she was issued a commercial driver license,
113 the criminal offense for which the employee was convicted, and
114 the final disposition of the employee's case.

115 3. The total amount of reimbursement requested and the
116 method used by the employer to determine the proportionate share

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117 of the cost of premiums attributable to each employee.

118 4. The employer's name, point of contact, and contact
119 information.

120 5. An attestation by the employer agreeing to maintain all
121 documentation supporting the information provided in the
122 application for at least 5 years.

123 6. Any other information requested by the department.

124 (b) The employee for whom reimbursement is sought must be a
125 United States citizen or qualified noncitizen authorized to work
126 in the United States who is proficient in English.

127 (c) An employer may not request reimbursement for an
128 employee who was convicted of any of the offenses in s.
129 945.091(5).

130 (3) Within 45 days after receipt of a completed
131 application, the department must process the application and
132 notify the applicant of approval or denial of the application.
133 Before making its determination, the department must coordinate
134 with the employer to verify the information on the application
135 relating to the employer and the employees for whom
136 reimbursement is sought.

137 (4) Reimbursements provided under this section are limited
138 to \$5,000 per employee and \$20,000 per employer.

139 Section 4. Paragraph (h) of subsection (3) and subsections
140 (5) and (6) of section 944.801, Florida Statutes, are amended to
141 read:

142 944.801 Education for state prisoners.—

143 (3) The responsibilities of the Correctional Education
144 Program shall be to:

145 (h) Develop a written procedure for selecting programs to

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146 add to or delete from the vocational curriculum. The procedure
147 shall include labor market analyses that demonstrate the
148 projected demand for certain occupations and the projected
149 supply of potential employees. In conducting these analyses, the
150 department shall evaluate the feasibility of adding vocational
151 education programs that have been identified by the Department
152 of Commerce, the Department of Education, or a regional
153 coordinating council as being in undersupply in this state. The
154 department shall periodically reevaluate the vocational
155 education programs in major institutions to determine which of
156 the programs support and provide relevant skills to inmates who
157 could be assigned to a correctional work program that is
158 operated as a Prison Industry Enhancement Program. The annual
159 report of correctional education activities required under
160 paragraph (f) must include all of the following information:

161 1. The number of inmates who completed vocational training
162 through the Correctional Education Program.

163 2. The number of inmates who completed vocational training
164 through the Correctional Education Program and were employed
165 within 6 months after being released from prison.

166 3. Statistics on whether the employed former inmates who
167 completed training through the Correctional Education Program
168 are employed in an occupation aligned with their education and
169 training received through the Correctional Education Program.

170 (5) The Correctional Education Program may:

171 (a) Establish a prison entrepreneurship program and adopt
172 procedures for admitting student inmates. If the department
173 elects to develop the program, it must include at least 180 days
174 of in-prison education. The program curriculum must include a

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175 component on developing a business plan, procedures for
176 graduation and certification of successful student inmates, and
177 at least 90 days of transitional and postrelease continuing
178 educational services. Transitional and postrelease continuing
179 educational services may be offered to graduate student inmates
180 on a voluntary basis and are not a requirement for completion of
181 the program. The department shall enter into agreements with
182 public or private colleges or universities, other nonprofit
183 entities, or other authorized providers under s. 1002.45(1)(a)1.
184 to implement the program. The program must be funded with
185 existing resources.

186 (b) ~~(6) The Correctional Education Program may~~ Work in
187 cooperation with the Department of Agriculture and Consumer
188 Services, Florida Forestry Service Division, and the Florida
189 Department of Financial Services, Division of State Fire Marshal
190 to develop a program for implementation within state
191 correctional institutions or correctional facilities to train
192 and certify inmates as firefighters. The program should include,
193 but not be limited to, certification of inmates as state forest
194 staff trained to help protect homes, forestland, and natural
195 resources from the effects of wildfires throughout the state.

196 (c) Develop and implement a vocational curriculum for
197 implementation within the state correctional institutions or
198 correctional facilities to train and license inmates to operate
199 a commercial motor vehicle. The vocational curriculum must
200 include training for Class A and Class B driver licenses, and
201 participation in such curriculum is limited to prerelease
202 inmates and inmates who have 2 years or less remaining to serve
203 on their sentence.

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204 Section 5. Paragraph (b) of subsection (1) of section
205 945.091, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

206 945.091 Extension of the limits of confinement; restitution
207 by employed inmates.—

208 (1) The department may adopt rules permitting the extension
209 of the limits of the place of confinement of an inmate as to
210 whom there is reasonable cause to believe that the inmate will
211 honor his or her trust by authorizing the inmate, under
212 prescribed conditions and following investigation and approval
213 by the secretary, or the secretary's designee, who shall
214 maintain a written record of such action, to leave the confines
215 of that place unaccompanied by a custodial agent for a
216 prescribed period of time to:

217 (b) Work at paid employment, participate in an education or
218 a training program, or voluntarily serve a public or nonprofit
219 agency or faith-based service group in the community, while
220 continuing as an inmate of the institution or facility in which
221 the inmate is confined, except during the hours of his or her
222 employment, education, training, or service and traveling
223 thereto and therefrom. An inmate may travel to and from his or
224 her place of employment, education, or training only by means of
225 walking, bicycling, or using public transportation or
226 transportation that is provided by a family member or employer.
227 Contingent upon specific appropriations or as authorized in s.
228 945.0913(2), the department may transport an inmate in a state-
229 owned vehicle if the inmate is unable to obtain other means of
230 travel to his or her place of employment, education, or
231 training.

232 1. An inmate may participate in paid employment only during

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233 the last 36 months of his or her confinement, unless sooner
234 requested by the Florida Commission on Offender Review or the
235 Control Release Authority.

236 2. While working at paid employment and residing in the
237 facility, an inmate may apply for placement at a contracted
238 substance abuse transition housing program. The transition
239 assistance specialist shall inform the inmate of program
240 availability and assess the inmate's need and suitability for
241 transition housing assistance. If an inmate is approved for
242 placement, the specialist shall assist the inmate. If an inmate
243 requests and is approved for placement in a contracted faith-
244 based substance abuse transition housing program, the specialist
245 must consult with the chaplain before such placement. The
246 department shall ensure that an inmate's faith orientation, or
247 lack thereof, will not be considered in determining admission to
248 a faith-based program and that the program does not attempt to
249 convert an inmate toward a particular faith or religious
250 preference.

251 Section 6. Section 945.0913, Florida Statutes, is amended
252 to read:

253 945.0913 Inmates prohibited from driving state-owned
254 vehicles to transport inmates in a work-release program;
255 exception.—

256 (1) Except as provided in subsection (2), an inmate may not
257 drive a state-owned vehicle for the purpose of transporting
258 inmates who are participating in a work-release program
259 authorized in s. 945.091(1)(b).

260 (2) An inmate may drive a state-owned vehicle if he or she
261 is participating in, or a graduate of, a department career and

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262 technical education program or a contracted commercial driver
263 license training program. An inmate may only operate a state-
264 owned vehicle on department property or other state-owned
265 property that is specifically designated for career and
266 technical education purposes.

267 Section 7. This act shall take effect July 1, 2026.