

By Senator Calatayud

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A bill to be entitled

An act relating to education and workforce development for current and former inmates; amending s. 334.044, F.S.; authorizing the Department of Transportation to expend certain funds for all workforce development programs, rather than only construction workforce development programs; revising the entities to which and the purposes for which the department may provide certain grants; amending s. 334.62, F.S.; requiring that certification and training opportunities include training for specified commercial driver licenses for certain inmates; authorizing the department to use workforce development funds for certain certification and training opportunities; creating s. 446.55, F.S.; defining the term "employer"; authorizing employers to apply to the Department of Financial Services for reimbursement of the cost of certain workers' compensation and automobile liability premiums, subject to appropriation; providing requirements for the reimbursement application; providing requirements and restrictions for reimbursement; requiring the department to process an application and notify the applicant within a specified timeframe; requiring the department to coordinate with the employer for a certain purpose; providing reimbursement limits; amending s. 944.801, F.S.; requiring the Correctional Education Program under the Department of Corrections to include specified information in a report annually submitted to the Secretary of Corrections; authorizing

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

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

Section 1. Subsection (35) of section 334.044, Florida 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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for Class A and Class B commercial driver licenses. The department's workforce development funds as described in s. 334.044(35) may be used to fund such certification and training opportunities.

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

446.55 Reimbursement for insurance premiums.—

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

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

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

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

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

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

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of the cost of premiums attributable to each employee.

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

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

6. Any other information requested by the department.

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

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

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

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

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

944.801 Education for state prisoners.—

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

(h) Develop a written procedure for selecting programs to

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

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

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

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

(5) The Correctional Education Program may:

(a) Establish a prison entrepreneurship program and adopt procedures for admitting student inmates. If the department elects to develop the program, it must include at least 180 days 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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Section 5. Paragraph (b) of subsection (1) of section 945.091, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

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

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

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

1. An inmate may participate in paid employment only during

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

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

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

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

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

(2) An inmate may drive a state-owned vehicle if he or she 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.