

1 A bill to be entitled
 2 An act relating to the Rural Economic Development
 3 Initiative; amending s. 288.0656, F.S.; revising
 4 legislative intent relating to the Rural Economic
 5 Development Initiative; redefining the term "rural
 6 area of opportunity"; revising the duties,
 7 responsibilities, and membership of the Rural Economic
 8 Development Initiative; revising reporting
 9 requirements; amending ss. 163.3177, 163.3187,
 10 257.193, 288.019, 288.06561, 290.0055, 290.06561,
 11 337.403, 339.2818, 339.2819, 339.63, 479.16, and
 12 627.6699, F.S.; conforming cross-references; providing
 13 an effective date.

14
 15 Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

16
 17 Section 1. Paragraph (e) of subsection (7) of section
 18 163.3177, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

19 163.3177 Required and optional elements of comprehensive
 20 plan; studies and surveys.—

21 (7)

22 (e) This subsection does not confer the status of rural
 23 area of opportunity, or any of the rights or benefits derived
 24 from such status, on any land area not otherwise designated as
 25 such pursuant to s. 288.0656(8) ~~s. 288.0656(7)~~.

26 Section 2. Subsection (3) of section 163.3187, Florida
27 Statutes, is amended to read:

28 163.3187 Process for adoption of small-scale comprehensive
29 plan amendment.—

30 (3) If the small scale development amendment involves a
31 site within a rural area of opportunity as defined under s.
32 288.0656(3)(d) ~~s. 288.0656(2)(d)~~ for the duration of such
33 designation, the 10-acre limit listed in subsection (1) shall be
34 increased by 100 percent to 20 acres. The local government
35 approving the small scale plan amendment shall certify to the
36 state land planning agency that the plan amendment furthers the
37 economic objectives set forth in the executive order issued
38 under s. 288.0656(8) ~~s. 288.0656(7)~~, and the property subject to
39 the plan amendment shall undergo public review to ensure that
40 all concurrency requirements and federal, state, and local
41 environmental permit requirements are met.

42 Section 3. Subsection (2) of section 257.193, Florida
43 Statutes, is amended to read:

44 257.193 Community Libraries in Caring Program.—

45 (2) The purpose of the Community Libraries in Caring
46 Program is to assist libraries in rural communities, as defined
47 in s. 288.0656(3) ~~s. 288.0656(2)~~ and subject to the provisions
48 of s. 288.06561, to strengthen their collections and services,
49 improve literacy in their communities, and improve the economic
50 viability of their communities.

51 Section 4. Section 288.019, Florida Statutes, is amended
52 to read:

53 288.019 Rural considerations in grant review and
54 evaluation processes.—Notwithstanding any other law, and to the
55 fullest extent possible, the member agencies and organizations
56 of the Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI) as defined
57 in s. 288.0656(7)(a) ~~s. 288.0656(6)(a)~~ shall review all grant
58 and loan application evaluation criteria to ensure the fullest
59 access for rural counties as defined in s. 288.0656(3) ~~s.~~
60 ~~288.0656(2)~~ to resources available throughout the state.

61 (1) Each REDI agency and organization shall review all
62 evaluation and scoring procedures and develop modifications to
63 those procedures which minimize the impact of a project within a
64 rural area.

65 (2) Evaluation criteria and scoring procedures must
66 provide for an appropriate ranking based on the proportionate
67 impact that projects have on a rural area when compared with
68 similar project impacts on an urban area.

69 (3) Evaluation criteria and scoring procedures must
70 recognize the disparity of available fiscal resources for an
71 equal level of financial support from an urban county and a
72 rural county.

73 (a) The evaluation criteria should weight contribution in
74 proportion to the amount of funding available at the local
75 level.

76 (b) In-kind match should be allowed and applied as
 77 financial match when a county is experiencing financial distress
 78 through elevated unemployment at a rate in excess of the state's
 79 average by 5 percentage points or because of the loss of its ad
 80 valorem base.

81 (4) For existing programs, the modified evaluation
 82 criteria and scoring procedure must be delivered to the
 83 department for distribution to the REDI agencies and
 84 organizations. The REDI agencies and organizations shall review
 85 and make comments. Future rules, programs, evaluation criteria,
 86 and scoring processes must be brought before a REDI meeting for
 87 review, discussion, and recommendation to allow rural counties
 88 fuller access to the state's resources.

89 Section 5. Section 288.0656, Florida Statutes, is amended
 90 to read:

91 288.0656 Rural Economic Development Initiative.—

92 (1)~~(a)~~ Recognizing that rural communities and regions
 93 continue to face extraordinary challenges in their efforts to
 94 significantly improve their quality of life and economies,
 95 specifically in terms of personal income, education,
 96 infrastructure, access to healthcare, and job creation, average
 97 ~~wages, and strong tax bases,~~ it is the intent of the Legislature
 98 to encourage and facilitate:

99 (a) Job creation through the location and expansion of
 100 ~~major economic development projects of significant scale in such~~

101 ~~rural communities.~~

102 (b) Improved community infrastructure, including, but not
103 limited to, roads, utilities, water and sewer, and broadband.

104 (c) The development and expansion of a skilled workforce.

105 (d) Improved access to healthcare.

106 (2)~~(b)~~ The Rural Economic Development Initiative, known as
107 "REDI," is created within the Department of Economic
108 Opportunity, and the participation of state and regional
109 agencies in this initiative is authorized.

110 (3)~~(2)~~ As used in this section, the term:

111 (a) "Catalyst project" means a business locating or
112 expanding in a rural area of opportunity to serve as an economic
113 generator of regional significance for the growth of a regional
114 target industry cluster. The project must provide capital
115 investment on a scale significant enough to affect the entire
116 region and result in the development of high-wage and high-skill
117 jobs.

118 (b) "Catalyst site" means a parcel or parcels of land
119 within a rural area of opportunity that has been prioritized as
120 a geographic site for economic development through partnerships
121 with state, regional, and local organizations. The site must be
122 reviewed by REDI and approved by the department for the purposes
123 of locating a catalyst project.

124 (c) "Economic distress" means conditions affecting the
125 fiscal and economic viability of a rural community, including

126 such factors as low per capita income, low per capita taxable
 127 values, high unemployment, high underemployment, low weekly
 128 earned wages compared to the state average, low housing values
 129 compared to the state average, high percentages of the
 130 population receiving public assistance, high poverty levels
 131 compared to the state average, and a lack of year-round stable
 132 employment opportunities.

133 (d) "Rural area of opportunity" means a rural community,
 134 or a region composed of rural communities, designated by the
 135 Governor, which has been adversely affected by ~~an extraordinary~~
 136 ~~economic event,~~ severe or chronic economic distress, and faces
 137 competitive disadvantages such as low labor force participation,
 138 low educational attainment levels, high unemployment, "D" or "F"
 139 district grades pursuant to s. 1008.34, high infant mortality
 140 rates, and high diabetes and obesity rates, and which ~~or a~~
 141 ~~natural disaster or that~~ presents a unique economic development
 142 opportunity of regional impact.

143 (e) "Rural community" means:

- 144 1. A county with a population of 75,000 or fewer.
- 145 2. A county with a population of 125,000 or fewer which is
 146 contiguous to a county with a population of 75,000 or fewer.
- 147 3. A municipality within a county described in
 148 subparagraph 1. or subparagraph 2.
- 149 4. An unincorporated federal enterprise community or an
 150 incorporated rural city with a population of 25,000 or fewer and

151 an employment base focused on traditional agricultural or
152 resource-based industries, located in a county not defined as
153 rural, which has at least three or more of the economic distress
154 factors identified in paragraph (c) and verified by the
155 department.

156
157 For purposes of this paragraph, population shall be determined
158 in accordance with the most recent official estimate pursuant to
159 s. 186.901.

160 (4)~~(3)~~ REDI is ~~shall be~~ responsible for coordinating and
161 focusing the efforts and resources of state and regional
162 agencies on the challenges of the state's rural areas of
163 opportunity and economically distressed rural communities. REDI
164 shall work ~~problems which affect the fiscal, economic, and~~
165 ~~community viability of Florida's economically distressed rural~~
166 ~~communities, working~~ with local governments, community-based
167 organizations, and private organizations that have an interest
168 in the renewed prosperity and competitiveness of ~~growth and~~
169 ~~development of these communities to find ways to balance~~
170 ~~environmental and growth management issues with local needs.~~

171 (5)~~(4)~~ REDI shall review and evaluate the impact of
172 statutes and rules on rural communities and shall work to
173 minimize any adverse impact and undertake outreach and capacity-
174 building efforts to improve rural communities' ability to
175 compete in a global economy.

176 ~~(6)(5)~~ REDI shall facilitate better access to state
177 resources by promoting direct access and referrals to
178 appropriate state and regional agencies and statewide
179 organizations. ~~REDI may undertake outreach, capacity-building,~~
180 ~~and other advocacy efforts to improve conditions in rural~~
181 ~~communities. These activities may include sponsorship of~~
182 ~~conferences and achievement awards.~~

183 (7) (a) REDI shall consist of the following members:

- 184 1. The executive director of the Department of Economic
185 Opportunity or his or her designee, who shall serve as the
186 chair.
- 187 2. The Secretary of Transportation or his or her designee.
- 188 3. The Secretary of Environmental Protection or his or her
189 designee.
- 190 4. The Commissioner of Agriculture or his or her designee.
- 191 5. The State Surgeon General or his or her designee.
- 192 6. The Commissioner of Education or his or her designee.
- 193 7. The chair of the board of directors of CareerSource
194 Florida, Inc., or his or her designee.
- 195 8. The chair of the board of the regional economic
196 development organization for each of the rural areas of
197 opportunity or his or her designee.
- 198 9. Five members from the private sector, three of whom
199 shall be appointed by the executive director of the Department
200 of Economic Opportunity, one of whom shall be appointed by the

201 President of the Senate, and one of whom shall be appointed by
202 the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

203 (b) In making their appointments, the executive director,
204 the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of
205 Representatives shall ensure that the appointments reflect the
206 diversity of Florida's business community and are representative
207 of the economic development goals in subsection (1).

208 (c) The executive director, the President of the Senate,
209 and the Speaker of the House of Representatives shall consider
210 appointees who reflect the state's racial, ethnic, and gender
211 diversity, and who are from rural communities.

212 (d) Each appointed member shall be appointed to a 2-year
213 term.

214 (e) Initial appointments shall be made by July 1. Member
215 terms shall expire on June 30.

216 (f) A vacancy shall be filled for the remainder of an
217 unexpired term and filled in the same manner as the original
218 appointment.

219 (g) An appointed member may be removed by the appointing
220 officer for cause. Absence of a member from three consecutive
221 meetings results in automatic removal.

222 (h) The chair may request the head of any state agency or
223 organization to serve on an ad hoc committee as needed to
224 address issues or projects relating to rural areas of
225 opportunity and economically distressed rural communities. The

226 | chair shall consider requesting the following individuals to
227 | serve on an ad hoc committee:

228 | 1. The executive director of the Fish and Wildlife
229 | Conservation Commission or his or her designee.

230 | 2. The Secretary of State or his or her designee.

231 | 3. The Secretary of Children and Families or his or her
232 | designee.

233 | 4. The Secretary of Corrections or his or her designee.

234 | 5. The Secretary of Juvenile Justice or his or her
235 | designee.

236 | 6. The Secretary of Health Care Administration or his or
237 | her designee.

238 | 7. A board member of the Florida Regional Councils
239 | Association or his or her designee.

240 | ~~(6) (a) By August 1 of each year, the head of each of the~~
241 | ~~following agencies and organizations shall designate a deputy~~
242 | ~~secretary or higher-level staff person from within the agency or~~
243 | ~~organization to serve as the REDI representative for the agency~~
244 | ~~or organization:~~

245 | ~~1. The Department of Transportation.~~

246 | ~~2. The Department of Environmental Protection.~~

247 | ~~3. The Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.~~

248 | ~~4. The Department of State.~~

249 | ~~5. The Department of Health.~~

250 | ~~6. The Department of Children and Families.~~

- 251 ~~7. The Department of Corrections.~~
- 252 ~~8. The Department of Education.~~
- 253 ~~9. The Department of Juvenile Justice.~~
- 254 ~~10. The Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.~~
- 255 ~~11. Each water management district.~~
- 256 ~~12. Enterprise Florida, Inc.~~
- 257 ~~13. CareerSource Florida, Inc.~~
- 258 ~~14. VISIT Florida.~~
- 259 ~~15. The Florida Regional Planning Council Association.~~
- 260 ~~16. The Agency for Health Care Administration.~~
- 261 ~~17. The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences~~
- 262 ~~(IFAS).~~

263

264 ~~An alternate for each designee shall also be chosen, and the~~
 265 ~~names of the designees and alternates shall be sent to the~~
 266 ~~executive director of the department.~~

267 (i) (b) Each REDI member from a state agency or
 268 organization representative must have comprehensive knowledge of
 269 his or her agency's functions, both regulatory and service in
 270 nature, and of the state's economic goals, policies, and
 271 programs. This person shall be the primary point of contact for
 272 his or her agency with REDI on issues and projects relating to
 273 rural areas of opportunity and economically distressed rural
 274 communities and with regard to expediting project review, shall
 275 ensure a prompt effective response to problems arising with

276 regard to rural issues, and shall work closely with the other
 277 REDI members ~~representatives~~ in the identification of
 278 opportunities for preferential awards of program funds and
 279 allowances and waiver of program requirements when necessary to
 280 encourage and facilitate long-term private capital investment
 281 and job creation. The member shall also ensure that each
 282 district office or facility of his or her agency or organization
 283 is informed about REDI and shall provide assistance throughout
 284 the agency in the implementation of REDI activities.

285 ~~(c) The REDI representatives shall work with REDI in the~~
 286 ~~review and evaluation of statutes and rules for adverse impact~~
 287 ~~on rural communities and the development of alternative~~
 288 ~~proposals to mitigate that impact.~~

289 ~~(d) Each REDI representative shall be responsible for~~
 290 ~~ensuring that each district office or facility of his or her~~
 291 ~~agency is informed about the Rural Economic Development~~
 292 ~~Initiative and for providing assistance throughout the agency in~~
 293 ~~the implementation of REDI activities.~~

294 ~~(8) (7) (a) REDI may recommend to the Governor up to three~~
 295 ~~rural areas of opportunity.~~ The Governor may by executive order
 296 designate ~~up to three~~ rural areas of opportunity which will
 297 establish these areas as priority assignments for REDI. ~~as well~~
 298 ~~as to allow~~ The Governor may, acting through REDI, ~~to~~ waive
 299 criteria, requirements, or similar provisions of any economic
 300 development incentive. ~~Such incentives shall include, but are~~

301 ~~not limited to, the Qualified Target Industry Tax Refund Program~~
302 ~~under s. 288.106, the Quick Response Training Program under s.~~
303 ~~288.047, the Quick Response Training Program for participants in~~
304 ~~the welfare transition program under s. 288.047(8),~~
305 ~~transportation projects under s. 339.2821, the brownfield~~
306 ~~redevelopment bonus refund under s. 288.107, and the rural job~~
307 ~~tax credit program under ss. 212.098 and 220.1895.~~

308 (b) Designation as a rural area of opportunity under this
309 subsection shall be contingent upon the execution of a
310 memorandum of agreement among the department; the governing body
311 of the county; and the governing bodies of any municipalities to
312 be included within a rural area of opportunity. Such agreement
313 shall specify the terms and conditions of the designation,
314 including, but not limited to, the duties and responsibilities
315 of the county and any participating municipalities to take
316 actions designed to facilitate the retention and expansion of
317 existing businesses in the area, as well as the recruitment of
318 new businesses to the area.

319 (c) Each rural area of opportunity may designate catalyst
320 projects, provided that each catalyst project is specifically
321 recommended by REDI, ~~identified as a catalyst project by~~
322 ~~Enterprise Florida, Inc.,~~ and confirmed as a catalyst project by
323 the department. All state agencies and departments shall use all
324 available tools and resources to the extent permissible by law
325 to promote the creation and development of each catalyst project

326 and the development of catalyst sites.

327 (9)~~(8)~~ Before September 1 of each year, REDI shall submit
328 ~~a report~~ to the department, the Governor, the President of the
329 Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives a
330 complete and detailed report, including, but not limited to ~~on~~
331 ~~all REDI activities for the previous fiscal year as a supplement~~
332 ~~to the department's annual report required under s. 20.60. This~~
333 ~~supplementary report must include:~~

334 (a) A description of the operations of ~~status report on~~
335 all projects currently being coordinated through REDI, the
336 number of preferential awards and allowances made pursuant to
337 this section, the dollar amount of such awards, ~~and~~ the names of
338 the recipients, and an evaluation of progress toward achieving
339 organizational goals and specific performance outcomes, as
340 established by the department.

341 (b) A description of the accomplishments of REDI and
342 identification of major trends, initiatives, or developments
343 affecting the performance of a program or activity coordinated
344 through REDI.

345 (c) A description of all waivers of program requirements
346 granted.

347 (d)~~(e)~~ Information as to the economic impact of the
348 projects coordinated by REDI.

349 (e)~~(d)~~ Recommendations based on the review and evaluation
350 of statutes and rules having an adverse impact on rural

351 communities and proposals to mitigate such adverse impacts.

352 Section 6. Section 288.06561, Florida Statutes, is amended
353 to read:

354 288.06561 Reduction or waiver of financial match
355 requirements.—Notwithstanding any other law, the member agencies
356 and organizations of the Rural Economic Development Initiative
357 (REDI), as defined in s. 288.0656(7)(a) ~~s. 288.0656(6)(a)~~, shall
358 review the financial match requirements for projects in rural
359 areas as defined in s. 288.0656(3) ~~s. 288.0656(2)~~.

360 (1) Each agency and organization shall develop a proposal
361 to waive or reduce the match requirement for rural areas.

362 (2) Agencies and organizations shall ensure that all
363 proposals are submitted to the department for review by the REDI
364 agencies.

365 (3) These proposals shall be delivered to the department
366 for distribution to the REDI agencies and organizations. A
367 meeting of REDI agencies and organizations must be called within
368 30 days after receipt of such proposals for REDI comment and
369 recommendations on each proposal.

370 (4) Waivers and reductions must be requested by the county
371 or community, and such county or community must have three or
372 more of the factors identified in s. 288.0656(3)(c) ~~s.~~
373 ~~288.0656(2)(e)~~.

374 (5) Any other funds available to the project may be used
375 for financial match of federal programs when there is fiscal

376 hardship, and the match requirements may not be waived or
 377 reduced.

378 (6) When match requirements are not reduced or eliminated,
 379 donations of land, though usually not recognized as an in-kind
 380 match, may be permitted.

381 (7) To the fullest extent possible, agencies and
 382 organizations shall expedite the rule adoption and amendment
 383 process if necessary to incorporate the reduction in match by
 384 rural areas in fiscal distress.

385 (8) REDI shall include in its annual report an evaluation
 386 on the status of changes to rules, number of awards made with
 387 waivers, and recommendations for future changes.

388 Section 7. Paragraph (d) of subsection (6) of section
 389 290.0055, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

390 290.0055 Local nominating procedure.—

391 (6)

392 (d)1. The governing body of a jurisdiction which has
 393 nominated an application for an enterprise zone that is at least
 394 15 square miles and less than 20 square miles and includes a
 395 portion of the state designated as a rural area of opportunity
 396 under s. 288.0656(8) ~~s. 288.0656(7)~~ may apply to the department
 397 to expand the boundary of the existing enterprise zone by not
 398 more than 3 square miles.

399 2. The governing body of a jurisdiction which has
 400 nominated an application for an enterprise zone that is at least

401 20 square miles and includes a portion of the state designated
 402 as a rural area of opportunity under s.288.0656(8) ~~s.~~
 403 ~~288.0656(7)~~ may apply to the department to expand the boundary
 404 of the existing enterprise zone by not more than 5 square miles.

405 3. An application to expand the boundary of an enterprise
 406 zone under this paragraph must be submitted by December 31,
 407 2013.

408 4. Notwithstanding the area limitations specified in
 409 subsection (4), the department may approve the request for a
 410 boundary amendment if the area continues to satisfy the
 411 remaining requirements of this section.

412 5. The department shall establish the initial effective
 413 date of an enterprise zone designated under this paragraph.

414 Section 8. Section 290.06561, Florida Statutes, is amended
 415 to read:

416 290.06561 Designation of rural enterprise zone as catalyst
 417 site.—Notwithstanding s. 290.0065(1), the Department of Economic
 418 Opportunity, upon request of the host county, shall designate as
 419 a rural enterprise zone any catalyst site as defined in s.
 420 288.0656(3)(b) ~~s. 288.0656(2)(b)~~ that was approved before
 421 January 1, 2010, and that is not located in an existing rural
 422 enterprise zone. The request from the host county must include
 423 the legal description of the catalyst site and the name and
 424 contact information for the county development authority
 425 responsible for managing the catalyst site. The designation

426 shall provide businesses locating within the catalyst site the
427 same eligibility for economic incentives and other benefits of a
428 rural enterprise zone designated under s. 290.0065. The
429 reporting criteria for a catalyst site designated as a rural
430 enterprise zone under this section are the same as for other
431 rural enterprise zones. Host county development authorities may
432 enter into memoranda of agreement, as necessary, to coordinate
433 their efforts to implement this section.

434 Section 9. Paragraph (h) of subsection (1) of section
435 337.403, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

436 337.403 Interference caused by utility; expenses.—

437 (1) If a utility that is placed upon, under, over, or
438 within the right-of-way limits of any public road or publicly
439 owned rail corridor is found by the authority to be unreasonably
440 interfering in any way with the convenient, safe, or continuous
441 use, or the maintenance, improvement, extension, or expansion,
442 of such public road or publicly owned rail corridor, the utility
443 owner shall, upon 30 days' written notice to the utility or its
444 agent by the authority, initiate the work necessary to alleviate
445 the interference at its own expense except as provided in
446 paragraphs (a)-(j). The work must be completed within such
447 reasonable time as stated in the notice or such time as agreed
448 to by the authority and the utility owner.

449 (h) If a municipally owned utility or county-owned utility
450 is located in a rural area of opportunity, as defined in s.

451 288.0656(3) ~~s. 288.0656(2)~~, and the department determines that
452 the utility is unable, and will not be able within the next 10
453 years, to pay for the cost of utility work necessitated by a
454 department project on the State Highway System, the department
455 may pay, in whole or in part, the cost of such utility work
456 performed by the department or its contractor.

457 Section 10. Subsection (7) of section 339.2818, Florida
458 Statutes, is amended to read:

459 339.2818 Small County Outreach Program.—

460 (7) Subject to a specific appropriation in addition to
461 funds annually appropriated for projects under this section, a
462 municipality within a rural area of opportunity or a rural area
463 of opportunity community designated under s. 288.0656(8)(a) ~~s.~~
464 ~~288.0656(7)(a)~~ may compete for the additional project funding
465 using the criteria listed in subsection (4) at up to 100 percent
466 of project costs, excluding capacity improvement projects.

467 Section 11. Paragraph (c) of subsection (4) of section
468 339.2819, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

469 339.2819 Transportation Regional Incentive Program.—

470 (4)

471 (c) The department shall give priority to projects that:

472 1. Provide connectivity to the Strategic Intermodal System
473 developed under s. 339.64.

474 2. Support economic development and the movement of goods
475 in rural areas of opportunity designated under s. 288.0656(8) ~~s.~~

476 ~~288.0656(7).~~

477 3. Are subject to a local ordinance that establishes
 478 corridor management techniques, including access management
 479 strategies, right-of-way acquisition and protection measures,
 480 appropriate land use strategies, zoning, and setback
 481 requirements for adjacent land uses.

482 4. Improve connectivity between military installations and
 483 the Strategic Highway Network or the Strategic Rail Corridor
 484 Network.

485
 486 The department shall also consider the extent to which local
 487 matching funds are available to be committed to the project.

488 Section 12. Paragraph (b) of subsection (5) of section
 489 339.63, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

490 339.63 System facilities designated; additions and
 491 deletions.—

492 (5)

493 (b) A facility designated part of the Strategic Intermodal
 494 System pursuant to paragraph (a) that is within the jurisdiction
 495 of a local government that maintains a transportation
 496 concurrency system shall receive a waiver of transportation
 497 concurrency requirements applicable to Strategic Intermodal
 498 System facilities in order to accommodate any development at the
 499 facility which occurs pursuant to a building permit issued on or
 500 before December 31, 2017, but only if such facility is located:

501 1. Within an area designated pursuant to s. 288.0656(8) ~~s.~~
 502 ~~288.0656(7)~~ as a rural area of opportunity;

503 2. Within a rural enterprise zone as defined in s.
 504 290.004(5); or

505 3. Within 15 miles of the boundary of a rural area of
 506 opportunity or a rural enterprise zone.

507 Section 13. Subsection (16) of section 479.16, Florida
 508 Statutes, is amended to read:

509 479.16 Signs for which permits are not required.—The
 510 following signs are exempt from the requirement that a permit
 511 for a sign be obtained under this chapter but are required to
 512 comply with s. 479.11(4)-(8), and subsections (15)-(20) may not
 513 be implemented or continued if the Federal Government notifies
 514 the department that implementation or continuation will
 515 adversely affect the allocation of federal funds to the
 516 department:

517 (16) Signs placed by a local tourist-oriented business
 518 located within a rural area of opportunity as defined in s.
 519 288.0656(3) ~~s. 288.0656(2)~~ which are:

520 (a) Not more than 8 square feet in size or more than 4
 521 feet in height;

522 (b) Located only in rural areas on a facility that does
 523 not meet the definition of a limited access facility, as defined
 524 in s. 334.03;

525 (c) Located within 2 miles of the business location and at

526 | least 500 feet apart;

527 | (d) Located only in two directions leading to the
528 | business; and

529 | (e) Not located within the road right-of-way.
530 |

531 | A business placing such signs must be at least 4 miles from any
532 | other business using this exemption and may not participate in
533 | any other directional signage program by the department.
534 |

535 | If the exemptions in subsections (15)-(20) are not implemented
536 | or continued due to notification from the Federal Government
537 | that the allocation of federal funds to the department will be
538 | adversely impacted, the department shall provide notice to the
539 | sign owner that the sign must be removed within 30 days after
540 | receipt of the notice. If the sign is not removed within 30 days
541 | after receipt of the notice by the sign owner, the department
542 | may remove the sign, and the costs incurred in connection with
543 | the sign removal shall be assessed against and collected from
544 | the sign owner.

545 | Section 14. Paragraph (d) of subsection (14) of section
546 | 627.6699, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

547 | 627.6699 Employee Health Care Access Act.—

548 | (14) SMALL EMPLOYERS ACCESS PROGRAM.—

549 | (d) Eligibility.—

550 | 1. Any small employer that is actively engaged in

551 business, has its principal place of business in this state,
552 employs up to 25 eligible employees on business days during the
553 preceding calendar year, employs at least 2 employees on the
554 first day of the plan year, and has had no prior coverage for
555 the last 6 months may participate.

556 2. Any municipality, county, school district, or hospital
557 employer located in a rural community as defined in s.
558 288.0656(3) ~~s. 288.0656(2)~~ may participate.

559 3. Nursing home employers may participate.

560 4. Each dependent of a person eligible for coverage is
561 also eligible to participate.

562

563 Any employer participating in the program must do so until the
564 end of the term for which the carrier providing the coverage is
565 obligated to provide such coverage to the program. Coverage for
566 a small employer group that ceases to meet the eligibility
567 requirements of this section may be terminated at the end of the
568 policy period for which the necessary premiums have been paid.

569 Section 15. This act shall take effect upon becoming a
570 law.