

By Senator Albritton

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1                   A bill to be entitled  
2           An act relating to regional rural development grants;  
3           amending s. 288.018, F.S.; defining the term "regional  
4           economic development organization"; specifying that  
5           the concept of building the professional capacity of a  
6           regional economic development organization includes  
7           the hiring of professional staff to perform specified  
8           services; providing that matching grants may be used  
9           to provide technical assistance to local governments  
10          and economic development organizations and to existing  
11          and prospective businesses; specifying that a regional  
12          economic development organization that provides  
13          taxpayer-funded incentives is not eligible to  
14          participate in the matching grant program; increasing  
15          the maximum amount of annual grant funding that  
16          specified economic development organizations may  
17          receive; revising the required amount of nonstate  
18          matching funds; requiring that certain information be  
19          included in a contract or agreement involving the  
20          expenditure of grant funds; requiring that contracts  
21          or agreements involving the expenditure of grant  
22          funds, and a plain-language version of certain  
23          contracts or agreements, be placed on the contracting  
24          regional economic development organization's website  
25          for a specified period before execution; deleting an  
26          obsolete provision; increasing the amount of funds the  
27          Department of Economic Opportunity may expend each  
28          fiscal year for certain purposes; amending s.  
29          288.0655, F.S.; increasing the maximum percentage of

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30 total infrastructure project costs for which the  
31 department may award a grant; deleting a provision  
32 authorizing a higher maximum percentage of total  
33 infrastructure project costs for a catalyst site;  
34 providing that improving access to and availability of  
35 broadband Internet service may be included in a  
36 project that is eligible for rural infrastructure  
37 grant funds; requiring that improvements to broadband  
38 Internet service and access be made through certain  
39 partnerships, which must be established through a  
40 competitive selection process; extending the date by  
41 which the department is required to reevaluate certain  
42 guidelines and criteria; requiring that certain  
43 information be included in a contract or agreement  
44 involving the expenditure of grant funds; requiring  
45 that contracts or agreements involving the expenditure  
46 of grant funds, and a plain-language version of  
47 certain contracts or agreements, be placed on the  
48 contracting regional economic development  
49 organization's website for a specified period before  
50 execution; providing an effective date.

51  
52 Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

53  
54 Section 1. Subsections (1), (3), and (4) of section  
55 288.018, Florida Statutes, are amended to read:

56 288.018 Regional Rural Development Grants Program.—

57 (1) (a) For the purposes of this section, a "regional  
58 economic development organization" means an economic development

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59 organization located in a rural area of opportunity, as defined  
60 in s. 288.0656.

61 (b) The department shall establish a matching grant program  
62 to provide funding to regional ~~regionally based~~ economic  
63 development organizations representing rural counties and  
64 communities to build ~~for the purpose of building~~ the  
65 professional capacity of those ~~their~~ organizations. Efforts to  
66 build the professional capacity of regional economic development  
67 organizations include the hiring of professional staff to  
68 develop, facilitate the delivery of, and directly provide needed  
69 economic development professional services, including technical  
70 assistance, education and leadership development, marketing, and  
71 project recruitment. ~~Such~~ Matching grants may also be used by a  
72 regional ~~an~~ economic development organization to provide  
73 technical assistance to local governments, local economic  
74 development organizations, and existing and prospective  
75 businesses within the rural counties and communities that it  
76 serves. A regional economic development organization that  
77 provides taxpayer-funded incentives to existing or prospective  
78 businesses is not eligible to participate in the matching grant  
79 program.

80 (c) A regional economic development organization may apply  
81 annually to the department for a matching grant. The department  
82 is authorized to approve an application for a grant of: ~~on an~~  
83 annual basis, ~~grants~~

84 1. Up to \$150,000 to an organization located ~~to such~~  
85 ~~regionally based economic development organizations. The maximum~~  
86 ~~amount an organization may receive in any year will be \$50,000,~~  
87 ~~or \$150,000~~ in a rural area of opportunity designated pursuant

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88 to s. 288.0656(7).

89 2. Up to \$250,000 to any of the three regional economic  
90 development organizations that serve an entire region of a rural  
91 area of opportunity designated pursuant to s. 288.0656(7) and  
92 that are recognized by the department as serving such a region.

93 (d) Grant funds received by a regional economic development  
94 organization recommended by the Rural Economic Development  
95 Initiative and designated by the Governor, and must be matched  
96 each year by an equivalent amount of nonstate resources in an  
97 amount equal to 25 percent of the state contribution.

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

105 1. The purpose of the contract or agreement.

106 2. Specific performance standards and responsibilities for  
107 each entity.

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

109 4. The value of any services provided.

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

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

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

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

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

139        Section 2. Present subsection (5) of section 288.0655,  
140 Florida Statutes, is redesignated as subsection (6), paragraph  
141 (b) of subsection (2) and subsection (4) of that section are  
142 amended, and a new subsection (5) is added to that section, to  
143 read:

144        288.0655 Rural Infrastructure Fund.—

145        (2) (b) To facilitate access of rural communities and rural

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146 areas of opportunity as defined by the Rural Economic  
147 Development Initiative to infrastructure funding programs of the  
148 Federal Government, such as those offered by the United States  
149 Department of Agriculture and the United States Department of  
150 Commerce, and state programs, including those offered by Rural  
151 Economic Development Initiative agencies, and to facilitate  
152 local government or private infrastructure funding efforts, the  
153 department may award grants for up to 50 ~~30~~ percent of the total  
154 infrastructure project cost. ~~If an application for funding is~~  
155 ~~for a catalyst site, as defined in s. 288.0656, the department~~  
156 ~~may award grants for up to 40 percent of the total~~  
157 ~~infrastructure project cost.~~ Eligible projects must be related  
158 to specific job-creation or job-retention opportunities.  
159 Eligible projects may also include improving any inadequate  
160 infrastructure that has resulted in regulatory action that  
161 prohibits economic or community growth or reducing the costs to  
162 community users of proposed infrastructure improvements that  
163 exceed such costs in comparable communities, including the costs  
164 associated with improving access to and the availability of  
165 broadband Internet service. Eligible uses of funds shall include  
166 improvements to public infrastructure for industrial or  
167 commercial sites, ~~and~~ upgrades to or development of public  
168 tourism infrastructure, and improvements to broadband Internet  
169 service and access in unserved or underserved rural communities.  
170 Improvements to broadband Internet service and access must be  
171 made in partnership with one or more dealers of communications  
172 services as defined in s. 202.11(2), and any such partnership  
173 must be established by a publicly noticed competitive selection  
174 process. Authorized infrastructure may include the following

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175 public or public-private partnership facilities: storm water  
176 systems; telecommunications facilities; broadband facilities;  
177 roads or other remedies to transportation impediments; nature-  
178 based tourism facilities; or other physical requirements  
179 necessary to facilitate tourism, trade, and economic development  
180 activities in the community. Authorized infrastructure may also  
181 include publicly or privately owned self-powered nature-based  
182 tourism facilities, publicly owned telecommunications  
183 facilities, and broadband facilities, and additions to the  
184 distribution facilities of the existing natural gas utility as  
185 defined in s. 366.04(3)(c), the existing electric utility as  
186 defined in s. 366.02, or the existing water or wastewater  
187 utility as defined in s. 367.021(12), or any other existing  
188 water or wastewater facility, which owns a gas or electric  
189 distribution system or a water or wastewater system in this  
190 state where:

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

195 2. Such utilities as defined herein are willing and able to  
196 provide such service.

197 (4) By September 1, 2020 ~~2012~~, the department shall, in  
198 consultation with the organizations listed in subsection (3),  
199 and other organizations, reevaluate existing guidelines and  
200 criteria governing submission of applications for funding,  
201 review and evaluation of such applications, and approval of  
202 funding under this section. The department shall consider  
203 factors including, but not limited to, the project's potential

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204 for enhanced job creation or increased capital investment, the  
205 demonstration and level of local public and private commitment,  
206 whether the project is located ~~in an enterprise zone,~~ in a  
207 community development corporation service area~~,~~ or in an urban  
208 high-crime area as designated under s. 212.097, the unemployment  
209 rate of the county in which the project would be located, and  
210 the poverty rate of the community.

211 (5) (a) A contract or agreement that includes the  
212 expenditure of grant funds provided under this section,  
213 including a contract or agreement entered into between an entity  
214 and a regional economic development organization, a unit of  
215 local government, or an economic development organization  
216 substantially underwritten by a unit of local government, must  
217 include:

- 218 1. The purpose of the contract or agreement.
- 219 2. Specific performance standards and responsibilities for  
220 each entity.
- 221 3. A detailed project or contract budget, if applicable.
- 222 4. The value of any services provided.
- 223 5. The projected travel and entertainment expenses for  
224 employees and board members, if applicable.

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

- 228 1. Any contract or agreement that involves the expenditure  
229 of grant funds provided under this section.
- 230 2. A plain-language version of a contract or agreement with  
231 a private entity, a municipality, or a vendor of services,  
232 supplies, or programs, including marketing, or for the purchase



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233 or lease or use of lands, facilities, or properties which  
234 involves the expenditure of grant funds provided under this  
235 section and which is estimated to exceed \$35,000.

236 Section 3. This act shall take effect July 1, 2019.