

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  
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.

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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, a "regional economic development organization" means an economic development organization located in a rural area of opportunity, as defined in s. 288.0656.

(b) The department shall establish a matching grant program to provide funding to regional ~~regionally based~~ economic development organizations representing rural counties and communities to build for the purpose of building the professional capacity of those ~~their~~ organizations. Efforts to build the professional capacity of regional economic development organizations include the hiring of professional staff to develop, facilitate the delivery of, and directly 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 ~~an~~ 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

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~~  
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  
94 development organization ~~recommended by the Rural Economic~~  
95 ~~Development Initiative and designated by the Governor, and must~~  
96 be matched each year by ~~an equivalent amount of~~ nonstate  
97 resources in an amount equal to 25 percent of the state  
98 contribution.

99 (3) (a) A contract or agreement that involves the  
100 expenditure of grant funds provided under this section,

101 including a contract or agreement entered into between another  
102 entity and a regional economic development organization, a unit  
103 of local government, or an economic development organization  
104 substantially underwritten by a unit of local government, must  
105 include:

- 106 1. The purpose of the contract or agreement.
- 107 2. Specific performance standards and responsibilities for  
108 each entity.
- 109 3. A detailed project or contract budget, if applicable.
- 110 4. The value of any services provided.
- 111 5. The projected travel and entertainment expenses for  
112 employees and board members, if applicable.

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

- 116 1. Any contract or agreement that involves the expenditure  
117 of grant funds provided under this section.
- 118 2. A plain-language version of the contract or agreement  
119 with a private entity, a municipality, or a vendor of services,  
120 supplies, or programs, including marketing, or for the purchase  
121 or lease or use of lands, facilities, or properties which  
122 involves the expenditure of grant funds provided under this  
123 section and which is estimated to exceed \$35,000 ~~The department~~  
124 ~~may also contract for the development of an enterprise zone web~~  
125 ~~portal or websites for each enterprise zone which will be used~~

126 | ~~to market the program for job creation in disadvantaged urban~~  
127 | ~~and rural enterprise zones. Each enterprise zone web page should~~  
128 | ~~include downloadable links to state forms and information, as~~  
129 | ~~well as local message boards that help businesses and residents~~  
130 | ~~receive information concerning zone boundaries, job openings,~~  
131 | ~~zone programs, and neighborhood improvement activities.~~

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

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

145 |       288.0655 Rural Infrastructure Fund.—

146 |       (2) (b) To facilitate access of rural communities and rural  
147 | areas of opportunity as defined by the Rural Economic  
148 | Development Initiative to infrastructure funding programs of the  
149 | Federal Government, such as those offered by the United States  
150 | Department of Agriculture and the United States Department of

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

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

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

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

198 (4) By September 1, 2020 ~~2012~~, the department shall, in  
199 consultation with the organizations listed in subsection (3),  
200 and other organizations, reevaluate existing guidelines and

201 criteria governing submission of applications for funding,  
202 review and evaluation of such applications, and approval of  
203 funding under this section. The department shall consider  
204 factors including, but not limited to, the project's potential  
205 for enhanced job creation or increased capital investment, the  
206 demonstration and level of local public and private commitment,  
207 whether the project is located ~~in an enterprise zone,~~ in a  
208 community development corporation service area, or in an urban  
209 high-crime area as designated under s. 212.097, the unemployment  
210 rate of the county in which the project would be located, and  
211 the poverty rate of the community.

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

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

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226 (b) At least 14 days before the contract or agreement is  
227 executed, the contracting regional economic development  
228 organization shall post on its website:

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

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

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