

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 the  
5           duties of a regional economic development  
6           organization; specifying authorized uses of matching  
7           grants; increasing the maximum amount of annual grant  
8           funding that specified economic development  
9           organizations may receive; revising the required  
10          amount of nonstate matching funds; requiring certain  
11          information to be included in contracts or agreements  
12          involving grant funds; specifying the information that  
13          must be posted on a regional economic development  
14          organizations website before execution of certain  
15          contracts or agreements; deleting an obsolete  
16          provision; increasing the amount of funds the  
17          Department of Economic Opportunity may expend each  
18          fiscal year from the Rural Community Development  
19          Revolving Loan Fund for certain purposes; amending s.  
20          288.0655, F.S.; increasing the maximum percent of  
21          total infrastructure project costs for which the  
22          department may award a grant; repealing a provision  
23          addressing increased certain maximum percentages;  
24          specifying that improving availability of broadband  
25          Internet services is an eligible project for certain

26 grant funds; providing that grants for improvements to  
 27 broadband Internet service and access must be  
 28 conducted through certain partnerships; extending the  
 29 date by which the department is required to reevaluate  
 30 certain guidelines; requiring certain information to  
 31 be included in contracts or agreements involving grant  
 32 funds; specifying the information that must be posted  
 33 on a regional economic development organizations  
 34 website before execution of certain contracts or  
 35 agreements; providing an effective date.

36

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

38

39 Section 1. Subsections (1), (3), and (4) of section  
 40 288.018, Florida Statutes, are amended to read:

41 288.018 Regional Rural Development Grants Program.—

42 (1) (a) For the purposes of this section, the term  
 43 "regional economic development organization" means an economic  
 44 development organization located in or contracted to serve a  
 45 rural area of opportunity, as defined in s. 288.0656(2)(d).

46 (b) The department shall establish a matching grant  
 47 program to provide funding to regional ~~regionally based~~ economic  
 48 development organizations ~~representing rural counties and~~  
 49 ~~communities~~ for the purpose of building the professional  
 50 capacity of those ~~their~~ organizations. Building the professional

51 capacity of a regional economic development organization  
52 includes hiring professional staff to develop, deliver, and  
53 provide needed economic development professional services,  
54 including technical assistance, education and leadership  
55 development, marketing, and project recruitment. ~~Such~~ Matching  
56 grants may also be used by a regional ~~an~~ economic development  
57 organization to provide technical assistance to local  
58 governments, local economic development organizations, and  
59 existing and prospective businesses ~~within the rural counties~~  
60 ~~and communities that it serves.~~

61 (c) A regional economic development organization may apply  
62 annually to the department for a matching grant. The department  
63 is authorized to approve, on an annual basis, grants to such  
64 regional ~~regionally based~~ economic development organizations.  
65 The maximum amount an organization may receive in any year will  
66 be \$50,000, or \$250,000 for any three regional economic  
67 development organizations that serve an entire region of a rural  
68 area of opportunity designated pursuant to s. 288.0656(7) if  
69 they are recognized by the department as serving such a region.

70 (d) Grant funds received by a regional economic development  
71 organization ~~\$150,000 in a rural area of opportunity recommended~~  
72 ~~by the Rural Economic Development Initiative and designated by~~  
73 ~~the Governor, and must be matched each year by an equivalent~~  
74 ~~amount of nonstate resources~~ in an amount equal to 25 percent of  
75 the state contribution.

76           (3) (a) A contract or agreement that involves the  
77 expenditure of grant funds provided under this section,  
78 including a contract or agreement entered into between another  
79 entity and a regional economic development organization, a unit  
80 of local government, or an economic development organization  
81 substantially underwritten by a unit of local government, must  
82 include:

- 83           1. The purpose of the contract or agreement.
- 84           2. Specific performance standards and responsibilities for  
85 each entity under the contract or agreement.
- 86           3. A detailed project or contract budget, if applicable.
- 87           4. The value of any services provided.
- 88           5. The projected travel expenses for employees and board  
89 members, if applicable.

90           (b) At least 14 days before executing a contract or  
91 agreement, the contracting regional economic development  
92 organization shall post on its website:

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

95           2. A plain-language version of any contract or agreement  
96 that is estimated to exceed \$35,000 with a private entity, a  
97 municipality, or a vendor of services, supplies, or programs,  
98 including marketing, or for the purchase or lease or use of  
99 lands, facilities, or properties which involves the expenditure  
100 of grant funds provided under this section and which is

101 estimated to exceed \$35,000 ~~The department may also contract for~~  
102 ~~the development of an enterprise zone web portal or websites for~~  
103 ~~each enterprise zone which will be used to market the program~~  
104 ~~for job creation in disadvantaged urban and rural enterprise~~  
105 ~~zones. Each enterprise zone web page should include downloadable~~  
106 ~~links to state forms and information, as well as local message~~  
107 ~~boards that help businesses and residents receive information~~  
108 ~~concerning zone boundaries, job openings, zone programs, and~~  
109 ~~neighborhood improvement activities.~~

110 (4) The department may expend up to \$1 million ~~\$750,000~~  
111 each fiscal year from funds appropriated to the Rural Community  
112 Development Revolving Loan Fund for the purposes outlined in  
113 this section. The department may contract with Enterprise  
114 Florida, Inc., for the administration of the purposes specified  
115 in this section. Funds released to Enterprise Florida, Inc., for  
116 this purpose shall be released quarterly and shall be calculated  
117 based on the applications in process.

118 Section 2. Subsection (5) of section 288.0655, Florida  
119 Statutes, is renumbered as subsection (6), paragraph (b) of  
120 subsection (2), subsection (4), and present subsection (6) are  
121 amended, and a new subsection (5) is added to that section, to  
122 read:

123 288.0655 Rural Infrastructure Fund.—

124 (2)

125 (b) To facilitate access of rural communities and rural

126 areas of opportunity as defined by the Rural Economic  
 127 Development Initiative to infrastructure funding programs of the  
 128 Federal Government, such as those offered by the United States  
 129 Department of Agriculture and the United States Department of  
 130 Commerce, and state programs, including those offered by Rural  
 131 Economic Development Initiative agencies, and to facilitate  
 132 local government or private infrastructure funding efforts, the  
 133 department may award grants for up to 50 ~~30~~ percent of the total  
 134 infrastructure project cost. ~~If an application for funding is~~  
 135 ~~for a catalyst site, as defined in s. 288.0656, the department~~  
 136 ~~may award grants for up to 40 percent of the total~~  
 137 ~~infrastructure project cost.~~ Eligible projects must be related  
 138 to specific job-creation or job-retention opportunities.  
 139 Eligible projects may also include improving any inadequate  
 140 infrastructure that has resulted in regulatory action that  
 141 prohibits economic or community growth, ~~or~~ reducing the costs to  
 142 community users of proposed infrastructure improvements that  
 143 exceed such costs in comparable communities, and improving  
 144 access to and the availability of broadband Internet service.  
 145 Eligible uses of funds shall include improvements to public  
 146 infrastructure for industrial or commercial sites, upgrades to  
 147 or development of public tourism infrastructure, and  
 148 improvements to broadband Internet service and access in  
 149 unserved or underserved rural communities. Improvements to  
 150 broadband Internet service and access must be conducted through

151 a partnership or partnerships with one or more dealers of  
152 communications services, as defined in s. 202.11(2), and the  
153 partnership or partnerships must be established by a publicly  
154 noticed and competitively selected process ~~and upgrades to or~~  
155 ~~development of public tourism infrastructure.~~ Authorized  
156 infrastructure may include the following public or public-  
157 private partnership facilities: storm water systems;  
158 telecommunications facilities; broadband facilities; roads or  
159 other remedies to transportation impediments; nature-based  
160 tourism facilities; or other physical requirements necessary to  
161 facilitate tourism, trade, and economic development activities  
162 in the community. Authorized infrastructure may also include  
163 publicly or privately owned self-powered nature-based tourism  
164 facilities, publicly owned telecommunications facilities, and  
165 broadband facilities, and additions to the distribution  
166 facilities of the existing natural gas utility as defined in s.  
167 366.04(3)(c), the existing electric utility as defined in s.  
168 366.02, or the existing water or wastewater utility as defined  
169 in s. 367.021(12), or any other existing water or wastewater  
170 facility, which owns a gas or electric distribution system or a  
171 water or wastewater system in this state where:  
172       1. A contribution-in-aid of construction is required to  
173 serve public or public-private partnership facilities under the  
174 tariffs of any natural gas, electric, water, or wastewater  
175 utility as defined herein; and

176           2. Such utilities as defined herein are willing and able  
177 to provide such service.

178           (4) By September 1, 2021 ~~2012~~, the department shall, in  
179 consultation with the organizations listed in subsection (3),  
180 and other organizations, reevaluate existing guidelines and  
181 criteria governing submission of applications for funding,  
182 review and evaluation of such applications, and approval of  
183 funding under this section. The department shall consider  
184 factors including, but not limited to, the project's potential  
185 for enhanced job creation or increased capital investment, the  
186 demonstration and level of local public and private commitment,  
187 whether the project is located ~~in an enterprise zone~~, in a  
188 community development corporation service area, or in an urban  
189 high-crime area as designated under s. 212.097, the unemployment  
190 rate of the county in which the project would be located, and  
191 the poverty rate of the community.

192           (5) (a) A contract or agreement that involves the  
193 expenditure of grant funds provided under this section,  
194 including a contract or agreement entered into between another  
195 entity and a regional economic development organization, a unit  
196 of local government, or an economic development organization  
197 substantially underwritten by a unit of local government, must  
198 include:

- 199           1. The purpose of the contract or agreement.  
200           2. Specific performance standards and responsibilities for



201 each entity.

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

203 4. The value of any services provided.

204 5. The projected travel expenses for employees and board  
 205 members, if applicable.

206 (b) At least 14 days before execution, the contracting  
 207 regional economic development organization shall post on its  
 208 website:

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

211 2. A plain-language version of a contract or agreement that  
 212 is estimated to exceed \$35,000 with a private entity, a  
 213 municipality, or a vendor of services, supplies, or programs,  
 214 including marketing, or for the purchase or lease or use of  
 215 lands, facilities, or properties which involves the expenditure  
 216 of grant funds provided under this section.

217 ~~(6) For the 2019-2020 fiscal year, the funds appropriated~~  
 218 ~~for the grant program for Florida Panhandle counties shall be~~  
 219 ~~distributed pursuant to and for the purposes described in the~~  
 220 ~~proviso language associated with Specific Appropriation 2314 of~~  
 221 ~~the 2019-2020 General Appropriations Act. This subsection~~  
 222 ~~expires July 1, 2020.~~

223 Section 3. This act shall take effect July 1, 2020.