

1 A bill to be entitled
2 An act relating to rural economic development;
3 amending s. 288.018, F.S.; removing the requirement
4 that grants received by a regional economic
5 development organization under the Regional Rural
6 Development Grants Program must be matched in a
7 certain manner; removing certain demonstration
8 requirements of program applicants; amending s.
9 288.0655, F.S.; revising the percentage of certain
10 project costs for which the department may award
11 certain grants; revising limitations on the use of
12 certain grants awarded by the department; amending s.
13 288.8017, F.S.; revising the purposes for which
14 certain awards may be provided; amending s. 446.71,
15 F.S.; revising the areas in which the department may
16 provide grants through the Everglades Restoration
17 Agricultural Community Employment Training Program;
18 authorizing the use of certain grant funds for certain
19 purposes; requiring the department to set aside a
20 certain percentage of funds for a certain purpose;
21 prohibiting the department from awarding employer-
22 based grants in excess of a certain amount; requiring
23 the department to prioritize awarding employer-based
24 grants to certain training programs; providing that
25 certain accreditation or licensure meets a certain

26 | qualification requirement; revising requirements for
 27 | the location in which a training program participant
 28 | must reside to receive a certain grant from the
 29 | department; revising the requirements for employer-
 30 | based training programs established in the Everglades
 31 | Agricultural Area; providing that certain provisions
 32 | shall control in the event of certain conflicts;
 33 | providing an effective date.

34 |

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

36 |

37 | Section 1. Paragraphs (d) and (e) of subsection (2) of
 38 | section 288.018, Florida Statutes, are redesignated as
 39 | paragraphs (b) and (c), respectively, and paragraphs (b), (c),
 40 | and (d) of subsection (1) and present paragraphs (b) and (c) of
 41 | subsection (2) of that section are amended to read:

42 | 288.018 Regional Rural Development Grants Program.—

43 | (1)

44 | (b) The department shall establish a ~~matching~~ grant
 45 | program to provide funding to regional economic development
 46 | organizations for the purpose of building the professional
 47 | capacity of those organizations. Building the professional
 48 | capacity of a regional economic development organization
 49 | includes hiring professional staff to develop, deliver, and
 50 | provide needed economic development professional services,

51 including technical assistance, education and leadership
52 development, marketing, and project recruitment. ~~Matching~~ Grants
53 may also be used by a regional economic development organization
54 to provide technical assistance to local governments, local
55 economic development organizations, and existing and prospective
56 businesses.

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

66 ~~(d) Grant funds received by a regional economic~~
67 ~~development organization must be matched each year by nonstate~~
68 ~~resources in an amount equal to 25 percent of the state~~
69 ~~contribution.~~

70 (2) In approving the participants, the department shall
71 consider the demonstrated need of the applicant for assistance
72 and require the following:

73 ~~(b) Demonstration that each unit of local government has~~
74 ~~made a financial or in-kind commitment to the regional~~
75 ~~organization.~~

76 ~~(c) Demonstration that the private sector has made~~
 77 ~~financial or in-kind commitments to the regional organization.~~

78 Section 2. Paragraphs (b) and (c) of subsection (2) of
 79 section 288.0655, Florida Statutes, are amended to read:

80 288.0655 Rural Infrastructure Fund.—

81 (2)

82 (b) To facilitate access of rural communities and rural
 83 areas of opportunity as defined by the Rural Economic
 84 Development Initiative to infrastructure funding programs of the
 85 Federal Government, such as those offered by the United States
 86 Department of Agriculture and the United States Department of
 87 Commerce, and state programs, including those offered by Rural
 88 Economic Development Initiative agencies, and to facilitate
 89 local government or private infrastructure funding efforts, the
 90 department may award grants for up to 75 ~~50~~ percent of the total
 91 infrastructure project cost, or up to 100 percent of the total
 92 infrastructure project cost for a project located in a rural
 93 community or a rural area of opportunity, as those terms are
 94 defined in s. 288.0656(2), which is also located in a fiscally
 95 constrained county as described in s. 218.67(1). Eligible
 96 projects must be related to specific job-creation or job-
 97 retention opportunities. Eligible projects may also include
 98 improving any inadequate infrastructure that has resulted in
 99 regulatory action that prohibits economic or community growth,
 100 reducing the costs to community users of proposed infrastructure

101 improvements that exceed such costs in comparable communities,
102 and improving access to and the availability of broadband
103 Internet service. Eligible uses of funds shall include
104 improvements to public infrastructure for industrial or
105 commercial sites, upgrades to or development of public tourism
106 infrastructure, and improvements to broadband Internet service
107 and access in unserved or underserved rural communities.
108 Improvements to broadband Internet service and access must be
109 conducted through a partnership or partnerships with one or more
110 dealers, as defined in s. 202.11(2), and the partnership or
111 partnerships must be established through a competitive selection
112 process that is publicly noticed. Authorized infrastructure may
113 include the following public or public-private partnership
114 facilities: storm water systems; telecommunications facilities;
115 broadband facilities; roads or other remedies to transportation
116 impediments; nature-based tourism facilities; or other physical
117 requirements necessary to facilitate tourism, trade, and
118 economic development activities in the community. Authorized
119 infrastructure may also include publicly or privately owned
120 self-powered nature-based tourism facilities, publicly owned
121 telecommunications facilities, and broadband facilities, and
122 additions to the distribution facilities of the existing natural
123 gas utility as defined in s. 366.04(3)(c), the existing electric
124 utility as defined in s. 366.02, or the existing water or
125 wastewater utility as defined in s. 367.021(12), or any other

126 existing water or wastewater facility, which owns a gas or
127 electric distribution system or a water or wastewater system in
128 this state where:

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

133 2. Such utilities as defined herein are willing and able
134 to provide such service.

135 (c) To facilitate timely response and induce the location
136 or expansion of specific job creating opportunities, The
137 department may award grants for infrastructure feasibility
138 studies, design and engineering activities, or other
139 infrastructure planning and preparation activities. Authorized
140 grants shall be up to \$50,000 for an employment project with a
141 business committed to create at least 100 jobs; up to \$150,000
142 for an employment project with a business committed to create at
143 least 300 jobs; and up to \$300,000 for a project in a rural area
144 of opportunity. Grants awarded under this paragraph may be used
145 in conjunction with grants awarded under paragraph (b), ~~provided~~
146 ~~that the total amount of both grants does not exceed 30 percent~~
147 ~~of the total project cost.~~ In evaluating applications under this
148 paragraph, the department shall consider the extent to which the
149 application seeks to minimize administrative and consultant
150 expenses.

151 Section 3. Subsection (1) of section 288.8017, Florida
 152 Statutes, is amended to read:

153 288.8017 Awards.—

154 (1) Triumph Gulf Coast, Inc., shall make awards from
 155 available funds to projects or programs that meet the priorities
 156 for economic recovery, diversification, and enhancement of the
 157 disproportionately affected counties. Awards may be provided
 158 for:

159 (a) Ad valorem tax rate reduction within
 160 disproportionately affected counties.†

161 (b) Local match requirements ~~of s. 288.0655~~ for projects
 162 in the disproportionately affected counties.†

163 (c) Public infrastructure projects for construction,
 164 expansion, or maintenance which are shown to enhance economic
 165 recovery, diversification, and enhancement of the
 166 disproportionately affected counties.†

167 (d) Grants to local governments in the disproportionately
 168 affected counties to establish and maintain equipment and
 169 trained personnel for local action plans of response to respond
 170 to disasters, such as plans created for the Coastal Impacts
 171 Assistance Program.†

172 (e) Grants to support programs that prepare students for
 173 future occupations and careers at K-20 institutions that have
 174 campuses in the disproportionately affected counties. Eligible
 175 programs include those that increase students' technology skills

176 and knowledge; encourage industry certifications; provide
 177 rigorous, alternative pathways for students to meet high school
 178 graduation requirements; strengthen career readiness
 179 initiatives; fund high-demand programs of emphasis at the
 180 bachelor's and master's level designated by the Board of
 181 Governors; and, similar to or the same as talent retention
 182 programs created by the Chancellor of the State University
 183 System and the Commission of Education, encourage students with
 184 interest or aptitude for science, technology, engineering,
 185 mathematics, and medical disciplines to pursue postsecondary
 186 education at a state university or a Florida College System
 187 institution within the disproportionately affected counties.;

188 (f) Grants to support programs that provide participants
 189 in the disproportionately affected counties with transferable,
 190 sustainable workforce skills that are not confined to a single
 191 employer.~~;~~ ~~and~~

192 (g) Grants to the tourism entity created under s. 288.1226
 193 for the purpose of advertising and promoting tourism and Fresh
 194 From Florida, and grants to promote workforce and
 195 infrastructure, on behalf of all of the disproportionately
 196 affected counties.

197 Section 4. Section 446.71, Florida Statutes, is amended to
 198 read:

199 446.71 Everglades Restoration Agricultural Community
 200 Employment Training Program.—

201 (1) The Department of Economic Opportunity, in cooperation
 202 with the state board as defined in s. 445.002, shall establish
 203 the Everglades Restoration Agricultural Community Employment
 204 Training Program within the Department of Economic Opportunity.
 205 The Department of Economic Opportunity shall use funds
 206 appropriated to the program by the Legislature to provide grants
 207 to stimulate and support training and employment programs that
 208 seek to match persons who complete such training programs to
 209 nonagricultural employment opportunities in the Everglades
 210 Agricultural Area as defined in s. 373.4592(2) and rural areas
 211 of opportunity as defined in s. 288.0656(2) ~~areas of high~~
 212 ~~agricultural unemployment~~, and to provide other training,
 213 educational, and information services necessary to stimulate the
 214 creation of jobs in the Everglades Agricultural Area and rural
 215 areas of opportunity ~~areas of high agricultural unemployment~~. In
 216 determining whether to provide funds to a particular program,
 217 the Department of Economic Opportunity shall consider the
 218 location of the program in proximity to the program's intended
 219 participants.

220 (2) The Legislature supports projects that improve the
 221 economy in the Everglades Agricultural Area and in rural areas
 222 of opportunity in counties that provide for water storage and
 223 dispersed water storage as part of Everglades restoration
 224 efforts. In recognition of the employment opportunities and
 225 economic development generated by new and expanding industries

226 | in such areas ~~the area~~, such as the Airglades Airport in Hendry
227 | County and the development of an inland port in Palm Beach
228 | County, the Legislature finds that training the citizens of the
229 | state to fill the needs of these industries significantly
230 | enhances the economic viability of such areas ~~the region~~.

231 | (3) Funds may be used for grants for tuition for public or
232 | private technical or vocational programs and matching grants to
233 | employers to conduct employer-based training programs. Grant
234 | funds provided to employer-based training programs may be used,
235 | ~~or~~ for the purchase of equipment to be used for training
236 | purposes, the hiring of instructors, or any other purpose
237 | directly associated with the program. For the first 6 months of
238 | each fiscal year, the Department of Economic Opportunity shall
239 | set aside up to 50 percent of the amount appropriated by the
240 | Legislature to fund employer-based training programs. Any
241 | unencumbered funds remaining undisbursed from the set-aside
242 | amount at the end of the 6-month period may be used to provide
243 | funding for tuition. The allocation of funds must be included in
244 | the notice of grant opportunities.

245 | (4) The Department of Economic Opportunity may not award
246 | an employer-based a grant to any given training program which
247 | exceeds 50 percent of the total cost of the program, unless the
248 | training program is located within a rural area of opportunity,
249 | in which case the grant may exceed 50 percent of the total cost
250 | of the program and up to 100 percent. Matching contributions may

251 include in-kind services, including, but not limited to, the
252 provision of training instructors, equipment, and training
253 facilities. The department shall prioritize awarding employer-
254 based grants to training programs located in rural areas of
255 opportunity in counties that provide for water storage and
256 dispersed water storage as part of Everglades restoration
257 efforts.

258 (5) Before granting a request for funds made in accordance
259 with this section, the Department of Economic Opportunity shall
260 enter into a grant agreement with the requester of funds and the
261 training institution receiving funding through the program. Such
262 agreement must include all of the following information:

263 (a) An identification of the personnel necessary to
264 conduct the instructional program, the qualifications of such
265 personnel, and the respective responsibilities of the parties
266 for paying costs associated with the employment of such
267 personnel. National accreditation or licensure of an
268 instructional program by the Commission for Independent
269 Education is sufficient to meet the qualifications requirement.

270 (b) An identification of the estimated length of the
271 instructional program.

272 (c) An identification of all direct, training-related
273 costs, including tuition and fees, curriculum development, books
274 and classroom materials, and overhead or indirect costs.

275 (d) An identification of special program requirements that

276 are not otherwise addressed in the agreement.

277 (6) The Department of Economic Opportunity may grant up to
 278 100 percent of the tuition for a training program participant
 279 who currently resides, and has resided for at least 3 of the 5
 280 immediately preceding years, in within the Everglades
 281 Agricultural Area or as described in a rural area of opportunity
 282 s. 373.4592 and in a county counties that provides provide for
 283 water storage and dispersed water storage as part of Everglades
 284 restoration efforts that are located in rural areas of
 285 opportunity as described in s. 288.0656.

286 (7) Employer-based training programs established in the
 287 Everglades Agricultural Area must include opportunities to
 288 obtain the qualifications and skills necessary for jobs related
 289 to federal and state restoration projects, the Airglades Airport
 290 in Hendry County, an inland port in Palm Beach County, or other
 291 industries with verifiable, demonstrated interest in operating
 292 in within the Everglades Agricultural Area or in rural areas of
 293 opportunity and in counties that provide for water storage and
 294 dispersed water storage as part of Everglades restoration
 295 efforts that are located in rural areas of opportunity as
 296 described in s. 288.0656.

297 (8) The Department of Economic Opportunity shall adopt
 298 rules to implement this section.

299 Section 5. In the event of a conflict of any provision of
 300 this act with the provisions of House Bill 5, 2023 Regular

CS/HB 1209

2023

301 Session, or similar legislation, the provisions of House Bill 5,
302 2023 Regular Session, or similar legislation, shall control to
303 the extent of such conflict.

304 Section 6. This act shall take effect July 1, 2023.