

The Florida Senate
BILL ANALYSIS AND FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT

(This document is based on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

Prepared By: The Professional Staff of the Appropriations Committee on Agriculture, Environment, and General Government

BILL: SB 1300

INTRODUCER: Senator Calatayud

SUBJECT: Education and Workforce Development for Current and Former Inmates

DATE: February 24, 2026 REVISED: _____

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	<u>Wyant</u>	<u>Stokes</u>	<u>CJ</u>	Favorable
2.	<u>Sanders</u>	<u>Betta</u>	<u>AEG</u>	Favorable
3.	_____	_____	<u>FP</u>	_____

I. Summary:

SB 1300 amends s. 334.044, F.S., to expand duties of the Department of Transportation (DOT) to expend funds for a workforce development program. The bill allows the DOT to provide grants from the State Transportation Trust Fund to private educational providers and for certification and training opportunities within the Florida Transportation Academy.

The bill amends s. 334.62, F.S., to allow the DOT to coordinate with the Department of Corrections (DOC) to identify and create certification and training opportunities for nonviolent, scheduled-release inmates and inmates who have two years or less remaining on their sentence. Such certification and training opportunities must include programs within the state correctional institutions or correctional facilities to train and license the specified inmates to operate a commercial motor vehicle. The bill requires the curriculum for such programs to include training for Class A and Class B commercial driver licenses.

The bill creates s. 446.55, F.S., to allow employers with 100 or fewer employees, to apply to the Department of Financial Services (DFS) for reimbursement of the proportionate cost of workers' compensation and automobile liability premiums paid during the fiscal year. The reimbursement applies to former inmates who have less than two years of commercial driving experience and who were hired during the previous fiscal year. The bill provides application for reimbursement requirements. Reimbursements are limited to \$5,000 per employee and \$20,000 per employer.

The bill amends s. 944.801, F.S., to allow the DOC's Correctional Education Program to develop and implement a vocational curriculum for implementation within the state correctional institutions or correctional facilities to train and license inmates to operate a commercial motor vehicle. Additionally, the bill requires the Correctional Education Program's annual report to contain specified information.

The bill amends ss. 945.091 and 945.0913, F.S., to allow an inmate to drive a state-owned vehicle if he or she is participating in, or a graduate of, a department career and technical education program or a contracted commercial driver license training program.

The bill has an indeterminate impact on state revenues and expenditures. *See Section V., Fiscal Statement.*

The bill takes effect on July 1, 2026.

II. Present Situation:

Truck Driver Shortage

The United States continues to experience a persistent shortage of commercial truck drivers, with industry estimates indicating a shortfall in the tens of thousands of positions. In 2025, estimates placed the gap at more than 80,000 drivers, and projections suggest that long-term demand will require over 1.2 million new drivers over the next decade to replace retirees and keep pace with freight growth.¹ The shortage is driven in part by an aging workforce, high annual turnover, and challenges in attracting younger workers and addressing training barriers.²

Florida's labor market for CDL-A truck drivers includes an estimate of over 16,000 job openings statewide.³ State-level workforce development programs, including state colleges and district career centers, have highlighted the need for expanded training opportunities to address the shortage.⁴

Requirements to Obtain a Commercial Driver's License (CDL)

Federal law establishes minimum qualification standards for individuals operating commercial motor vehicles. Motor carriers are prohibited from permitting unqualified individuals to drive.⁵

To be qualified, a commercial driver must, among other requirements:⁶

- Be at least 21 years old;⁷

¹ TruckClub, *Trucking's Driver Shortage: What's Behind It and How the Industry is Responding* (Sept. 18, 2025), <https://www.truckclub.com/trucking-news/driver-shortage-in-trucking> (last visited Feb. 17, 2026).

² Freight Amigo, *The Ongoing US Truck Driver shortage: Impacts & Adaptions 2025*, <https://www.freightamigo.com/en/blog/logistics/the-ongoing-truck-driver-shortage-in-the-us-impacts-and-adaptations/> (last visited Feb. 17, 2026).

³ Florida Educator Preparation & Leadership Network 2025 Convening, *Florida' Labor Market Needs: CDL-A Truck Drivers*, p. 33, <https://www.fau.edu/education/academicdepartments/el/school-leaders/initiatives/leadership-learning-center/fepln/convening/2025-convening-presentation/documents/fepln-2025-day-1-ppt.pdf>. (last visited Feb. 17, 2026).

⁴ Spectrum News, Pinellas Technical College aims to bridge female truck driver gap, reduce storage, <https://baynews9.com/fl/tampa/news/2023/06/08/pinellas-technical-college-aims-to-bridge-female-truck-driver-gap--reduce-shortage> (last visited Feb. 17, 2026).

⁵ 49 C.F.R. s. 391.11(a).

⁶ 49 C.F.R. s. 391.11(b)(1)-(3).

⁷ An individual who is at least 18 years of age, but younger than 21, is restricted to intrastate operation only. <https://www.flhsmv.gov/driver-licenses-id-cards/commercial-motor-vehicle-drivers/commercial-driver-license/> (last visited Feb. 17, 2026). *also*, 49 C.F.R. s. 383.71(a). A Commercial Learner's Permit can be issued to a person 18 years of age or older.

- Be able to read and speak the English language sufficiently to communicate with the general public, understand traffic signs and signals, respond to official inquiries, and accurately complete required reports and records; and
- Have the training, experience, or both, necessary to safely operate the type of commercial motor vehicle driven.

Drivers must also meet federal physical qualification standards, hold a valid commercial driver license issued by only one jurisdiction, not be subject to federal disqualification, and have successfully completed a road skills test or an equivalent licensing requirement accepted by the employing motor carrier.⁸

In Florida, CDLs are issued in three primary classes based on the type and weight of vehicle to be operated:⁹

- Class A licenses allow operation of any combination vehicle, such as e.g., tractor-trailers, with a gross vehicle weight rating of 26,001 pounds or more when the towed vehicle weighs more than 10,000 pounds;
- Class B licenses allow operation of a single vehicle with a gross vehicle weight rating of 26,001 pounds or more; and
- Class C licenses allow operation of vehicles not covered by Class A or B that either transport a specified number of passengers or hazardous materials.

Beginning, February 6, 2026, all driver license knowledge and skills examinations will be administered exclusively in English.¹⁰

Florida law prohibits the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles from issuing a driver license to a person who is an unauthorized alien or undocumented immigrant.¹¹

Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT)

The FDOT has several general powers and duties, including expending funds for a construction workforce development program, in consultation with affected stakeholders, for delivery of projects designated in the department's work program.¹² The FDOT may annually expend up to five million dollars from the State Transportation Trust Fund for fiscal years 2025-2026 through 2029-2030 in grants to state colleges and school districts, with priority given to state colleges and school districts in rural communities.¹³ These funds may be used for:

⁸ 49 C.F.R. s. 391.11(b)(4)-(7).

⁹ Florida Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles, License Classes, Endorsements & Designations, <https://www.flhsmv.gov/driver-licenses-id-cards/general-information/license-classes-endorsements-designations/> (last visited Feb. 17, 2026).

¹⁰ Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles, *Driver Licenses & ID Cards* (Jan. 30, 2026), <https://www.flhsmv.gov/2026/01/30/flhsmv-announces-driver-license-exams-to-be-administered-in-english-only/> (last visited Feb. 17, 2026).

¹¹ Section 322.033, F.S.

¹² Section 334.044(35), F.S.

¹³ See s. 288.0656(2), F.S. A rural community means a county with a population of 75,000 or fewer; a county with a population of 125,000 or fewer which is contiguous to a county with a population of 75,000 or fewer; a municipality within a county described Florida statute; or an unincorporated federal enterprise community or an incorporated rural city with a population of 25,000 or fewer and an employment base focused on traditional agricultural or resource-based industries,

- The purchase of equipment simulators with authentic original equipment manufacturer controls and a companion curriculum;
- The purchase of instructional aids for use in conjunction with the equipment simulators; and
- Supporting offering an elective course in heavy civil construction which must, at a minimum, provide the student with:
 - Occupational Safety and Health Administration 10-hour certification; and
 - Fill equipment simulator certification.¹⁴

Florida Transportation Academy (FTA)

In 2025, the Florida Legislature codified the FTA¹⁵ to prioritize the continued need for transportation industry workforce development programs. To support, promote, and sustain workforce development efforts in the transportation sector, the FDOT has the authority to coordinate with various entities,¹⁶ including the DOC. Coordination with the DOC is intended to identify and create certification and training opportunities for nonviolent inmates and to establish a process for notifying the FDOT when a nonviolent inmate seeking employment has a scheduled release date.¹⁷

Education for State Prisoners

The Bureau of Workforce Development within the DOC offers Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs throughout the state's correctional institutions and work camps.¹⁸ Currently, the DOC provides 92 CTE courses in 37 distinct vocational trades spanning 11 career clusters aligned to Florida's in-demand occupations. Expansion of programs has been achieved through contracted education partners, including state colleges, technical colleges, and community providers. Technical training, employability skill development, and industry-recognized credentialing are integrated into the CTE programs to ensure returning citizens are job-ready upon release.¹⁹

As part of these efforts, the DOC operates the (Correctional Education Program) CEP, which manages educational services in all state correctional facilities. The CEP develops, evaluates, and periodically updates CTE programs based on labor market demand and workforce needs.²⁰ In addition to curriculum development and evaluation, the CEP must annually report correctional education activities to the Secretary of Corrections.²¹ Current law does not specify the data elements that must be included in the report.

located in a county not defined as rural, which has at least three or more of the economic distress factors identified Florida statute and verified by the department.

¹⁴ Section 334.044(35), F.S.

¹⁵ Section 25, ch. 2025-155, L.O.F. *See also*, Florida Department of Transportation, *Florida Transportation Academy Construction Division*, <https://moving4forward.com/workforce-development-landing-page/> (last visited Feb. 17, 2026).

¹⁶ *See s.* 334.62, F.S. The FDOT may coordinate with the DOC, the Department of Juvenile Justice, veteran's organizations, the Department of Commerce, CareerSource Florida, regional business communities, the American Council of Engineering Companies, and the Florida Transportation Builders Association.

¹⁷ Section 334.62(1), F.S.

¹⁸ Florida Department of Corrections, *Bureau of Workforce Development*, <https://www.fdc.myflorida.com/programs/bureau-of-workforce-development> (last visited Feb. 17, 2026).

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ Section 944.801(1), (2), and 3(h) F.S.

²¹ Section 944.801(3)(f), F.S.

The CEP is authorized to establish specialized educational programs for inmates, including prison entrepreneurship programs and workforce certifications, and to adopt procedures for admitting student inmates. Programs may include in-prison education, development of business plans, graduation and certification of successful student inmates, and post release transitional or continuing education services. The DOC may implement programs in partnership with public or private colleges or universities, nonprofit organizations, or other authorized providers using existing resources.²²

Additionally, the CEP may work with the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, the Florida Forest Service Division, and the DFS, Division of State Fire Marshal to develop certifications and training programs, such as state forest staff training to protect homes, forestland, and natural resources from wildfires.²³

Department of Corrections Commercial Driver's License Training Opportunities

As part of broader workforce development efforts, vocational and pre-release programs may provide training related to CDLs. In Florida, workforce initiatives such as Florida HIREs, which involves CareerSource Florida and the DOC, have included training opportunities for in-demand occupations, including Class B commercial truck driving.²⁴ The Florida HIREs program currently operates at Kissimmee Community Release Center (Kissimmee CRC). Female inmates from Orlando Community Release Center that are eligible for the program are provided daily transport to and from Kissimmee CRC to participate in the program. Cohorts typically take six weeks to complete the program. The program is contracted for five cohorts for Fiscal Year 2025-2026, serving 75 total inmates for Class B CDLs.²⁵

Through contract with the Tallahassee State College, the DOC currently operates a Class A CDL program for work release inmates at Tallahassee Community Release Center. The 320-hour course is completed in over eight weeks. The program is contracted for two cohorts for Fiscal Year 2025-2026, serving 16 total inmates.²⁶

Inmate Transportation in Work-Released Program

An inmate is prohibited from driving a state-owned vehicle for the purpose of transporting other inmates who are participating in a work-release program that allows inmates to be gainfully employed in the community while remaining in the custody and supervision of the DOC.²⁷ Due to this prohibition and the required knowledge and skills tests, commercial vehicle driving programs are only offered to inmates housed at Work Release Centers, where testing and training

²² Section 944.801(5), F.S.

²³ Section 944.801(6), F.S.

²⁴ Florida Daily, CareerSource Florida, *Department of Corrections Honor Graduates of Commercial Driver License Program* (Feb. 2022), https://floridadaily.com/careersource-florida-department-of-corrections-honor-graduates-of-commercial-driver-license-program/#google_vignette (last visited Feb. 17, 2026).

²⁵ Florida Department of Corrections, *Agency Analysis of 2026 House Bill 325*, p. 2 (Nov. 21, 2025) (on file with the Senate Committee on Criminal Justice).

²⁶ *Id.*

²⁷ Section 945.0913, F.S.; *see also* s. 945.091(1)(b), F.S. and rule 33-601.605(9)(a), F.A.C.

facilities are available. Both Class A and Class B licenses require knowledge exams and skills tests, including pre-trip inspection, basic vehicle control, and on-road driving.²⁸

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

The bill amends s. 334.044, F.S., to expand duties of the DOT to expend funds for a workforce development program. The bill allows for the DOT to expend funds from the State Transportation Trust Fund in grants to private educational providers and for certification and training opportunities within the Florida Transportation Academy.

The bill amends s. 334.62, F.S., to allow the DOT to coordinate with the DOC to identify and create certification and training opportunities for nonviolent, scheduled-release inmates and inmates who have two years or less remaining on their sentence. Such certification and training opportunities must include programs within the state correctional institutions or correctional facilities to train and license the specified inmates to operate a commercial motor vehicle. The bill requires the curriculum for such programs to include training for Class A and Class B commercial driver licenses.

The bill creates s. 446.55, F.S., to allow employers, with 100 or fewer employees, to apply to the DFS for reimbursement of the proportionate cost of workers' compensation and automobile liability premiums paid during the fiscal year for former inmates who have less than two years of commercial driving experience and who were hired during the previous fiscal year. The bill requires the following information for the application for reimbursement:

- The number of employees for whom reimbursement is sought.
- Each employee's name, the date he or she was hired, the date on which he or she was issued a commercial driver license, the criminal offense for which the employee was convicted, and the final disposition of the employee's case.
- The total amount of reimbursement requested, and the method used by the employer to determine the proportionate share of the cost of premiums attributable to each employee.
- The employer's name, point of contact, and contact information.
- An attestation by the employer agreeing to maintain all documentation supporting the information provided in the application for at least five years.
- Any other information requested by the department.

The employee for whom reimbursement is sought must be a United States citizen or qualified noncitizen authorized to work in the United States who is proficient in English.

A reimbursement may not be sought for an employee who was convicted of any murder, manslaughter, sexual battery, robbery, arson, aggravated assault, aggravated battery, kidnapping, escape, breaking and entering with intent to commit a felony, or aircraft piracy, or any attempt to commit the aforementioned crimes.

Reimbursements are limited to \$5,000 per employee and \$20,000 per employer.

²⁸ Florida Department of Corrections, *Agency Analysis of 2026 House Bill 325*, (Nov. 21, 2025), pp. 2-3., (on file with the Senate Committee on Criminal Justice).

The bill amends s. 944.801, F.S., to allow the DOC's Correctional Education Program (CEP) to develop and implement a vocational curriculum for implementation within the state correctional institutions or correctional facilities to train and license inmates to operate a commercial motor vehicle. The curriculum must include training for Class A and Class B driver licenses, and participation is limited to prerelease inmates and inmates with two years or less remaining on their sentence. Additionally, the bill requires the CEP's annual report to include the following:

- The number of inmates who completed vocational training through the Correctional Education Program.
- The number of inmates who completed vocational training through the Correctional Education Program and were employed within six months after being released from prison.
- Statistics on whether the employed former inmates who completed training through the CEP are employed in an occupation aligned with their education and training received through the program.

The bill amends ss. 945.091 and 945.0913, F.S., to allow an inmate to drive a state-owned vehicle if he or she is participating in, or a graduate of, a department career and technical education program or a contracted commercial driver license training program.

The bill takes effect on July 1, 2026.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

The bill does not appear to require the cities and counties to expend funds or limit their authority to raise revenue or receive state-shared revenues as specified by Article VII, s. 18, of the State Constitution.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

D. State Tax or Fee Increases:

None.

E. Other Constitutional Issues:

None.

V. Fiscal Impact Statement:

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

The impact to the private sector is indeterminate as the number of inmates participating in the CEP is unknown. Additionally, Florida companies who apply for (and receive) the reimbursement of the proportionate cost of workers' compensations and automobile liability premiums paid for former inmates with less than two years of commercial driver experience, may experience a positive fiscal outcome. Trucking companies who participate in the hiring of former inmates who have completed the CDL training prescribed in the bill, may have a positive yet indeterminate fiscal impact, as training costs will be diminished.

C. Government Sector Impact:

There is an indeterminate negative impact on the DFS for reimbursement of the proportionate cost of workers' compensations and automobile liability premiums paid for former inmates with less than two years of commercial driver experience. Reimbursements are limited to \$20,000 per employer, however, it cannot be determined how many employers will apply for reimbursement.

There is an indeterminate negative impact on the DOC due to an increase in programming opportunities through the CEP, which may result in an increase in staffing or operational cost. The bill will require the DOC to update technology systems which can be absorbed within existing resources.²⁹

Additionally, the bill allows the DOT to annually expend up to \$5,000,000 in funds for a workforce development program, rather than solely for a construction workforce development program as previously specified.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

The DOC's General Counsel raised a concern with Line 126 of the bill, stating:

It is not clear from the bill language if the intent is for the Department to only provide CDL training to inmates who are proficient in English or alternatively whether or how employers of inmates who are not proficient in English will get reimbursed as contemplated by Section 2 of the bill. Moreover, how proficiency will be established is not stated. Finally, it is not clear whether this provision is legally viable to the extent it may preclude fully trained inmates from finding employment by operation of the bill language.

In addition, the DOC, with regards to Lines 227-228, states "[I]t is not clear how an extension of the limits of confinement relates to or is necessary for implementation of s. 945.0913(2), F.S., since that provision restricts inmates to activities that take place on DOC [department] property or other state owned property." Further, the DOC indicates it is not clear from s. 945.0913(2), F.S., if the bill contemplates inmates leaving the limits of confinement.

²⁹ *Id.*

Furthermore, the DOC raises a concern with Lines 260-266, stating, “[I]t is not clear from the bill language whether the inmates described (1) must be licensed; (2) must be accompanied by an appropriately licensed driver while operating a motor vehicle if they are not licensed, or (3) are permitted to transport passengers, all of which could raise issues of DOC [Department] and inmate liability.”

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Statutes Affected:

This bill substantially amends the following sections of the Florida Statutes: 334.044, 334.62, 944.801, 945.091, 945.0913.

This bill creates section 446.55 of the Florida Statutes.

IX. Additional Information:

A. Committee Substitute – Statement of Changes:

(Summarizing differences between the Committee Substitute and the prior version of the bill.)

None.

B. Amendments:

None.