

# FLORIDA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

## FINAL BILL ANALYSIS

*This bill analysis was prepared by nonpartisan committee staff and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.*

<b>BILL #:</b> <a href="#">CS/CS/HB 325</a>	<b>COMPANION BILL:</b> <a href="#">SB 1300</a> (Calatayud)
<b>TITLE:</b> Education and Workforce Development for Inmates	<b>LINKED BILLS:</b> None
<b>SPONSOR(S):</b> Kendall	<b>RELATED BILLS:</b> None

**FINAL HOUSE FLOOR ACTION:** 112 Y's 0 N's      **GOVERNOR'S ACTION:** Pending

### SUMMARY

#### **Effect of the Bill:**

The bill expands current commercial driver license (CDL) training programs operated or contracted by the Department of Corrections (DOC). Specifically, the bill removes a barrier limiting DOC CDL training to work-release inmates by allowing nonviolent inmates with two years or less remaining on their sentence to enroll in CDL training conducted "behind the fence" at state correctional institutions and facilities. To facilitate this, the bill allows an inmate to operate a state-owned vehicle on department or other state-owned property – provided a certified correctional officer is present. Operation of the vehicle would be strictly for CDL training purposes. The bill also clarifies the mission of the Florida Transportation Academy (FTA). Specifically, the bill requires the FTA's programs include Class A and Class B CDL training opportunities.

The bill requires inmates be proficient in English in order to enroll in CDL training programs offered or contracted by DOC or the FTA.

#### **Fiscal or Economic Impact:**

The bill is not expected to have a fiscal impact on state agencies beyond existing resources. Florida Department of Transportation may implement broader workforce development programs within current funding limitations, and DOC may expand CTE and CDL training programs using existing resources. Any additional workload from reporting requirements is expected to be minimal and absorbable within current resources.

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### ANALYSIS

#### **EFFECT OF THE BILL:**

The bill expands the scope of career and technical education (CTE) [programs authorized](#) under the Correctional Education Program ([CEP](#)) that may be implemented and offered at state correctional institutions and correctional facilities. In addition to existing authority to establish a prison entrepreneurship program and a firefighter training and certification program, the bill authorizes the implementation of a CTE curriculum to train and license inmates to operate commercial motor vehicles.

The bill specifies that the commercial motor vehicle CTE curriculum must include training for [Class A](#) and [Class B](#) driver licenses and limits participation in the program to nonviolent inmates who have two years or less remaining to serve on their sentence. To be eligible to enroll in a Class A or Class B [commercial driver license \(CDL\) training program](#) offered through the CEP, the bill requires an inmate be proficient in English. Such proficiency may be demonstrated in a manner specified by the Department of Corrections (DOC) or the DOC's designee.

The bill also specifies annual reporting requirements of the CEP. Specifically, the bill requires the annual report of correctional education activities to include:

- The number of inmates who completed CTE training, the type of training each inmate completed, and the credential each inmate earned through the CEP;
- The number of inmates who completed CTE training and were employed within six months after release; and

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- Statistics indicating whether employed former inmates are working in occupations aligned with the education and training they received through the program. (Section [3](#)).

The bill creates a limited exception to the prohibition against [inmates driving state-owned vehicles](#). Under the bill, an inmate appropriately licensed and trained may operate a state-owned vehicle if he or she is enrolled in, or a completer of, a department-operated or a contracted CDL training program. An inmate may only operate a state-owned vehicle on DOC property or other state-owned property specifically designated for CDL training purposes. At least one certified correctional officer must be present during such operation. (Section [5](#)).

The bill also expands the circumstances under which an inmate may be transported in a state-owned vehicle. Specifically, the DOC may transport an appropriately licensed inmate who is enrolled in, or a completer of, a DOC-operated or contracted CDL program for the purpose of completing program requirements or demonstrating proficiency. At least one certified correctional officer must be present during such transport or operation. (Section [4](#)).

The bill broadens the authority of the [Florida Department of Transportation](#) (FDOT) to expend funds, in consultation with affected stakeholders, for a workforce development program, rather than a construction workforce development program, for delivery of projects designated in the FDOT's work program.

From the FDOT's annual expenditure of up to \$5 million from the State Transportation Trust Fund for grants, the bill expands the recipients to include private educational providers, in addition to state colleges and school districts. The bill also expands the authorization for the use of grant funds to include funding for certification and training opportunities within the [Florida Transportation Academy \(FTA\)](#), in addition to the purchase of equipment simulators with authentic original equipment manufacturer controls and companion curriculum, instructional aids, and support for an elective course in heavy civil construction, including Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) 10-hour and equipment simulator certifications. (Section [1](#)).

The bill expands the FTA's certification and training programs to include nonviolent inmates who have two years or less remaining on their sentence, in addition to nonviolent scheduled-release inmates. The bill also specifies that such certification and training opportunities for eligible inmates must:

- be offered at state correctional institutions and correctional facilities; and
- at a minimum, include training for Class A and Class B CDLs.

To be eligible to enroll in a Class A or Class B CDL training program offered through the FTA, the bill requires an inmate be proficient in English. Such proficiency may be demonstrated in a manner specified by the FDOT or the department's designee.

Additionally, the bill authorizes the FDOT to use workforce development funds from the State Transportation Trust Fund<sup>1</sup> to support these certifications and training programs. (Section [2](#)).

Subject to the Governor's veto powers, the effective date of this bill is July 1, 2026. (Section [6](#)).

#### **FISCAL OR ECONOMIC IMPACT:**

##### STATE GOVERNMENT:

The bill is not expected to have a fiscal impact on state agencies beyond existing resources. FDOT may implement broader workforce development programs within current funding limitations, and DOC may expand CTE and CDL training programs using existing resources. Any additional workload from reporting requirements is expected to be minimal and absorbable within current resources.

<sup>1</sup> See [s. 334.044\(35\), F.S.](#)

## RELEVANT INFORMATION

### SUBJECT OVERVIEW:

#### 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.<sup>2</sup> The shortage is driven in part by an aging workforce, high annual turnover, and challenges in attracting younger workers and addressing training barriers.<sup>3</sup>

Florida's labor market for Class A commercial driver's license (CDL) truck drivers includes an estimated 16,000+ job openings statewide.<sup>4</sup> State-level workforce development programs, including state colleges and district career centers, have highlighted the need for expanded training opportunities to address the shortage.<sup>5</sup>

#### Requirements to Obtain a CDL

Federal law establishes minimum qualification standards for individuals operating commercial motor vehicles and motor carriers are prohibited from permitting unqualified individuals to drive.<sup>6</sup>

To be qualified, a commercial driver must, among other requirements:<sup>7</sup>

- be at least 21 years old<sup>8</sup>;
- 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 CDL 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.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>2</sup> TruckClub, *Trucking's Driver Shortage: What's Behind It and How the Industry is Responding* (Sept. 2025), <https://www.truckclub.com/trucking-news/driver-shortage-in-trucking> (last visited Mar. 3, 2026).

<sup>3</sup> 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 Mar. 3, 2026).

<sup>4</sup> Florida Educator Preparation & Leadership Network 2025 Convening, *Florida' Labor Market Needs: CDL-A Truck Drivers*, at 33, available at <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>.

<sup>5</sup> 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 Mar. 3, 2026).

<sup>6</sup> 49 C.F.R. § 391.11(a).

<sup>7</sup> 49 C.F.R. § 391.11(b)(1)-(3).

<sup>8</sup> 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 Mar. 10, 2026). See also, 49 C.F.R. § 383.71(a). A Commercial Learner's Permit can be issued to a person 18 years of age or older.

<sup>9</sup> 49 C.F.R. § 391.11(b)(4)-(7).

In Florida, CDLs are issued in three primary classes based on the type and weight of vehicle to be operated:<sup>10</sup>

- [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.<sup>11</sup>

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.<sup>12</sup>

#### [Department of Corrections CDL 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.<sup>13</sup> 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 6 weeks to complete. The program is contracted for 5 cohorts for fiscal year 2025-2026, serving 75 total inmates for Class B CDLs.<sup>14</sup>

For Fiscal Year 2025-2026, the Legislature allocated \$1M in recurring General Revenue funds to support the Florida HIREs initiative.<sup>15</sup>

Through contract with 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 over 8 weeks. The program is contracted for 2 cohorts for fiscal year 2025-2026, serving 16 total inmates.<sup>16</sup>

## Education for State Prisoners

The Bureau of Workforce Development within the DOC offers CTE programs throughout the state's correctional institutions and work camps.<sup>17</sup> 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.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>10</sup> 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 Mar. 10, 2026).

<sup>11</sup> 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 Mar. 10, 2026).

<sup>12</sup> Section [322.033, F.S.](#)

<sup>13</sup> 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](https://floridadaily.com/careersource-florida-department-of-corrections-honor-graduates-of-commercial-driver-license-program/#google_vignette) (last visited Mar. 10, 2026).

<sup>14</sup> Florida Department of Corrections, Agency Analysis of 2026 House Bill 325, p. 2 (Nov. 21, 2025).

<sup>15</sup> See Specific Appropriation 713, ch. 2025-198, Laws of Florida.

<sup>16</sup> *Id.*

<sup>17</sup> Florida Department of Corrections, *Bureau of Workforce Development*, <https://www.fdc.myflorida.com/programs/bureau-of-workforce-development> (last visited Mar. 10, 2026).

<sup>18</sup> *Id.*

As part of these efforts, the DOC operates the [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.<sup>19</sup> In addition to curriculum development and evaluation, the CEP must annually report correctional education activities to the Secretary of Corrections.<sup>20</sup> Current law does not specify the data elements that must be included in the report.

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.<sup>21</sup>

Additionally, the CEP may work with the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, the Florida Forest Service Division, and the Department of Financial Services, 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.<sup>22</sup>

According to the DOC, tuition for the above programs is typically paid by the inmate or the inmate's family. However, the DOC does participate in the Prison Education Program/Second Chance Pell Program. Since 2023, inmates may be eligible to receive Pell Grants if they are enrolled in an approved prison education program offered by a public or non-profit educational institution. The program covers tuition, fees, books, course materials, supplies, equipment, and the cost of obtaining a license, certification, or a first professional credential.

### [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.<sup>23</sup> The FDOT may annually expend up to \$5 million 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 counties that are rural communities.<sup>24</sup> These funds may be used for:

- 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:
  - OSHA 10-hour certification; and
  - fill equipment simulator certification.<sup>25</sup>

### [Florida Transportation Academy \(FTA\)](#)

<sup>19</sup> Section [944.801\(1\), \(2\), and 3\(h\) F.S.](#)

<sup>20</sup> Section [944.801\(3\)\(f\), F.S.](#)

<sup>21</sup> Section [944.801\(5\), F.S.](#)

<sup>22</sup> Section [944.801\(6\), F.S.](#)

<sup>23</sup> Section [334.044\(35\), F.S.](#)

<sup>24</sup> 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, 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.

<sup>25</sup> Section [334.044\(35\), F.S.](#)

In 2025, the Florida Legislature codified the FTA<sup>26</sup> 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,<sup>27</sup> 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 who is seeking employment has a scheduled release date.<sup>28</sup>

### [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.<sup>29</sup> 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 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.<sup>30</sup>

#### RECENT LEGISLATION:

YEAR	BILL #/SUBJECT	HOUSE/SENATE SPONSOR(S)	OTHER INFORMATION
2025	<a href="#">CS/CS/CS/SB 462</a> - Transportation	McFarland/ <i>DiCeglie</i>	Became law on July 1, 2025, except where otherwise provided.
2025	<a href="#">CS/CS/CS/SB 1662</a> - Transportation	Abbott, Bankson/ <i>Collins</i>	Became law on July 1, 2025.

<sup>26</sup> Section 25, ch. 2025-155, L.O.F. *See also*, Florida Department of Transportation, *Florida Transportation Academy Construction Division*, <https://movingi4forward.com/workforce-development-landing-page/> (last visited Jan. 30, 2026).

<sup>27</sup> *See* [s. 334.62, F.S.](#) The FDOT may coordinate with the Department of Corrections, 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.

<sup>28</sup> Section [334.62\(1\), F.S.](#)

<sup>29</sup> Section [945.0913, F.S.](#); *see also* [s. 945.091\(1\)\(b\), F.S.](#) and rule 33-601.605(9)(a), F.A.C.

<sup>30</sup> Florida Department of Corrections, Agency Analysis of 2026 House Bill 325, pp. 2-3 (Nov. 21, 2025).