

1 A bill to be entitled
2 An act relating to education and workforce development
3 for current and former inmates; amending s. 334.044,
4 F.S.; authorizing the Department of Transportation to
5 expend certain funds for all workforce development
6 programs, rather than only construction workforce
7 development programs; authorizing the department to
8 provide grants to private educational providers to use
9 for certain certification and training opportunities;
10 amending s. 334.62, F.S.; requiring certification and
11 training opportunities to include training for
12 specified commercial driver licenses to certain
13 inmates; authorizing the department to use workforce
14 development funds for certain certification and
15 training opportunities; creating s. 446.55, F.S.;
16 providing that the Department of Financial Services
17 may reimburse, subject to appropriation, employers for
18 the cost of certain workers' compensation and auto
19 liability premiums; providing requirements for the
20 reimbursement application; providing requirements and
21 restrictions for reimbursement; requiring the
22 department to process an application and notify the
23 applicant within a specified timeframe; requiring the
24 department to coordinate with the employer for a
25 certain purpose; providing that reimbursements are

made on a first-come, first-serve basis; amending s. 944.801, F.S.; requiring the Correctional Education Program under the Department of Corrections to annually submit a report to the Secretary of Corrections with specified information; authorizing the Correctional Education Program to develop and implement a vocational curriculum in which certain inmates can earn specified commercial driver licenses; amending s. 945.091, F.S.; conforming a provision to changes made by the act; amending s. 945.0913, F.S.; authorizing inmates to drive a state-owned vehicle under certain circumstances; providing an effective date.

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

Section 1. Subsection (35) of section 334.044, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

334.044 Powers and duties of the department.—The department shall have the following general powers and duties:

(35) To expend funds for a ~~construction~~ workforce development program, in consultation with affected stakeholders, for delivery of projects designated in the department's work program. The department 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, and private educational providers, with priority given to state colleges and school districts in counties that are rural communities as defined in s. 288.0656(2), for certification and training opportunities within the Florida Transportation Academy, for the purchase of equipment simulators with authentic original equipment manufacturer controls and a companion curriculum, for the purchase of instructional aids for use in conjunction with the equipment simulators, and to support offering an elective course in heavy civil construction which must, at a minimum, provide the student with an Occupational Safety and Health Administration 10-hour certification and a fill equipment simulator certification.

Section 2. Subsection (1) of section 334.62, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

334.62 Florida Transportation Academy.—The Legislature finds that the growth and sustainability of the transportation industry workforce is vital to the continued success and efficiency of the state's supply chain and economic competitiveness. In order to prioritize the continued need for transportation industry workforce development programs, the Florida Transportation Academy is established within the department. In order to support, promote, and sustain workforce development efforts in the transportation sector, the department may do all of the following:

(1) Coordinate with the Department of Corrections to identify and create certification and training opportunities for nonviolent, scheduled-release inmates and inmates who have 2 years or less remaining on their sentence and create a notification process between the Department of Corrections and the department for nonviolent inmates with imminent scheduled-release dates who are expected to seek employment upon release. Such certification and training opportunities must include programs within the state correctional institutions or correctional facilities to train and license nonviolent, scheduled-release inmates and inmates who have 2 years or less remaining on their sentence to operate a commercial motor vehicle. The curriculum for such program must include training for Class A and Class B commercial driver licenses. The department's workforce development funds as described in s. 334.044(35) may be used to fund such certification and training opportunities.

Section 3. Section 446.55, Florida Statutes, is created to read:

446.55 Reimbursement for insurance premiums.—

(1) Subject to appropriation, employers may apply to the Department of Financial Services, in a format prescribed by the department, for reimbursement of the proportionate cost of workers' compensation and auto liability premiums paid during the fiscal year for former inmates who have less than 2 years of

101 commercial driving experience and who were hired during the
102 previous fiscal year.

103 (a) An application for reimbursement must include all of
104 the following information:

105 1. The number of employees for whom reimbursement is
106 sought.

107 2. Each employee's name, date he or she was hired, date on
108 which he or she was issued a commercial driving license, the
109 criminal offense for which the employee was convicted, and the
110 final disposition of the employee's case.

111 3. The total amount of reimbursement requested and the
112 method used by the employer to determine the proportionate share
113 of the cost of premiums attributable to each employee.

114 4. The employer's name, point of contact, and contact
115 information.

116 5. An attestation by the employer agreeing to maintain all
117 documentation supporting the information provided in the
118 application for at least 5 years.

119 6. Any other information requested by the department.

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

123 (c) An employer may not request reimbursement for an
124 employee who was convicted of any of the offenses in s.
125 945.091(5).

126 (2) Within 45 days after receipt of a completed
127 application, the department must process the application and
128 notify the applicant of approval or denial of the application.
129 Before making its determination, the department must coordinate
130 with the employer to verify the information on the application
131 relating to the employer and the employees for whom
132 reimbursement is sought.

133 (3) Reimbursements provided under this section must be
134 made on a first-come, first-served basis.

135 **Section 4. Subsections (7), (8), and (9) of section**
136 **944.801, Florida Statutes, are renumbered as subsections (6),**
137 **(7), and (8), respectively, and paragraph (h) of subsection (3)**
138 **and subsections (5) and (6) of that section are amended, to**
139 **read:**

140 944.801 Education for state prisoners.—

141 (3) The responsibilities of the Correctional Education
142 Program shall be to:

143 (h) Develop a written procedure for selecting programs to
144 add to or delete from the vocational curriculum. The procedure
145 shall include labor market analyses that demonstrate the
146 projected demand for certain occupations and the projected
147 supply of potential employees. In conducting these analyses, the
148 department shall evaluate the feasibility of adding vocational
149 education programs that have been identified by the Department
150 of Commerce, the Department of Education, or a regional

151 coordinating council as being in undersupply in this state. The
152 department shall periodically reevaluate the vocational
153 education programs in major institutions to determine which of
154 the programs support and provide relevant skills to inmates who
155 could be assigned to a correctional work program that is
156 operated as a Prison Industry Enhancement Program. The annual
157 report of correctional education activities required under
158 paragraph (f) must include all of the following information:

159 1. The number of inmates who completed vocational training
160 through the Correctional Education Program.

161 2. The number of inmates who completed vocational training
162 through the Correctional Education Program and were employed
163 within 6 months after being released from prison.

164 3. Statistics on whether the employed former inmates who
165 completed training through the Correctional Education Program
166 are employed in an occupation aligned with their education and
167 training received through the Correctional Education Program.

168 (5) The Correctional Education Program may:

169 (a) Establish a prison entrepreneurship program and adopt
170 procedures for admitting student inmates. If the department
171 elects to develop the program, it must include at least 180 days
172 of in-prison education. The program curriculum must include a
173 component on developing a business plan, procedures for
174 graduation and certification of successful student inmates, and
175 at least 90 days of transitional and postrelease continuing

176 educational services. Transitional and postrelease continuing
177 educational services may be offered to graduate student inmates
178 on a voluntary basis and are not a requirement for completion of
179 the program. The department shall enter into agreements with
180 public or private colleges or universities, other nonprofit
181 entities, or other authorized providers under s. 1002.45(1)(a)1.
182 to implement the program. The program must be funded with
183 existing resources.

184 ~~(b) (6) The Correctional Education Program may~~ Work in
185 cooperation with the Department of Agriculture and Consumer
186 Services, Florida Forestry Service Division, and the Florida
187 Department of Financial Services, Division of State Fire Marshal
188 to develop a program for implementation within state
189 correctional institutions or correctional facilities to train
190 and certify inmates as firefighters. The program should include,
191 but not be limited to, certification of inmates as state forest
192 staff trained to help protect homes, forestland, and natural
193 resources from the effects of wildfires throughout the state.

194 (c) Develop and implement a vocational curriculum for
195 implementation within the state correctional institutions or
196 correctional facilities to train and license inmates to operate
197 a commercial motor vehicle. The vocational curriculum must
198 include training for Class A and Class B driver licenses and
199 participation in such curriculum is limited to prerelease
200 inmates and inmates who have 2 years or less remaining to serve

on his or her sentence.

Section 5. Paragraph (b) of subsection (1) of section 945.091, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

945.091 Extension of the limits of confinement; restitution by employed inmates.—

(1) The department may adopt rules permitting the extension of the limits of the place of confinement of an inmate as to whom there is reasonable cause to believe that the inmate will honor his or her trust by authorizing the inmate, under prescribed conditions and following investigation and approval by the secretary, or the secretary's designee, who shall maintain a written record of such action, to leave the confines of that place unaccompanied by a custodial agent for a prescribed period of time to:

(b) Work at paid employment, participate in an education or a training program, or voluntarily serve a public or nonprofit agency or faith-based service group in the community, while continuing as an inmate of the institution or facility in which the inmate is confined, except during the hours of his or her employment, education, training, or service and traveling thereto and therefrom. An inmate may travel to and from his or her place of employment, education, or training only by means of walking, bicycling, or using public transportation or transportation that is provided by a family member or employer. Contingent upon specific appropriations or as authorized in s.

226 945.0913(2), the department may transport an inmate in a state-
227 owned vehicle if the inmate is unable to obtain other means of
228 travel to his or her place of employment, education, or
229 training.

230 1. An inmate may participate in paid employment only
231 during the last 36 months of his or her confinement, unless
232 sooner requested by the Florida Commission on Offender Review or
233 the Control Release Authority.

234 2. While working at paid employment and residing in the
235 facility, an inmate may apply for placement at a contracted
236 substance abuse transition housing program. The transition
237 assistance specialist shall inform the inmate of program
238 availability and assess the inmate's need and suitability for
239 transition housing assistance. If an inmate is approved for
240 placement, the specialist shall assist the inmate. If an inmate
241 requests and is approved for placement in a contracted faith-
242 based substance abuse transition housing program, the specialist
243 must consult with the chaplain before such placement. The
244 department shall ensure that an inmate's faith orientation, or
245 lack thereof, will not be considered in determining admission to
246 a faith-based program and that the program does not attempt to
247 convert an inmate toward a particular faith or religious
248 preference.

249 **Section 6. Section 945.0913, Florida Statutes, is amended**
250 **to read:**

251 945.0913 Inmates prohibited from driving state-owned
252 vehicles to transport inmates in a work-release program;
253 exception.—

254 (1) Except as provided in subsection (2), an inmate may
255 not drive a state-owned vehicle for the purpose of transporting
256 inmates who are participating in a work-release program
257 authorized in s. 945.091(1)(b).

258 (2) An inmate may drive a state-owned vehicle if he or she
259 is participating in, or a graduate of, a department career and
260 technical education program or a contracted commercial driver
261 licensed training program. An inmate may only operate a state-
262 owned vehicle on department property or other state-owned
263 property that is specifically designated for career and
264 technical education purposes.

265 **Section 7.** This act shall take effect July 1, 2026.