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1  
2 An act relating to education and workforce development  
3 for inmates; amending s. 334.044, F.S.; authorizing  
4 the Department of Transportation to expend certain  
5 funds for all workforce development programs, rather  
6 than only construction workforce development programs;  
7 authorizing the department to provide grants to  
8 private educational providers to use for certain  
9 certification and training opportunities; amending s.  
10 334.62, F.S.; requiring certification and training  
11 opportunities to include training for specified  
12 commercial driver licenses to certain inmates;  
13 providing eligibility; authorizing the department to  
14 use workforce development funds for certain  
15 certification and training opportunities; amending s.  
16 944.801, F.S.; requiring the Correctional Education  
17 Program under the Department of Corrections to  
18 annually submit a report to the Secretary of  
19 Corrections with specified information; authorizing  
20 the Correctional Education Program to implement a  
21 career and technical education program in which  
22 certain inmates can earn specified commercial driver  
23 licenses; providing eligibility; amending s. 945.091,  
24 F.S.; authorizing an inmate to be transported in or to  
25 operate a state-owned vehicle under certain

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26 |       circumstances; requiring a certified correctional  
 27 |       officer to be present during such transport or  
 28 |       operation; amending s. 945.0913, F.S.; authorizing  
 29 |       inmates to drive a state-owned vehicle under certain  
 30 |       circumstances; requiring a certified correctional  
 31 |       officer to be present during such transport or  
 32 |       operation; providing an effective date.  
 33 |

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

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

38 |       334.044 Powers and duties of the department.—The  
 39 | department shall have the following general powers and duties:

40 |       (35) To expend funds for a ~~construction~~ workforce  
 41 | development program, in consultation with affected stakeholders,  
 42 | for delivery of projects designated in the department's work  
 43 | program. The department may annually expend up to \$5 million  
 44 | from the State Transportation Trust Fund for fiscal years 2025-  
 45 | 2026 through 2029-2030 in grants to state colleges, and school  
 46 | districts, and private educational providers, with priority  
 47 | given to state colleges and school districts in counties that  
 48 | are rural communities as defined in s. 288.0656(2), for  
 49 | certification and training opportunities within the Florida  
 50 | Transportation Academy, for the purchase of equipment simulators

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51 | with authentic original equipment manufacturer controls and a  
52 | companion curriculum, for the purchase of instructional aids for  
53 | use in conjunction with the equipment simulators, and to support  
54 | offering an elective course in heavy civil construction which  
55 | must, at a minimum, provide the student with an Occupational  
56 | Safety and Health Administration 10-hour certification and a  
57 | fill equipment simulator certification.

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

60 | 334.62 Florida Transportation Academy.—The Legislature  
61 | finds that the growth and sustainability of the transportation  
62 | industry workforce is vital to the continued success and  
63 | efficiency of the state's supply chain and economic  
64 | competitiveness. In order to prioritize the continued need for  
65 | transportation industry workforce development programs, the  
66 | Florida Transportation Academy is established within the  
67 | department. In order to support, promote, and sustain workforce  
68 | development efforts in the transportation sector, the department  
69 | may do all of the following:

70 | (1) Coordinate with the Department of Corrections to  
71 | identify and create certification and training opportunities for  
72 | nonviolent~~7~~ scheduled-release inmates and nonviolent inmates who  
73 | have 2 years or less remaining on their sentence and create a  
74 | notification process between the Department of Corrections and  
75 | the department for nonviolent inmates with imminent scheduled-

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76 | release dates who are expected to seek employment upon release.  
77 | Such certification and training opportunities must be offered at  
78 | state correctional institutions and correctional facilities and,  
79 | at a minimum, include training for Class A and Class B  
80 | commercial driver licenses. To be eligible to enroll in a Class  
81 | A or Class B commercial driver license training program offered  
82 | in accordance with this subsection, an inmate must be proficient  
83 | in English. Such proficiency may be demonstrated in a manner  
84 | specified by the department or the department's designee. The  
85 | department's workforce development funds as described in s.  
86 | 334.044(35) may be used to fund such certification and training  
87 | opportunities.

88 | Section 3. Subsections (7), (8), and (9) of section  
89 | 944.801, Florida Statutes, are renumbered as subsections (6),  
90 | (7), and (8), respectively, and paragraphs (a), (e), and (g)  
91 | through (j) of subsection (3) and subsection (5) and present  
92 | subsections (6) and (7) of that section are amended, to read:

93 | 944.801 Education for state prisoners.—

94 | (3) The responsibilities of the Correctional Education  
95 | Program shall be to:

96 | (a) Develop guidelines for collecting education-related  
97 | information during the inmate reception process and for  
98 | disseminating such information to the classification staff of  
99 | the Department of Corrections. The information collected shall  
100 | include the inmate's areas of educational or career and

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101 technical educational ~~vocational~~ interest, ~~vocational~~ skills,  
 102 and level of education.

103 (e) Enter into agreements with public or private school  
 104 districts, entities, state ~~community~~ colleges, ~~junior colleges,~~  
 105 ~~colleges,~~ or universities as may be deemed appropriate for the  
 106 purpose of carrying out its duties and responsibilities and  
 107 ensure that agreements require minimum performance standards and  
 108 standards for measurable objectives, in accordance with  
 109 established Department of Education standards.

110 (g) Develop and maintain complete and reliable statistics  
 111 on the number of high school equivalency diplomas and career and  
 112 technical education ~~vocational~~ certificates issued by each  
 113 institution in each skill area, the change in inmate literacy  
 114 levels, and the number of inmate admissions to and withdrawals  
 115 from education courses. The compiled statistics shall be  
 116 summarized and analyzed in the annual report of correctional  
 117 education activities required by paragraph (f).

118 (h) Develop a written procedure for selecting programs to  
 119 add to or delete from the career and technical education  
 120 ~~vocational~~ curriculum. The procedure shall include labor market  
 121 analyses that demonstrate the projected demand for certain  
 122 occupations and the projected supply of potential employees. In  
 123 conducting these analyses, the department shall evaluate the  
 124 feasibility of adding career and technical ~~vocational~~ education  
 125 programs that have been identified by the Department of

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126 Commerce, the Department of Education, or a regional  
 127 coordinating council as being in undersupply in this state. The  
 128 department shall periodically reevaluate the career and  
 129 technical ~~vocational~~ education programs in major institutions to  
 130 determine which of the programs support and provide relevant  
 131 skills to inmates who could be assigned to a correctional work  
 132 program that is operated as a Prison Industry Enhancement  
 133 Program. The annual report of correctional education activities  
 134 required under paragraph (f) must include all of the following  
 135 information:

136 1. The number of inmates who completed career and  
 137 technical education training, the type of training each inmate  
 138 completed, and the credential each inmate earned through the  
 139 Correctional Education Program.

140 2. The number of inmates who completed career and  
 141 technical education training through the Correctional Education  
 142 Program and were employed within 6 months after being released  
 143 from prison.

144 3. Statistics on whether the employed former inmates who  
 145 completed training through the Correctional Education Program  
 146 are employed in an occupation aligned with their education and  
 147 training received through the Correctional Education Program.

148 (i) Ensure that every inmate who has 2 years or more  
 149 remaining to serve on his or her sentence at the time that he or  
 150 she is received at an institution and who lacks basic and

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151 functional literacy skills as defined in s. 1004.02 attends not  
 152 fewer than 150 hours of sequential instruction in a correctional  
 153 adult basic education program. The basic and functional literacy  
 154 level of an inmate shall be determined by the average composite  
 155 test score obtained on a test approved for this purpose by the  
 156 State Board of Education.

157 1. Upon completion of the 150 hours of instruction, the  
 158 inmate shall be retested and, if a composite test score of  
 159 functional literacy is not attained, the department is  
 160 authorized to require the inmate to remain in the instructional  
 161 program.

162 2. Highest priority of inmate participation shall be  
 163 focused on youthful offenders and those inmates nearing release  
 164 from the correctional system.

165 3. An inmate shall be required to attend the 150 hours of  
 166 adult basic education instruction unless such inmate:

167 a. Is serving a life sentence or is under sentence of  
 168 death.

169 b. Is specifically exempted for security or health  
 170 reasons.

171 c. Is housed at a community correctional center, road  
 172 prison, work camp, or career and technical education ~~vocational~~  
 173 center.

174 d. Attains a functional literacy level after attendance in  
 175 fewer than 150 hours of adult basic education instruction.

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176 e. Is unable to enter such instruction because of  
 177 insufficient facilities, staff, or classroom capacity.

178 4. The Department of Corrections shall provide classes to  
 179 accommodate those inmates assigned to correctional or public  
 180 work programs after normal working hours. The department shall  
 181 develop a plan to provide academic and career and technical  
 182 education ~~vocational~~ classes on a more frequent basis and at  
 183 times that accommodate the increasing number of inmates with  
 184 work assignments, to the extent that resources permit.

185 5. If an inmate attends and actively participates in the  
 186 150 hours of instruction, the Department of Corrections may  
 187 grant a one-time award of up to 6 additional days of incentive  
 188 gain-time, which must be credited and applied as provided by  
 189 law. Active participation means, at a minimum, that the inmate  
 190 is attentive, responsive, cooperative, and completes assigned  
 191 work.

192 (j) Recommend the award of additional incentive gain-time  
 193 for inmates who receive a high school equivalency diploma or a  
 194 career and technical education ~~vocational~~ certificate.

195 (5) The Correctional Education Program may:

196 (a) Establish a prison entrepreneurship program and adopt  
 197 procedures for admitting student inmates. If the department  
 198 elects to develop the program, it must include at least 180 days  
 199 of in-prison education. The program curriculum must include a  
 200 component on developing a business plan, procedures for

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201 graduation and certification of successful student inmates, and  
202 at least 90 days of transitional and postrelease continuing  
203 educational services. Transitional and postrelease continuing  
204 educational services may be offered to graduate student inmates  
205 on a voluntary basis and are not a requirement for completion of  
206 the program. The department shall enter into agreements with  
207 public or private colleges or universities, other nonprofit  
208 entities, or other authorized providers under s. 1002.45(1)(a)1.  
209 to implement the program. The program must be funded with  
210 existing resources.

211 ~~(b)(6) The Correctional Education Program may~~ Work in  
212 cooperation with the Department of Agriculture and Consumer  
213 Services, Florida Forestry Service Division, and the Florida  
214 Department of Financial Services, Division of State Fire Marshal  
215 to develop a program for implementation within state  
216 correctional institutions or correctional facilities to train  
217 and certify inmates as firefighters. The program should include,  
218 but not be limited to, certification of inmates as state forest  
219 staff trained to help protect homes, forestland, and natural  
220 resources from the effects of wildfires throughout the state.

221 (c) Implement a career and technical education program to  
222 be offered at state correctional institutions and correctional  
223 facilities to train and license inmates to operate a commercial  
224 motor vehicle. The career and technical education curriculum  
225 must include training for Class A and Class B driver licenses

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226 and participation in such curriculum is limited to nonviolent  
 227 inmates who have 2 years or less remaining to serve on his or  
 228 her sentence. To be eligible to enroll in a Class A or Class B  
 229 commercial driver license training program offered in accordance  
 230 with this paragraph, an inmate must be proficient in English.  
 231 Such proficiency may be demonstrated in a manner specified by  
 232 the department or the department's designee.

233 (6)-(7) The department may contract with a district school  
 234 board, the Florida Virtual School, a charter school authorized  
 235 to operate under s. 1002.33, or a Florida College System  
 236 institution to provide education services in the Correctional  
 237 Education Program. The education services may include any  
 238 educational or, career and technical education, ~~or vocational~~  
 239 training authorized by the department.

240 Section 4. Paragraph (b) of subsection (1) of section  
 241 945.091, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

242 945.091 Extension of the limits of confinement;  
 243 restitution by employed inmates.-

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

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251 of that place unaccompanied by a custodial agent for a  
252 prescribed period of time to:

253 (b) Work at paid employment, participate in an education  
254 or a training program, or voluntarily serve a public or  
255 nonprofit agency or faith-based service group in the community,  
256 while continuing as an inmate of the institution or facility in  
257 which the inmate is confined, except during the hours of his or  
258 her employment, education, training, or service and traveling  
259 thereto and therefrom. An inmate may travel to and from his or  
260 her place of employment, education, or training only by means of  
261 walking, bicycling, or using public transportation or  
262 transportation that is provided by a family member or employer.  
263 Contingent upon specific appropriations or as authorized in s.  
264 945.0913(2), the department may transport an inmate in a state-  
265 owned vehicle if the inmate is unable to obtain other means of  
266 travel to his or her place of employment, education, or  
267 training. An inmate may be transported in or may operate a  
268 state-owned vehicle if the inmate is appropriately licensed and  
269 enrolled in or has completed a department-operated or contracted  
270 commercial driver license program for the purpose of completing  
271 program requirements or demonstrating proficiency in the  
272 program. At least one certified correctional officer must be  
273 present during such transport or operation.

274 1. An inmate may participate in paid employment only  
275 during the last 36 months of his or her confinement, unless

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276 | sooner requested by the Florida Commission on Offender Review or  
 277 | the Control Release Authority.

278 |         2. While working at paid employment and residing in the  
 279 | facility, an inmate may apply for placement at a contracted  
 280 | substance abuse transition housing program. The transition  
 281 | assistance specialist shall inform the inmate of program  
 282 | availability and assess the inmate's need and suitability for  
 283 | transition housing assistance. If an inmate is approved for  
 284 | placement, the specialist shall assist the inmate. If an inmate  
 285 | requests and is approved for placement in a contracted faith-  
 286 | based substance abuse transition housing program, the specialist  
 287 | must consult with the chaplain before such placement. The  
 288 | department shall ensure that an inmate's faith orientation, or  
 289 | lack thereof, will not be considered in determining admission to  
 290 | a faith-based program and that the program does not attempt to  
 291 | convert an inmate toward a particular faith or religious  
 292 | preference.

293 |         Section 5. Section 945.0913, Florida Statutes, is amended  
 294 | to read:

295 |         945.0913 Inmates prohibited from driving state-owned  
 296 | vehicles to transport inmates in a work-release program;  
 297 | exception.—

298 |         (1) Except as provided in subsection (2), an inmate may  
 299 | not drive a state-owned vehicle for the purpose of transporting  
 300 | inmates who are participating in a work-release program

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301 authorized in s. 945.091(1)(b).

302 (2) An inmate appropriately licensed and trained may  
303 operate a state-owned vehicle if he or she is enrolled in or has  
304 completed a department-operated or contracted commercial driver  
305 license training program. An inmate may only operate a state-  
306 owned vehicle on department property or other state-owned  
307 property specifically designated for commercial driver license  
308 training purposes. At least one certified correctional officer  
309 must be present during such operation.

310 Section 6. This act shall take effect July 1, 2026.