

1 A bill to be entitled
2 An act relating to rural counties; amending s. 212.08,
3 F.S.; providing an exemption from the sales and use
4 tax for industrial machinery and equipment used by
5 wholesalers in fiscally constrained counties; amending
6 s. 215.971, F.S.; clarifying a provision relating to
7 agreements funded with federal or state assistance;
8 requiring a state agency to expedite certain payment
9 requests; amending s. 216.0153, F.S.; prohibiting the
10 state from purchasing certain land in a fiscally
11 constrained county; providing exceptions; requiring
12 the Department of Environmental Protection to provide
13 a certain explanation to a fiscally constrained county
14 within a specified timeframe; amending s. 339.2816,
15 F.S.; increasing the amount of an annual appropriation
16 to the Small County Road Assistance Program beginning
17 in a specified fiscal year; amending s. 339.2818,
18 F.S.; authorizing a specified amount from the State
19 Transportation Trust Fund to be used to fund the Small
20 County Outreach Program beginning in a specified
21 fiscal year; amending s. 409.975, F.S.; requiring the
22 Agency for Health Care Administration to determine
23 which providers in hospitals located in rural areas
24 are essential Medicaid providers; creating s. 1011.79,
25 F.S.; creating the Rural District Graduate Placement

Incentive Pilot program within the Department of Education for a specified purpose; subject to legislative appropriation, requiring the department to provide a certain bonus to a school district or charter school located in a fiscally constrained county for specified purposes; requiring the amount of the bonus to be specified in the General Appropriations Act; providing for proration of funds; requiring a graduate's employment to be verified using certain data; requiring certain entities to assist rural school districts and charter schools with increasing the employment of certain students; requiring rural school districts and charter schools that earn a bonus to use such funds for specified purposes; providing for expiration; requiring the State Board of Education to adopt rules; providing an effective date.

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

Section 1. Paragraph (w) is added to subsection (5) of section 212.08, Florida Statutes, to read:

212.08 Sales, rental, use, consumption, distribution, and storage tax; specified exemptions.—The sale at retail, the rental, the use, the consumption, the distribution, and the

51 storage to be used or consumed in this state of the following
52 are hereby specifically exempt from the tax imposed by this
53 chapter.

54 (5) EXEMPTIONS; ACCOUNT OF USE.—

55 (w) Industrial machinery and equipment used by food
56 wholesalers in fiscally constrained counties.—

57 1. As used in this paragraph:

58 a. "Fiscally constrained county" means a county that is
59 entirely within a rural area of opportunity as designated by the
60 Governor pursuant to s. 288.0656 or a county for which the value
61 of a mill will raise no more than \$5 million in revenue, based
62 on the taxable value certified pursuant to s. 1011.62(4)(a)1.a.,
63 from the previous July 1.

64 b. "Food establishment" has the same meaning as in s.
65 500.03.

66 c. "Industrial machinery and equipment" means tangible
67 personal property or other property that has a depreciable life
68 of at least 3 years and that is used as an integral part in the
69 manufacturing, processing, packing, holding, production, or sale
70 of wholesale food products. The term includes a building and its
71 structural components, including heating and air-conditioning
72 systems.

73 2. Industrial machinery and equipment purchased by a food
74 establishment that is manufacturing, processing, packing,
75 holding, producing, or selling food at wholesale at fixed

locations within a fiscally constrained county is exempt from the tax imposed by this chapter. If, at the time of purchase, the purchaser furnishes the seller with a signed certificate certifying the purchaser's entitlement to exemption permitted by this paragraph, the seller is not required to collect the tax on the sale of such item, and the department shall look solely to the purchaser for recovery of the tax if it determines that the purchaser was not entitled to the exemption.

Section 2. Paragraph (h) of subsection (1) of section 215.971, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

215.971 Agreements funded with federal or state assistance.—

(1) An agency agreement that provides state financial assistance to a recipient or subrecipient, as those terms are defined in s. 215.97, or that provides federal financial assistance to a subrecipient, as defined by applicable United States Office of Management and Budget circulars, must include all of the following:

(h) If the agency agreement provides federal or state financial assistance to a county or municipality that is a rural community or rural area of opportunity as those terms are defined in s. 288.0656(2), a provision allowing the agency to provide for the payment of invoices to the county, municipality, or rural area of opportunity as that term is defined in s. 288.0656(2), for verified and eligible performance that has been

completed in accordance with the terms and conditions set forth in the agreement. Such provision is not intended to require reimbursement to the county or municipality that is a rural community or rural area of opportunity for invoices paid but is intended to allow the agency to provide for the payment of invoices due. The agency shall expedite such payment requests in order to facilitate the timely payment of invoices received by the county or municipality that is a rural community or rural area of opportunity. This provision is included to alleviate the financial hardships that certain rural counties and municipalities encounter when administering agreements, and must be exercised by the agency when a county or municipality demonstrates financial hardship, to the extent that federal or state law, rule, or other regulation allows such payments. This paragraph may not be construed to alter or limit any other provisions of federal or state law, rule, or other regulation.

Section 3. Subsection (3) of section 216.0153, Florida Statutes, is renumbered as subsection (4), and a new subsection (3) is added to that section to read:

216.0153 Comprehensive state-owned real property system.—
Whereas, the Legislature finds that it is in the best interest of the state to identify surplus property and dispose of such property owned by the state that is unnecessary to achieving the state's responsibilities, that may cost more to maintain than the revenue generated, that does not serve any public purpose,

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or from which the state may derive a substantially similar public purpose under private ownership.

(3) (a) The state may not purchase any land in a fiscally constrained county as defined in s. 212.08(5) (w)1. if the combination of federal- and state-owned lands is greater than 40 percent of the total land in the fiscally constrained county. This paragraph does not apply if:

1. The state identifies a parcel of land in the fiscally constrained county that can be surplusd.

2. The state obtains approval for the purchase from the fiscally constrained county.

(b) The fiscally constrained county may request that the Department of Environmental Protection analyze whether the county should approve the purchase. The Department of Environmental Protection shall conduct an analysis and provide a detailed written explanation to the fiscally constrained county within 90 days.

Section 4. Subsection (3) of section 339.2816, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

339.2816 Small County Road Assistance Program.—

(3) Beginning ~~in with~~ in fiscal year 2026-2027 ~~1999-2000~~ until ~~fiscal year 2009-2010,~~ and ~~beginning again with fiscal year 2012-2013,~~ up to \$50 ~~\$25~~ million annually from the State Transportation Trust Fund may be used for the purposes of funding the Small County Road Assistance Program as described in

151 this section.

152 **Section 5. Subsection (9) is added to section 339.2818,**
153 **Florida Statutes, to read:**

154 339.2818 Small County Outreach Program.—

155 (9) Beginning in fiscal year 2026-2027, and annually
156 thereafter, at least \$50 million from the State Transportation
157 Trust Fund may be used to fund the Small County Outreach
158 Program.

159 **Section 6. Paragraph (a) of subsection (1) of section**
160 **409.975, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:**

161 409.975 Managed care plan accountability.—In addition to
162 the requirements of s. 409.967, plans and providers
163 participating in the managed medical assistance program shall
164 comply with the requirements of this section.

165 (1) PROVIDER NETWORKS.—Managed care plans must develop and
166 maintain provider networks that meet the medical needs of their
167 enrollees in accordance with standards established pursuant to
168 s. 409.967(2)(c). Except as provided in this section, managed
169 care plans may limit the providers in their networks based on
170 credentials, quality indicators, and price.

171 (a) Plans must include all providers in the region that
172 are classified by the agency as essential Medicaid providers,
173 unless the agency approves, in writing, an alternative
174 arrangement for securing the types of services offered by the
175 essential providers. Providers are essential for serving

Medicaid enrollees if they offer services that are not available from any other provider within a reasonable access standard, or if they provided a substantial share of the total units of a particular service used by Medicaid patients within the region during the last 3 years and the combined capacity of other service providers in the region is insufficient to meet the total needs of the Medicaid patients. The agency may not classify physicians and other practitioners as essential providers. The agency, at a minimum, shall determine which providers in the following categories are essential Medicaid providers:

1. Federally qualified health centers.
2. Statutory teaching hospitals as defined in s. 408.07(46).
3. Hospitals that are trauma centers as defined in s. 395.4001(15).
4. Hospitals located at least 25 miles from any other hospital with similar services.
5. Hospitals located in rural areas.

Managed care plans that have not contracted with all essential providers in the region as of the first date of recipient enrollment, or with whom an essential provider has terminated its contract, must negotiate in good faith with such essential providers for 1 year or until an agreement is reached, whichever

is first. Payments for services rendered by a nonparticipating essential provider shall be made at the applicable Medicaid rate as of the first day of the contract between the agency and the plan. A rate schedule for all essential providers shall be attached to the contract between the agency and the plan. After 1 year, managed care plans that are unable to contract with essential providers shall notify the agency and propose an alternative arrangement for securing the essential services for Medicaid enrollees. The arrangement must rely on contracts with other participating providers, regardless of whether those providers are located within the same region as the nonparticipating essential service provider. If the alternative arrangement is approved by the agency, payments to nonparticipating essential providers after the date of the agency's approval shall equal 90 percent of the applicable Medicaid rate. Except for payment for emergency services, if the alternative arrangement is not approved by the agency, payment to nonparticipating essential providers shall equal 110 percent of the applicable Medicaid rate.

Section 7. Section 1011.79, Florida Statutes, is created to read:

1011.79 Rural District Graduate Placement Incentive Pilot Program.—

(1) The Rural District Graduate Placement Incentive Pilot Program is created within the Department of Education for the

purpose of financially rewarding rural school districts and
charter schools for preparing high school graduates with in-
demand certifications required for employment.

(2) Subject to legislative appropriation, the Department
of Education shall provide a bonus to a school district or
charter school located in a fiscally constrained county as
defined in s. 212.08(5)(w)1. for increasing the percentage of
students who:

(a) Graduate from a high school or charter school within
the district.

(b) Earn an industry certification included on the CAPE
Industry Certification Funding List described in s. 1008.44
while enrolled in a high school or charter school within the
district.

(c) Are employed in the fiscally constrained county in a
field for which such industry certification is required within 6
months after graduation.

(d) Remain employed in such field for at least 3 months.

(3) The amount of the bonus shall be specified in the
General Appropriations Act. If the appropriated funds are
insufficient to fully fund the total number of eligible high
school graduates, such funds must be prorated based on each
eligible school's proportionate share of the total number of
eligible high school graduates.

(4) A graduate's employment shall be verified using data

251 contained in the Florida Education and Training Placement
252 Information Program described in s. 1008.39.

253 (5) Each local workforce development board, education and
254 industry consortium described in s. 445.07, and regional
255 educational consortia described in s. 1001.451 shall assist
256 rural school districts and charter schools with increasing the
257 employment of students who have earned an industry certification
258 included on the CAPE Industry Certification Funding List
259 described in s. 1008.44.

260 (6) A rural school district or charter school that earns a
261 bonus pursuant to this section must use such funds to benefit
262 the workforce education programs provided by the school district
263 or charter school. Such funds may be used to upgrade equipment
264 or expand or otherwise improve such programs.

265 (7) This section expires July 1, 2029, unless reenacted by
266 the Legislature.

267 (8) The State Board of Education shall adopt rules to
268 implement and administer this section.

269 **Section 8.** This act shall take effect July 1, 2026.