

1 A bill to be entitled
2 An act relating to Rural Economic Development;
3 amending s. 288.018, F.S.; specifying that funding
4 provided under the Regional Rural Development Grants
5 Program are not matching grants; revising the required
6 criteria the Department of Economic Opportunity must
7 consider to approve a participant in the program;
8 amending s. 288.0655, F.S.; revising the percentage of
9 certain project costs for which the department may
10 award certain grants; removing a local match
11 requirement; amending s. 288.8017, F.S.; conforming
12 provisions to changes made by the act; amending s.
13 446.71, F.S.; revising the areas in which the
14 department may provide grants through the Everglades
15 Restoration Agricultural Community Employment Training
16 Program; authorizing the use of certain grant funds
17 for certain purposes; requiring the department to set
18 aside a certain percentage of funds for a certain
19 purpose; prohibiting the department from awarding
20 employer-based grants in excess of a certain amount;
21 requiring the department to prioritize awarding
22 employer-based grants to certain training programs;
23 providing that certain accreditation or licensure
24 meets a certain qualification requirement; revising
25 requirements for the location in which a training

26 program participant must reside to receive a certain
 27 grant from the department; revising the requirements
 28 for employer-based training programs established in
 29 the Everglades Agricultural Area; providing that the
 30 provisions of this act shall not control to the extent
 31 of certain conflicts; providing an effective date.

32

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

34

35 Section 1. Subsections (1) and (2) of section 288.018,
 36 Florida Statutes, are amended to read:

37 288.018 Regional Rural Development Grants Program.—

38 (1)(a) For the purposes of this section, the term
 39 "regional economic development organization" means an economic
 40 development organization located in or contracted to serve a
 41 rural area of opportunity, as defined in s. 288.0656(2)(d).

42 (b) The department shall establish a ~~matching~~ grant
 43 program to provide funding to regional economic development
 44 organizations for the purpose of building the professional
 45 capacity of those organizations. Building the professional
 46 capacity of a regional economic development organization
 47 includes hiring professional staff to develop, deliver, and
 48 provide needed economic development professional services,
 49 including technical assistance, education and leadership
 50 development, marketing, and project recruitment. ~~Matching~~ Grants

51 | may also be used by a regional economic development organization
 52 | to provide technical assistance to local governments, local
 53 | economic development organizations, and existing and prospective
 54 | businesses.

55 | (c) A regional economic development organization may apply
 56 | annually to the department for a ~~matching~~ grant. The department
 57 | is authorized to approve, on an annual basis, grants to such
 58 | regional economic development organizations. The maximum amount
 59 | an organization may receive in any year will be \$50,000, or
 60 | \$250,000 for any three regional economic development
 61 | organizations that serve an entire region of a rural area of
 62 | opportunity designated pursuant to s. 288.0656(7) if they are
 63 | recognized by the department as serving such a region.

64 | ~~(d) Grant funds received by a regional economic~~
 65 | ~~development organization must be matched each year by nonstate~~
 66 | ~~resources in an amount equal to 25 percent of the state~~
 67 | ~~contribution.~~

68 | (2) In approving the participants, the department shall
 69 | consider the demonstrated need of the applicant for assistance
 70 | and require the following:

71 | (a) Documentation of official commitments of support from
 72 | each of the units of local government represented by the
 73 | regional organization.

74 | ~~(b) Demonstration that each unit of local government has~~
 75 | ~~made a financial or in-kind commitment to the regional~~

76 ~~organization.~~

77 ~~(c) Demonstration that the private sector has made~~
 78 ~~financial or in-kind commitments to the regional organization.~~

79 ~~(d)~~ Demonstration that the organization is in existence
 80 and actively involved in economic development activities serving
 81 the region.

82 (c)~~(e)~~ Demonstration of the manner in which the
 83 organization is or will coordinate its efforts with those of
 84 other local and state organizations.

85 Section 2. Paragraphs (b), (c), and (e) of subsection (2)
 86 of section 288.0655, Florida Statutes, are amended to read:

87 288.0655 Rural Infrastructure Fund.—

88 (2)

89 (b) To facilitate access of rural communities and rural
 90 areas of opportunity as defined by the Rural Economic
 91 Development Initiative to infrastructure funding programs of the
 92 Federal Government, such as those offered by the United States
 93 Department of Agriculture and the United States Department of
 94 Commerce, and state programs, including those offered by Rural
 95 Economic Development Initiative agencies, and to facilitate
 96 local government or private infrastructure funding efforts, the
 97 department may award grants for up to 75 ~~50~~ percent of the total
 98 infrastructure project cost, or up to 100 percent of the total
 99 infrastructure project cost for a project located in a rural
 100 community or a rural area of opportunity, as those terms are

101 defined in s. 288.0656(2), which is also located in a fiscally
102 constrained county as described in s. 218.67(1). Eligible
103 projects must be related to specific job-creation or job-
104 retention opportunities. Eligible projects may also include
105 improving any inadequate infrastructure that has resulted in
106 regulatory action that prohibits economic or community growth,
107 reducing the costs to community users of proposed infrastructure
108 improvements that exceed such costs in comparable communities,
109 and improving access to and the availability of broadband
110 Internet service. Eligible uses of funds shall include
111 improvements to public infrastructure for industrial or
112 commercial sites, upgrades to or development of public tourism
113 infrastructure, and improvements to broadband Internet service
114 and access in unserved or underserved rural communities.
115 Improvements to broadband Internet service and access must be
116 conducted through a partnership or partnerships with one or more
117 dealers, as defined in s. 202.11(2), and the partnership or
118 partnerships must be established through a competitive selection
119 process that is publicly noticed. Authorized infrastructure may
120 include the following public or public-private partnership
121 facilities: storm water systems; telecommunications facilities;
122 broadband facilities; roads or other remedies to transportation
123 impediments; nature-based tourism facilities; or other physical
124 requirements necessary to facilitate tourism, trade, and
125 economic development activities in the community. Authorized

126 infrastructure may also include publicly or privately owned
 127 self-powered nature-based tourism facilities, publicly owned
 128 telecommunications facilities, and broadband facilities, and
 129 additions to the distribution facilities of the existing natural
 130 gas utility as defined in s. 366.04(3)(c), the existing electric
 131 utility as defined in s. 366.02, or the existing water or
 132 wastewater utility as defined in s. 367.021(12), or any other
 133 existing water or wastewater facility, which owns a gas or
 134 electric distribution system or a water or wastewater system in
 135 this state where:

136 1. A contribution-in-aid of construction is required to
 137 serve public or public-private partnership facilities under the
 138 tariffs of any natural gas, electric, water, or wastewater
 139 utility as defined herein; and

140 2. Such utilities as defined herein are willing and able
 141 to provide such service.

142 (c) To facilitate timely response and induce the location
 143 or expansion of specific job creating opportunities, The
 144 department may award grants for infrastructure feasibility
 145 studies, design and engineering activities, or other
 146 infrastructure planning and preparation activities. Authorized
 147 grants shall be up to \$50,000 for an employment project with a
 148 business committed to create at least 100 jobs; up to \$150,000
 149 for an employment project with a business committed to create at
 150 least 300 jobs; and up to \$300,000 for a project in a rural area

151 of opportunity. Grants awarded under this paragraph may be used
152 in conjunction with grants awarded under paragraph (b), ~~provided~~
153 ~~that the total amount of both grants does not exceed 30 percent~~
154 ~~of the total project cost.~~ In evaluating applications under this
155 paragraph, the department shall consider the extent to which the
156 application seeks to minimize administrative and consultant
157 expenses.

158 (e) To enable local governments to access the resources
159 available pursuant to s. 403.973(18), the department may award
160 grants for surveys, feasibility studies, and other activities
161 related to the identification and preclearance review of land
162 which is suitable for preclearance review. Authorized grants
163 under this paragraph may not exceed \$75,000 each, except in the
164 case of a project in a rural area of opportunity, in which case
165 the grant may not exceed \$300,000. Any funds awarded under this
166 paragraph must be matched at a level of 50 percent with local
167 funds, except that any funds awarded for a project in a rural
168 area of opportunity must be matched at a level of 33 percent
169 with local funds. If an application for funding is for a
170 catalyst site, as defined in s. 288.0656, the requirement for
171 local match may be waived pursuant to the process in s.
172 288.06561. In evaluating applications under this paragraph, the
173 department shall consider the extent to which the application
174 seeks to minimize administrative and consultant expenses.

175 Section 3. Subsection (1) of section 288.8017, Florida

176 Statutes, is amended to read:

177 288.8017 Awards.—

178 (1) Triumph Gulf Coast, Inc., shall make awards from
 179 available funds to projects or programs that meet the priorities
 180 for economic recovery, diversification, and enhancement of the
 181 disproportionately affected counties. Awards may be provided
 182 for:

183 (a) Ad valorem tax rate reduction within
 184 disproportionately affected counties;

185 (b) Local match requirements ~~of s. 288.0655~~ for projects
 186 in the disproportionately affected counties;

187 (c) Public infrastructure projects for construction,
 188 expansion, or maintenance which are shown to enhance economic
 189 recovery, diversification, and enhancement of the
 190 disproportionately affected counties;

191 (d) Grants to local governments in the disproportionately
 192 affected counties to establish and maintain equipment and
 193 trained personnel for local action plans of response to respond
 194 to disasters, such as plans created for the Coastal Impacts
 195 Assistance Program;

196 (e) Grants to support programs that prepare students for
 197 future occupations and careers at K-20 institutions that have
 198 campuses in the disproportionately affected counties. Eligible
 199 programs include those that increase students' technology skills
 200 and knowledge; encourage industry certifications; provide

201 rigorous, alternative pathways for students to meet high school
 202 graduation requirements; strengthen career readiness
 203 initiatives; fund high-demand programs of emphasis at the
 204 bachelor's and master's level designated by the Board of
 205 Governors; and, similar to or the same as talent retention
 206 programs created by the Chancellor of the State University
 207 System and the Commission of Education, encourage students with
 208 interest or aptitude for science, technology, engineering,
 209 mathematics, and medical disciplines to pursue postsecondary
 210 education at a state university or a Florida College System
 211 institution within the disproportionately affected counties;

212 (f) Grants to support programs that provide participants
 213 in the disproportionately affected counties with transferable,
 214 sustainable workforce skills that are not confined to a single
 215 employer; and

216 (g) Grants to the tourism entity created under s. 288.1226
 217 for the purpose of advertising and promoting tourism and Fresh
 218 From Florida, and grants to promote workforce and
 219 infrastructure, on behalf of all of the disproportionately
 220 affected counties.

221 Section 4. Section 446.71, Florida Statutes, is amended to
 222 read:

223 446.71 Everglades Restoration Agricultural Community
 224 Employment Training Program.—

225 (1) The Department of Economic Opportunity, in cooperation

226 | with the state board as defined in s. 445.002, shall establish
 227 | the Everglades Restoration Agricultural Community Employment
 228 | Training Program within the Department of Economic Opportunity.
 229 | The Department of Economic Opportunity shall use funds
 230 | appropriated to the program by the Legislature to provide grants
 231 | to stimulate and support training and employment programs that
 232 | seek to match persons who complete such training programs to
 233 | nonagricultural employment opportunities in the Everglades
 234 | Agricultural Area as defined in s. 373.4592(2) and rural areas
 235 | of opportunity as defined in s. 288.0656(2) ~~areas of high~~
 236 | ~~agricultural unemployment~~, and to provide other training,
 237 | educational, and information services necessary to stimulate the
 238 | creation of jobs in the Everglades Agricultural Area and rural
 239 | areas of opportunity ~~areas of high agricultural unemployment~~. In
 240 | determining whether to provide funds to a particular program,
 241 | the Department of Economic Opportunity shall consider the
 242 | location of the program in proximity to the program's intended
 243 | participants.

244 | (2) The Legislature supports projects that improve the
 245 | economy in the Everglades Agricultural Area and in rural areas
 246 | of opportunity in counties that provide for water storage and
 247 | dispersed water storage as part of Everglades restoration
 248 | efforts. In recognition of the employment opportunities and
 249 | economic development generated by new and expanding industries
 250 | in such areas ~~the area~~, such as the Airglades Airport in Hendry

251 County and the development of an inland port in Palm Beach
252 County, the Legislature finds that training the citizens of the
253 state to fill the needs of these industries significantly
254 enhances the economic viability of such areas ~~the region~~.

255 (3) Funds may be used for grants for tuition for public or
256 private technical or vocational programs and matching grants to
257 employers to conduct employer-based training programs. Grant
258 funds provided to employer-based training programs may be used,
259 ~~or~~ for the purchase of equipment to be used for training
260 purposes, the hiring of instructors, or any other purpose
261 directly associated with the program. For the first 6 months of
262 each fiscal year, the Department of Economic Opportunity shall
263 set aside up to 50 percent of the amount appropriated by the
264 Legislature to fund employer-based training programs. Any
265 unencumbered funds remaining undisbursed from the set-aside
266 amount at the end of the 6-month period may be used to provide
267 funding for tuition. The allocation of funds must be included in
268 the notice of grant opportunities.

269 (4) The Department of Economic Opportunity may not award
270 an employer-based a grant to any given training program which
271 exceeds 50 percent of the total cost of the program, unless the
272 training program is located within a rural area of opportunity,
273 in which case the grant may exceed 50 percent of the total cost
274 of the program and up to 100 percent. Matching contributions may
275 include in-kind services, including, but not limited to, the

276 provision of training instructors, equipment, and training
277 facilities. The department shall prioritize awarding employer-
278 based grants to training programs located in rural areas of
279 opportunity in counties that provide for water storage and
280 dispersed water storage as part of Everglades restoration
281 efforts.

282 (5) Before granting a request for funds made in accordance
283 with this section, the Department of Economic Opportunity shall
284 enter into a grant agreement with the requester of funds and the
285 training institution receiving funding through the program. Such
286 agreement must include all of the following information:

287 (a) An identification of the personnel necessary to
288 conduct the instructional program, the qualifications of such
289 personnel, and the respective responsibilities of the parties
290 for paying costs associated with the employment of such
291 personnel. National accreditation or licensure of an
292 instructional program by the Commission for Independent
293 Education is sufficient to meet the qualifications requirement.

294 (b) An identification of the estimated length of the
295 instructional program.

296 (c) An identification of all direct, training-related
297 costs, including tuition and fees, curriculum development, books
298 and classroom materials, and overhead or indirect costs.

299 (d) An identification of special program requirements that
300 are not otherwise addressed in the agreement.

301 (6) The Department of Economic Opportunity may grant up to
 302 100 percent of the tuition for a training program participant
 303 who currently resides, and has resided for at least 3 of the 5
 304 immediately preceding years, in within the Everglades
 305 Agricultural Area or as described in a rural area of opportunity
 306 ~~s. 373.4592 and in a county counties~~ that provides provide for
 307 water storage and dispersed water storage as part of Everglades
 308 restoration efforts that are located in rural areas of
 309 opportunity as described in s. 288.0656.

310 (7) Employer-based training programs established in the
 311 Everglades Agricultural Area must include opportunities to
 312 obtain the qualifications and skills necessary for jobs related
 313 to federal and state restoration projects, the Airglades Airport
 314 in Hendry County, an inland port in Palm Beach County, or other
 315 industries with verifiable, demonstrated interest in operating
 316 in within the Everglades Agricultural Area or in rural areas of
 317 opportunity and in counties that provide for water storage and
 318 dispersed water storage as part of Everglades restoration
 319 efforts that are located in rural areas of opportunity as
 320 described in s. 288.0656.

321 (8) The Department of Economic Opportunity shall adopt
 322 rules to implement this section.

323 Section 5. In the event of a conflict of any provision of
 324 this act with the provisions of House Bill 5, 2023 regular
 325 session, or similar legislation, the provisions of House Bill 5,

PCS for HB 1209

2023

326 | 2023 regular session, or similar legislation, shall control to
327 | the extent of such conflict.

328 | Section 6. This act shall take effect July 1, 2023.