Rural Legislative Discussion

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District 10
Rural Florida

Per s. 288.0656 a rural county is defined as a county with a population of 75,000 or less, a county with a population of 125,000 or less which is contiguous to a county with a population of 75,000 or less and any municipality within a county as described above.
Section 288.0656, Florida Statutes, established the Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI) to better serve Florida’s rural communities by providing a more focused and coordinated effort among state and regional agencies that provide programs and services for rural areas.

- Responds to specific community needs and requests.
- Works with communities to improve their rural economies.
- Assists communities in improving access to housing, health care, and educational opportunities.
- Recommends waivers of provisions of economic development programs on a project-by-project basis.
- Undertakes advocacy, outreach, and capacity building to improve conditions in rural communities.
- Provides direct access and referrals to appropriate state agencies as well as county and city associations.
- Reviews and evaluates the impact of statutes and rules on rural communities and works to minimize adverse impact.

Rural Programs

- **Regional Rural Development Grants**
  - established to encourage rural counties and rural communities to leverage limited resources by utilizing regional economic development organizations. Eligible applicants include private organizations made up of two or more rural counties, including municipalities or communities, which agree to cooperatively establish an economic development office.

- **Rural Infrastructure Fund**
  - The purpose of the Rural Infrastructure Fund Grant is to facilitate the planning, preparing, and financing of traditional economic development or nature-based tourism infrastructure projects that encourage job creation and capital investment in rural communities.

- **Rural Revolving Loan Program**
  - The Rural Community Development Revolving Loan Fund Program is established within the Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO) to facilitate the use of existing federal, state, and local financial resources to promote the economic viability of rural communities. The program provides long-term loans, loan guarantees, and loan loss reserves.
2014 Recommendations

As a result of the 2012 Florida Rural Economic Development Study, Enterprise Florida worked with each RACEC region, whereby the Small County Coalition and others developed the following legislative recommendations:

- Renaming the Rural Area of Critical Economic Concern (RACEC) to a more positive brand
  - Rural Areas of Opportunity (as voted by Florida’s rural counties and stakeholders)
- Revise rural infrastructure awards and qualifications to be more competitive with competing states
- Rural Targeted Industries and Industry Waivers
- Increase award amounts of the rural jobs tax credit to be more competitive with competing states ($2,000 in rural county/ $5,000 in RACEC region) and add retail (SIC Codes 52-57 and 59- to match with urban). If a company does not have enough liability to fully utilize the credit, they can apply for an ad valorem reimbursement through the state fund
- Remove award amount restriction on QTI awards when local match is waived
- Allow any county in a RACEC region to automatically be designated an Enterprise Zone with a $5 million annual cap
2014 Legislative Session

As a result of Enterprise Florida’s rural economic study, a rural economic development boot camp was hosted by Gov. Scott & Sec. Swoope in July 2013. Recommendations from the study and boot camp helped inform the Rural Areas of Opportunity Bill.

While this bill did not pass, some of its initiatives were included in HB 7023:

- Renames Rural Areas of Critical Economic Concern (RACEC) to Rural Areas of Opportunity
- Increases the maximum amount an organization can receive from the Regional Rural Development Grant Program to $50,000, or $150,000 in a Rural Area of Opportunity
- directs DEO to distribute Small Cities CDBG Program grants and loan guarantees to better address the diversity and economic needs of Florida’s rural areas
- allows eligible businesses to receive a sales tax refund on electricity purchased in rural areas
What’s Next? 2015 Session Focus