A bill to be entitled

An act relating to education and workforce development for inmates; amending s. 334.044, F.S.; authorizing the Department of Transportation to expend certain funds for all workforce development programs, rather than only construction workforce development programs; authorizing the department to provide grants to private educational providers to use for certain certification and training opportunities; amending s. 334.62, F.S.; requiring certification and training opportunities to include training for specified commercial driver licenses to certain inmates; authorizing the department to use workforce development funds for certain certification and training opportunities; 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 implement a career and technical education 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 be offered at state correctional institutions and correctional facilities, and at minimum, include training for Class A and Class B commercial driver licenses. To be eligible to enroll in a Class A or Class B commercial driver license training program offered in

accordance with this subsection, an inmate must be proficient in English. Such proficiency may be demonstrated in a manner specified by the department or the department's designee. 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. Subsections (7), (8), and (9) of section 944.801, Florida Statutes, are renumbered as subsections (6), (7), and (8), respectively, and paragraphs (a), (e), and (g) through (j) of subsection (3) and subsection (5) and present subsections (6) and (7) of that section are amended, to read:

944.801 Education for state prisoners.—

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

(a) Develop guidelines for collecting education-related information during the inmate reception process and for disseminating such information to the classification staff of the Department of Corrections. The information collected shall include the inmate's areas of educational or career and technical educational ~~vocational~~ interest, ~~vocational~~ skills, and level of education.

(e) Enter into agreements with public or private school districts, entities, state ~~community~~ colleges, ~~junior colleges, colleges,~~ or universities as may be deemed appropriate for the purpose of carrying out its duties and responsibilities and

ensure that agreements require minimum performance standards and standards for measurable objectives, in accordance with established Department of Education standards.

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

(h) Develop a written procedure for selecting programs to add to or delete from the career and technical education ~~vocational~~ curriculum. The procedure shall include labor market analyses that demonstrate the projected demand for certain occupations and the projected supply of potential employees. In conducting these analyses, the department shall evaluate the feasibility of adding career and technical ~~vocational~~ education programs that have been identified by the Department of Commerce, the Department of Education, or a regional coordinating council as being in undersupply in this state. The department shall periodically reevaluate the career and technical ~~vocational~~ education programs in major institutions to determine which of the programs support and provide relevant skills to inmates who could be assigned to a correctional work

program that is operated as a Prison Industry Enhancement Program. The annual report of correctional education activities required under paragraph (f) must include all of the following information:

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

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

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

(i) Ensure that every inmate who has 2 years or more remaining to serve on his or her sentence at the time that he or she is received at an institution and who lacks basic and functional literacy skills as defined in s. 1004.02 attends not fewer than 150 hours of sequential instruction in a correctional adult basic education program. The basic and functional literacy level of an inmate shall be determined by the average composite test score obtained on a test approved for this purpose by the State Board of Education.

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

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

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

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

b. Is specifically exempted for security or health reasons.

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

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

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

4. The Department of Corrections shall provide classes to accommodate those inmates assigned to correctional or public work programs after normal working hours. The department shall develop a plan to provide academic and career and technical

education ~~vocational~~ classes on a more frequent basis and at times that accommodate the increasing number of inmates with work assignments, to the extent that resources permit.

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

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

(5) The Correctional Education Program may:

(a) Establish a prison entrepreneurship program and adopt procedures for admitting student inmates. If the department elects to develop the program, it must include at least 180 days of in-prison education. The program curriculum must include a component on developing a business plan, procedures for graduation and certification of successful student inmates, and at least 90 days of transitional and postrelease continuing educational services. Transitional and postrelease continuing educational services may be offered to graduate student inmates on a voluntary basis and are not a requirement for completion of the program. The department shall enter into agreements with

public or private colleges or universities, other nonprofit entities, or other authorized providers under s. 1002.45(1)(a)1. to implement the program. The program must be funded with existing resources.

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

(c) Implement a career and technical education program to be offered at the state correctional institutions and correctional facilities to train and license inmates to operate a commercial motor vehicle. The career and technical education curriculum must include training for Class A and Class B driver licenses and participation in such curriculum is limited to nonviolent inmates who have 2 years or less remaining to serve on his or her sentence. To be eligible to enroll in a Class A or Class B commercial driver license training program offered in accordance with this paragraph, an inmate must be proficient in English. Such proficiency may be demonstrated in a manner

specified by the department or the department's designee.

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

Section 4. 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. 945.0913(2), the department may transport an inmate in a state-owned vehicle if the inmate is unable to obtain other means of travel to his or her place of employment, education, or training. An inmate may be permitted to be transported in or drive a state-owned vehicle if the inmate is appropriately licensed and enrolled in or a completer of a department-operated or contracted commercial driver license program for the purpose of completing program requirements or demonstrating proficiency in the program. At least one certified correctional officer must be present during such transport or operation.

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

2. While working at paid employment and residing in the facility, an inmate may apply for placement at a contracted substance abuse transition housing program. The transition assistance specialist shall inform the inmate of program

availability and assess the inmate's need and suitability for transition housing assistance. If an inmate is approved for placement, the specialist shall assist the inmate. If an inmate requests and is approved for placement in a contracted faith-based substance abuse transition housing program, the specialist must consult with the chaplain before such placement. The department shall ensure that an inmate's faith orientation, or lack thereof, will not be considered in determining admission to a faith-based program and that the program does not attempt to convert an inmate toward a particular faith or religious preference.

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

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

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

(2) An inmate appropriately licensed and trained may drive a state-owned vehicle if he or she is enrolled in, or a completer of, a department-operated or contracted commercial driver license training program. An inmate may only operate a state-owned vehicle on department property or other state-owned

property specifically designated for commercial driver license training purposes. At least one certified correctional officer must be present during such operation.

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