

STATE OF FLORIDA

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR EXECUTIVE ORDER NUMBER 23-132 (Re-designation of Rural Area of Opportunity)

WHEREAS, rural communities are stewards of the vast majority of Florida's land and natural resources, upon which the State's continued growth and prosperity depend; and

WHEREAS, successful rural communities are essential to the overall success of the State's economy and quality of life; and

WHEREAS, certain rural communities are struggling to maintain, support or enhance job creating activities or to generate revenues for education and other critical government services such as infrastructure, transportation, and safety; and

WHEREAS, the challenges faced by these rural communities threaten their well-being and viability; and

WHEREAS, the Governor is authorized in section 288.0656(7), Florida Statutes, to designate up to three "Rural Areas of Opportunity," formerly "rural areas of critical economic concern," under section 288.0656, Florida Statutes (2000-2013); and

WHEREAS, a Rural Area of Opportunity is a rural community, or a region composed of rural communities, designated by the Governor, that have been adversely affected by an extraordinary economic event, severe or chronic distress, or a natural disaster or that presents a unique economic development opportunity of regional impact; and

WHEREAS, the counties of Baker, Bradford, Columbia, Dixie, Gilchrist, Hamilton, Jefferson, Lafayette, Levy, Madison, Putnam, Suwannee, Taylor, and Union were designated on April 23, 2003, by Executive Order 03-74, as a Rural Area of Critical Economic Concern for a term of five years; and

WHEREAS, the designation expired on April 23, 2008, and the Rural Economic Development Initiative met on April 18, 2008, and agreed to recommend the Governor continue the designation of the counties of Baker, Bradford, Columbia, Dixie, Gilchrist, Hamilton, Jefferson, Lafayette, Levy, Madison, Putnam, Suwannee, Taylor, and Union as a Rural Area of Critical Economic Concern; and

WHEREAS, the counties of Baker, Bradford, Columbia, Dixie, Gilchrist, Hamilton, Jefferson, Lafayette, Levy, Madison, Putnam, Suwannee, Taylor, and Union were re-designated on June 11, 2008, by Executive Order 08-132, as a Rural Area of Critical Economic Concern for a period of five years; and

WHEREAS, the re-designation expired on June 11, 2013, and the Rural Economic Development Initiative met on April 26, 2013, and agreed to recommend the Governor continue the designation of the counties of Baker, Bradford, Columbia, Dixie, Gilchrist, Hamilton, Jefferson, Lafayette, Levy, Madison, Putnam, Suwannee, Taylor, and Union as a Rural Area of Critical Economic Concern; and

WHEREAS, the counties of Baker, Bradford, Columbia, Dixie, Gilchrist, Hamilton, Jefferson, Lafayette, Levy, Madison, Putnam, Suwannee, Taylor, and Union were re-designated on June 12, 2013, by Executive Order 13-151, as a Rural Area of Critical Economic Concern for a period of five years; and

WHEREAS, the re-designation expired on June 12, 2018, and the Rural Economic Development Initiative met on March 16, 2018, and agreed to recommend the Governor continue the designation of the counties of Baker, Bradford, Columbia, Dixie, Gilchrist, Hamilton, Jefferson, Lafayette, Levy, Madison, Putnam, Suwannee, Taylor, and Union as a Rural Area of Opportunity; and

WHEREAS, the counties of Baker, Bradford, Columbia, Dixie, Gilchrist, Hamilton, Jefferson, Lafayette, Levy, Madison, Putnam, Suwannee, Taylor and Union were re-designated on

June 11, 2018, by Executive Order 18-158, as a Rural Area of Opportunity for a period of five years;
and

WHEREAS, the re-designation expired on June 11, 2023, and the Rural Economic Development Initiative met on April 21, 2023, and agreed to recommend the Governor continue the designation of the counties of Baker, Bradford, Columbia, Dixie, Gilchrist, Hamilton, Jefferson, Lafayette, Levy, Madison, Putnam, Suwannee, Taylor, and Union as a Rural Area of Opportunity.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, RON DESANTIS, as Governor of Florida, by virtue of the authority vested in me by Article IV, Section 1(a), Florida Constitution, and section 288.0656(7), Florida Statutes, do hereby issue the following Executive Order, effective immediately:

Section 1. The area within the boundaries of the counties of Baker, Bradford, Columbia, Dixie, Gilchrist, Hamilton, Jefferson, Lafayette, Levy, Madison, Putnam, Suwannee, Taylor, and Union is designated as a Rural Area of Opportunity.

Section 2. This area shall be a priority assignment for the Rural Economic Development Initiative.

Section 3. On a case-by-case basis, the criteria, requirements, or similar provisions of economic development incentives may be waived. Such incentives include, but shall not be limited to, the Quick Response Training Program under section 288.047, Florida Statutes, the Quick Response Training Program for participants in the Welfare Transition Program under section 288.047(8), Florida Statutes, transportation projects under section 339.2821, Florida Statutes, the brownfield redevelopment bonus refund under section 288.107, Florida Statutes, and the rural job tax credit program under section 212.098 and 220.1895, Florida Statutes.

Section 4. Pursuant to section 288.0656(7)(b), Florida Statutes, access to the assistance available under this designation as a Rural Area of Opportunity shall be contingent upon the execution of a memorandum of agreement between the Department of Economic Opportunity, the governing bodies of the counties, and the governing bodies of the municipalities included within the

designated area. Such memorandum of agreement shall specify the terms and conditions of the designation, including, but not limited to, the duties and responsibilities of the counties and any participating municipalities to take actions designed to facilitate the retention and expansion of existing businesses in the area, as well as the recruitment of new businesses to the area.

Section 5. Pursuant to section 288.0656(7)(c), Florida Statutes, all state agencies and departments shall use all available tools and resources to the extent permissible by law to promote the creation and development of any catalyst project designated by the Rural Area of Opportunity that has been recommended by the Department of Economic Opportunity.

Section 6. This designation shall take effect as of June 11, 2023, shall be in effect for five years, and will expire on June 11, 2028. The Rural Economic Development Initiative may recommend the designation be terminated or continued based on economic development progress from current base lines or upon performance under the memorandum of agreement.

IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Great Seal of the State of Florida to be affixed at Tallahassee, this 16th day of June, 2023.





RON DESANTIS, GOVERNOR

ATTEST:



SECRETARY OF STATE

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TALLAHASSEE, FL