

## CHAPTER 2026-167

### Committee Substitute for House Bill No. 273

An act relating to special district funding; amending s. 215.971, F.S.; revising agency agreements that provide state financial assistance to recipients or subrecipients to include specified special districts as an entity to which such agency may provide for the payment of invoices under specified circumstances; providing construction; requiring state agencies to expedite payment requests from certain counties, municipalities, and special districts for a specified purpose; amending s. 288.0656, F.S.; revising the definition of the term “rural community” to include specified special districts; providing an effective date.

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

Section 1. 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) or a special district located entirely within such county or municipality or an independent special district that provides water and wastewater services within a rural area of opportunity as defined in s. 288.0656(2), a provision allowing the agency to provide for the payment of invoices to such the county, municipality, or special district ~~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. The provision is not intended to require reimbursement to such county, municipality, or special district for invoices paid, but to allow the agency to provide for the payment of invoices due. The agency shall expedite payment requests in order to facilitate the timely payment of invoices received by such county, municipality, or special district. This provision is included to alleviate the financial hardships that such certain rural counties, and municipalities, or special districts encounter when administering agreements, and must be exercised by the agency if when a county, or municipality, or special district located entirely within such county or municipality or an independent special district that provides water and wastewater services within a rural area of opportunity, as defined in s. 288.0656(2), 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 2. Paragraph (e) of subsection (2) of section 288.0656, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

288.0656 Rural Economic Development Initiative.—

(2) As used in this section, the term:

(e) “Rural community” means:

1. A county with a population of 75,000 or fewer.
2. A county with a population of 125,000 or fewer which is contiguous to a county with a population of 75,000 or fewer.
3. A municipality or special district within a county described in subparagraph 1. or subparagraph 2.
4. An unincorporated federal enterprise community or an incorporated rural city with a population of 25,000 or fewer and an employment base focused on traditional agricultural or resource-based industries, located in a county not defined as rural, which has at least three or more of the economic distress factors identified in paragraph (c) and verified by the department.
5. An independent special district that provides water and wastewater services within a rural area of opportunity.

For purposes of this paragraph, population shall be determined in accordance with the most recent official estimate pursuant to s. 186.901.

Section 3. This act shall take effect July 1, 2026.

Approved by the Governor June 25, 2026.

Filed in Office Secretary of State June 25, 2026.