

VIRGINIA ACTS OF ASSEMBLY — CHAPTER

An Act to amend and reenact § 2.2-2238.1 of the Code of Virginia, relating to the Virginia Economic Development Partnership Authority; economic development services in distressed areas.

[H 2027]

Approved

Whereas, a number of organizations and agencies such as the Rural Economic Analysis Program of Virginia Tech, the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, and selected community colleges have identified rural economic development issues and have begun to address some of the problems facing Virginia's rural communities; and

Whereas, these organizations should work together to develop a plan with the following goals: (i) create an environment that strengthens and diversifies the agriculture industry by (a) educating the public on the economic benefit of agriculture, manufacturing and advanced technology-based business, (b) developing the necessary infrastructure to support rural Virginia, (c) expanding the worldwide market opportunities for Virginia products and services, and (d) continuing to develop a skilled and productive workforce; and (ii) create rural and urban partnerships to increase the contributions of agriculture, manufactured products and service-based corporations to the state's economy; and

Whereas, rural Virginia is in need of a comprehensive strategic plan incorporating the goals above and such plan does not currently exist; now, therefore,

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That § 2.2-2238.1 of the Code of Virginia is amended and reenacted as follows:

§ 2.2-2238.1. Special economic development services in rural communities; strategic plan.

A. In order to assist the rural communities of the Commonwealth, the Authority shall develop a program for reviewing existing economic development programs of rural communities, upon request. The program shall include (i) a review and evaluation of existing industrial sites and infrastructure, including existing streets, water and sewer systems, electricity, natural gas and communications facilities; (ii) an assessment of the existing workforce and the provision of information on state and federal programs such as tax incentives that may be available to local or prospective employers to assist in hiring and training in areas of high unemployment; (iii) assistance in identifying community resources and the type of industries that may benefit from locating in a community with such resources; and (iv) marketing assistance to help rural communities improve their visibility to expanding industries looking for new facilities.

B. The Authority, the Center for Rural Virginia, the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development, the Virginia Resources Authority, the Virginia Department of Business Assistance, the Virginia Tobacco Indemnification and Community Revitalization Commission, the Virginia Employment Commission, the Virginia Tourism Corporation, the Virginia Community College System, institutions of higher education within rural regions of the Commonwealth, and the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services shall jointly develop and implement a rural economic development strategic plan that at a minimum addresses: (i) education, including pre-kindergarten, primary, secondary and post-graduate resources, and comprehensive workforce development programs, as they may pertain to the Workforce Investment Act; (ii) infrastructure, including capital for water and sewer upgrading, waste management, law enforcement, housing, primary and secondary roads, and telecommunications; (iii) traditional industrial development and industry retention programs, including assistance in financing and in workforce training; (iv) recreational and cultural enhancement and related quality of life measures, including parks, civic centers, and theaters; (v) agribusiness incentives to promote the use of new technologies, and the exploration of new market opportunities; and (vi) a revolving loan fund or loan guarantee program to help start or expand entrepreneurial activities, especially small business activities in rural communities.

2. That the Virginia Economic Development Partnership, the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development, the Virginia Resources Authority, the Virginia Department of Business Assistance, the Virginia Tobacco Indemnification and Community Revitalization Commission, the Virginia Employment Commission, the Virginia Tourism Corporation, the Virginia Community College System, institutions of higher education within rural regions of the Commonwealth, and the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services shall report their progress in establishing and implementing a rural economic development strategic plan to the House Committee on Agriculture, Chesapeake and Natural Resources and the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Natural Resources by November 1 of each year until the strategic plan is fully

58 implemented.