

**MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT
STATE OF FLORIDA
DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**

THIS MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT (MOA) is made and entered into by and between the State of Florida, Department of Commerce ("Commerce") and Columbia County ("County"). Commerce and the County are sometimes referred to herein individually as a "Party" and collectively as "the Parties".

I. Background and Purpose of MOA

- A. The purpose of this MOA is to document the terms and conditions of the implementation of the Rural Area of Opportunity (RAO).
- B. The Governor of Florida recognizes that successful rural communities are essential to the overall success of the State of Florida's economy and quality of life, yet many rural communities struggle to maintain, support, or enhance job creation activities and to generate revenues for critical government services.
- C. Florida's Legislature also recognizes that rural communities continue to face extraordinary challenges in their efforts to significantly improve their economies, and as such, section 288.0656, Florida Statutes (F.S.), establishes the Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI) within Commerce and authorizes the participation of State and regional organizations in this initiative. Section 288.0656(7)(a), F.S., provides for the designation of up to three RAOs formerly Rural Areas of Critical Economic Concern (RACECs) under F.S., 1999-2013). RAOs include rural communities or a region composed of rural communities, including rural counties as identified in section 288.0656(2)(d)(e), F.S., that have been adversely affected by extraordinary economic events, severe or chronic distress, a natural disaster, or an event that presents a unique economic development opportunity of regional impact.
- D. Pursuant to section 288.0656(7), F.S., representatives of the State and regional agencies and organizations comprising the REDI met on **April 21, 2023**, and recommended the re-designation of the North Central region composed of the counties of Baker, Bradford, Columbia, Dixie, Gilchrist, Hamilton, Jefferson, Lafayette, Levy, Madison, Putnam, Suwannee, Taylor, and Union as a RAO. On **June 16, 2023**, Governor Ron DeSantis issued Executive Order Number **23-132**, which re-designated the North Central RAO for another five-year term with an expiration date of **June 11, 2028**.

II. The Participating Community

- A. Pursuant to section 288.0656(7)(b), F.S., and Executive Order Number **23-132**, RAO designation shall be contingent upon the execution of a MOA between the Parties. Section 288.0656(7)(b), F.S., requires this MOA to specify the terms and conditions of the designation, including, but not limited to, the duties and responsibilities of the County 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.
- B. The County agrees that fulfillment of the following duties and responsibilities, as reasonably determined by REDI, are required for recommendation by REDI for continued designation as a RAO.
- C. The County shall:
 - 1. Designate a specific contact person from among County elected or appointed officials to serve as a point of contact in all matters and activities relating to the North Central RAO;
 - 2. Designate a specific person from a non-profit organization actively engaged in economic development within the County to serve as the single point of contact to represent and provide input on all economic development matters and activities relating to the North Central RAO; and
 - 3. Include contact information for designees on Exhibit A, attached hereto (these designees may be the same designee to serve as the representative to other similar organizations). The County shall inform Commerce in writing by either mail or email of any changes to the specified persons within ten (10) business days of the change.

III. Implementation and Duration

- A. Pursuant to Executive Order Number **23-132**, the designation of the North Central RAO affecting the counties of Baker, Bradford, Columbia, Dixie, Gilchrist, Hamilton, Jefferson, Lafayette, Levy, Madison, Putnam, Suwannee, Taylor, and Union shall be in effect for five years and will expire on **June 11, 2028**.
- B. REDI may recommend the RAO designation and this MOA be terminated or continued based on performance under this MOA.
- C. This MOA shall take effect immediately upon full and proper execution by all Parties, and supersedes and replaces any and all previous Rural Area of Critical Economic Concern and RAO agreement(s) between the Parties.

- D. This MOA shall expire on **June 11, 2028**, unless terminated earlier.
- E. Both Parties shall review this MOA annually. If revisions are needed, notification shall be given to both Parties in writing of the specific changes desired with the proposed amendment language and the reasons for the revisions. With the mutual consent of both Parties, the proposed changes shall become effective when both Parties have duly executed an amendment to this MOA.
- F. The County may terminate this MOA at any time upon written notice to Commerce.
- G. Designation as an RAO is, by statute and Executive Order, contingent upon execution of a MOA between the Parties. REDI shall recommend the RAO designation be terminated if this MOA is not duly executed, or if this MOA is terminated and another MOA is not timely and duly executed in its place.

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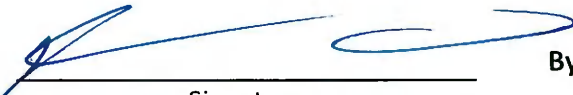
IV. EXECUTION

By affixing her or his signature herein below, each undersigned official represents and warrants that she or he has read the above MOA and the Exhibit A attached hereto and understands each section and paragraph.

IN WITNESS THEREOF, and in consideration of the mutual covenants set forth above and, in the Attachments and Exhibits hereto, the Parties have caused to be executed this MOA by their undersigned officials duly authorized.

COLUMBIA COUNTY, FLORIDA

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

By 
Signature
Rocky Ford
Title Chairman, Columbia County
Board of County Commissioners
Date 2-1-24

By J. Alex Kelly
Signature
J. Alex Kelly
Title Secretary
Date 4/1/2024

Approved as to form and legal sufficiency,
subject only to full and proper execution
by the Parties.

OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

By: Ryan Bourgoin
Approved Date: 3/28/2024

EXHIBIT A – DESIGNATED CONTACTS
County Name, Florida

Contact Information for an Elected or Appointed Official

Name: Commissioner Ronald Williams
Address: P.O. Box 1529
Lake City, FL 32056
Phone: 386-758-1005
Fax: _____
Email: Ron.Williams@ColumbiaCountyFla.com

**Contact Information for One Person from
a Non-Profit Organization Engaged in Economic Development**

Name: Jennifer Daniels
Address: 971 W Duval St.
Lake City, FL 32055
Phone: 386-758-1033
Fax: _____
Email: jgoff@ColumbiaCountyFla.com

Please complete this page and return with the signed MOA. The County is required to inform Commerce of any changes to this information within ten (10) business days of a change.