

LEGISLATURE OF NEBRASKA  
ONE HUNDRED EIGHTH LEGISLATURE  
FIRST SESSION

**LEGISLATIVE BILL 515**

Introduced by Walz, 15.

Read first time January 17, 2023

Committee: Banking, Commerce and Insurance

1 A BILL FOR AN ACT relating to economic development; to adopt the Rural

2 Economic Development Initiative Act.

3 Be it enacted by the people of the State of Nebraska,

1           Section 1. Sections 1 to 6 of this act shall be known and may be  
2 cited as the Rural Economic Development Initiative Act.

3           Sec. 2. For purposes of the Rural Economic Development Initiative  
4 Act:

5           (1) Department means the Department of Economic Development;

6           (2) Nonprofit economic development corporation means a nonprofit  
7 corporation that is organized under the Nebraska Nonprofit Corporation  
8 Act to assist with economic development; and

9           (3) Program means the Economic Development Grant Program created in  
10 section 3 of this act.

11          Sec. 3. (1) The Economic Development Grant Program is hereby  
12 created. The department shall administer the program.

13          (2) The department shall award only one grant per county under the  
14 program. A nonprofit economic development corporation operating within a  
15 county may apply to receive the grant for such county.

16          (3) Grant funds shall be used to hire up to one additional full-time  
17 equivalent employee to provide services described in subsection (4) of  
18 this section to cities of the first class, cities of the second class,  
19 villages, and rural areas within the county. The amount requested shall  
20 be sufficient to fund up to one additional full-time equivalent employee  
21 for five years. Grant funds shall not be awarded until proof of  
22 employment is submitted by the applicant to the department.

23          (4) An individual hired using grant funds received under this  
24 section shall be engaged in two or more of the following activities:

25           (a) Providing assistance with the creation of economic development  
26 plans;

27           (b) Identifying and applying for economic development grants;

28           (c) Identifying and pursuing options to improve housing stock in  
29 target communities;

30           (d) Promoting new development;

31           (e) Providing assistance with workforce retention;

1       (f) Advocating for cities, villages, and rural areas within the  
2 county when businesses are looking to locate or relocate; and

3       (g) Providing information regarding economic development  
4 opportunities available at the state and national level.

5       (5) Any nonprofit economic development corporation that receives a  
6 grant under the program shall coordinate with the applicable county in  
7 determining the services to be provided.

8       (6) Applications for a grant under the program shall be submitted to  
9 the department in a form and manner prescribed by the department and  
10 shall include the following information:

11       (a) A listing of the cities, villages, and rural areas to be served;

12       (b) A listing of the services to be provided;

13       (c) A listing of staff positions that will be created if grant funds  
14 are awarded; and

15       (d) A description of the methods to be utilized in measuring  
16 success.

17       (7) The department shall give priority to applicants meeting the  
18 following criteria:

19       (a) The total population of the subject county is fifty thousand or  
20 fewer inhabitants;

21       (b) The application indicates a partnership between the applicant  
22 and the county;

23       (c) The applicant intends to focus efforts on one or more cities of  
24 the second class or villages; and

25       (d) The applicant has demonstrated experience providing economic  
26 development services in the area.

27       (8) The department shall begin accepting applications on January 15,  
28 2024.

29       Sec. 4. (1) Each nonprofit economic development corporation that  
30 receives a grant under the program shall submit an annual report to the  
31 department describing the economic development services provided during

1 the year by the individual who was hired using grant funds.

2 (2) The department shall submit, as part of the department's annual  
3 status report under section 81-1201.11, a summary of the program,  
4 including a description of the economic development services provided and  
5 the number of communities served.

6 Sec. 5. It is the intent of the Legislature to appropriate fifteen  
7 million dollars to the department for fiscal year 2023-24 for purposes of  
8 carrying out the Rural Economic Development Initiative Act.

9 Sec. 6. The department may adopt and promulgate rules and  
10 regulations to carry out the Rural Economic Development Initiative Act.