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**HOUSE BILL 1623**

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**State of Washington 68th Legislature 2023 Regular Session**

**By** Representatives Volz, Chapman, Walsh, Maycumber, Paul, Graham, Ryu, Chambers, Ybarra, Barnard, Christian, Walen, Tharinger, and Shavers

AN ACT Relating to regional economic development visions and action plans; adding a new section to chapter 43.330 RCW; and creating a new section.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  Since the inception of the department of community, trade, and economic development in 1993, the forerunner of today's department of commerce, Washington has assigned responsibilities to the department for increasing economic development and developing economic strategies in cooperation with the legislature and the governor. Since 2005, Washington has maintained a list of distressed areas, which include, but are not limited to, counties with an unemployment rate more than 20 percent higher than the statewide unemployment rate for the previous three years. The legislature finds that numerous counties outside of the central Puget Sound region have been persistently categorized as distressed based on their unemployment rates. The legislature finds that regional economic development visions and action plans should be developed in partnership with local businesses and local civic leadership specific to these distressed areas experiencing persistently higher than average unemployment.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 43.330 RCW to read as follows:

(1) Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, by December 1, 2024, and every 10 years thereafter, the department shall lead and facilitate the development of a regional economic development vision and action plan for each region of the state that includes a county that is eligible to be categorized as a distressed area under RCW 43.168.020 due to its unemployment rate. There must be at least five regional vision and action plans completed, with the boundaries of the regions to be determined at the discretion of the department after outreach to affected communities.

(2) The purpose of each regional economic development vision and action plan is to assist with synchronizing local government policies and actions, and to guide and inform state funding and policies connected to the economic development objectives. No regional economic development action plan shall have the force of law or compel any local or state action.

(3) In developing the vision and action plan, the department shall coordinate with local associate development organizations, local government officials, the private sector business community, nonprofit organizations, and local labor organizations. The department shall survey the local community with respect to their goals for the future of the local economy.

(4) The department shall call upon and receive the cooperation of other state agencies for research and analysis that may be needed to fulfill the requirements of this section.

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