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PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION SCREENING HEARINGS

February 03, 2026

State Regulation of Public Utilities Review Committee Meeting

REPORTER: Susanna M. Amstutz

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PUBLIC UTILITIES REVIEW EXAMINATIONS
of
CAROLINE "CAROLEE" L. WILLIAMS and MARK NIX
February 3, 2026

COURT REPORTER: Susanna Amstutz

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BEFORE THE PUBLIC UTILITIES REVIEW COMMISSION

The within examinations of Caroline L. "Carolee" Williams and Mark Nix, before the Public Utilities Review Committee, reported by Susanna M. Amstutz, Court Reporter and Notary Public in and for the State of South Carolina; pursuant to Federal Rules of Civil Procedure; said examinations were taken at the State House Building, 1100 Gervais Street, Conference Room, Columbia, South Carolina, on Tuesday, the 3rd day of February, 2026; commencing at the hour of 4:24 p.m.

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A P P E A R A N C E S :

Senator Thomas C. Alexander, Chairman
Representative William Herbkersman, Vice Chairman
Representative Gil Gatch
Senator C. Bradley Hutto
Senator Luke Rankin
Representative Todd Rutherford

Committee Counsel:
Breden John, Esquire
Bryan Triplett, Esquire

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(*No exhibits were marked or introduced during this proceeding)

Court Reporter's Legend:

Dashes [--] Intentional or purposeful interruption

... Indicates trailing off

[ph] Denotes phonetically written

[sic] Written as said

P R O C E E D I N G S

1
2 CHAIRMAN ALEXANDER: Okay. We've lifted the veil.
3 We're now back on the record. For the record, no
4 action was taken during the executive session. We will
5 now ask the counsel to provide a background information
6 prior to questioning the candidate.

7 MR. JOHN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

8 So at our -- at the review committee's December 9, 2025
9 meeting, the review committee voted to find

10 Ms. Caroline L. "Carolee" Williams qualified and
11 nominated for consideration by the general assembly for
12 election to the 1st congressional district seat on the
13 Public Service Commission. At that hearing, the review
14 committee informed Ms. Williams that as a candidate,
15 she's expected to follow the spirit as well as a letter
16 of the state's ethics laws and that any violation or
17 appearance of impropriety would be deemed very serious
18 and potentially warranting the review committee
19 reconvening for further questions.

20 South Carolina Code section 8-13-935 provides that no
21 candidate for or person intending to become a candidate
22 for the Public Service Commission may seek directly or
23 indirectly the pledge of a member of the general
24 assembly's vote or contact directly or indirectly a
25 member of the general assembly regarding screening for

1 the Public Service Commission until 1, the
2 qualifications of all candidates for that office have
3 been determined by the state regulation Public
4 Utilities Review Committee and the review committee has
5 formally released its report as to the qualifications
6 of all candidates for the office to the general
7 assembly.

8 For purposes of this section, indirectly seeking a
9 pledge means the candidate or someone acting on behalf
10 of and at the request of the candidate requests a
11 person to contact a member of the general assembly on
12 behalf of the candidate before nominations are formally
13 made by the review committee. The prohibitions of this
14 section do not extend to an announcement of candidacy
15 by the candidate or statement by the candidate
16 detailing the candidate's qualifications. Subsection
17 D1 provides that violations of this section may be
18 considered by the state regulation of Public Utilities
19 Review Committee when it considers the candidate's
20 qualifications.

21 On January 13 of this year, Mark Nix, executive
22 director of the Home Builders Association of South
23 Carolina, emailed a letter of support for Ms. Williams
24 to members of the general assembly. At the time
25 Mr. Nix emailed the letter of support, the review

1 committee had not formally released its report as to
2 the qualifications of all candidates to the general
3 assembly.

4 Mr. Chairman, I'll quickly read just the full text of
5 Mr. Nix's brief letter for the record.

6 CHAIRMAN ALEXANDER: Okay.

7 MR. JOHN: [REDACTED]

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1 Staff, Mr. Triplett and myself discussed the situation
2 with Ms. Williams and Mr. Nix individually on
3 January 15, 2025 -- 2026. Ms. Williams denied any
4 knowledge of Mr. Nix's letter and said that she first
5 gained knowledge of the letter during a conversation
6 with the legislator who received Mr. Nix's email.
7 Mr. Nix denied any coordination or discussion regarding
8 the letter with Ms. Williams and stated that he had not
9 spoken with Ms. Williams prior to sending the letter.
10 That's all I have for background, Mr. Chairman.

11 CHAIRMAN ALEXANDER: Okay. Thank you for that
12 background.

13 Ms. Williams, would you please come forward? I'll ask
14 you to raise your right hand.

15 (Ms. Williams complies)

16 WHEREUPON:

17 CAROLINE L. "CAROLEE" WILLIAMS, being duly sworn
18 and cautioned to speak the truth, the whole truth and
19 nothing but the truth, testifies as follows:

20 CHAIRMAN ALEXANDER: Okay. So counsel will have some
21 questions. If you would respond to those questions, I
22 would appreciate it.

23 EXAMINATION

24 BY MR. JOHN:

25 Q. Good afternoon, Ms. Williams. As mentioned,

1 our purpose here today is to ascertain whether any
2 ethical violations may have occurred in connection with
3 the letter of support for your candidacy that Mr. Nix
4 sent to members of the general assembly on January 13,
5 2026.

6 Ms. Williams, did you know that candidates for the
7 Public Service Commission are bound by the state's ethics
8 laws, including section 8-13-935?

9 A. Yes, sir.

10 Q. Are you aware that the review committee had not
11 yet released its report as to the qualifications of all
12 candidates for the office to the general assembly?

13 A. Yes.

14 Q. Could you please briefly describe the type of
15 conduct you think that Section 8-13-935 is intended to
16 prohibit?

17 A. I'm going to start by saying I'm almost
18 mortified by the fact that you all are having to spend
19 your time here because I think this is intended to create
20 a level playing field for everyone where there is no
21 pre-commitment. It's very clear that all that can be
22 done is to present your qualifications. Individually.
23 No one else can present my qualifications. Only I can
24 present them. That's the way I read the law.

25 Q. Thank you. Have you seen the letter that

1 **Mr. Nix emailed to members of the general assembly?**

2 A. I have not.

3 **Q. Would you like a copy? I know I just read it.**

4 A. I heard it.

5 **Q. Okay. Very good. Did you ask Mr. Nix to**
6 **contact members of the general assembly on your behalf**
7 **prior to January 13 --**

8 A. No, sir.

9 **Q. -- 2026?**

10 A. No, sir.

11 **Q. When did you first become aware of this letter?**

12 A. I was in a meeting the morning of the 13th with
13 a senator who referenced a letter, but I didn't know what
14 the subject matter was. I mean, I did understand it was
15 about me. That's all I learned. And a few hours later,
16 I heard the representative say they had heard some --
17 they had got -- there had been some contact.

18 **Q. Did you discuss any potential letter with any**
19 **individual other than Mr. Nix prior to January 13th of**
20 **2026?**

21 A. No.

22 **Q. Okay.**

23 A. And I -- and I did not with Mr. Nix --

24 **Q. Okay.**

25 A. -- just for clarification.

1 Q. Have you discussed this matter with
2 Mr. Nix after the date of the letter?

3 A. I have not.

4 Q. When was the last time you spoke to Mr. Nix
5 prior to January 13th?

6 A. I did not bring those dates with me but you --
7 you gave the date earlier. When was the PURC meeting
8 where --

9 Q. December 9th.

10 A. Okay. So I think on December 10, I may have
11 followed up and said what happened during that meeting
12 where President Alexander took a quote from that letter
13 and I just thanked him for -- for writing that.

14 Q. Did you discuss your candidacy -- well, I guess
15 you just answered the question whether you discussed your
16 candidacy for the Public Service Commission during that
17 December 10th conversation. Is that the extent of it?

18 A. That was the extent of it. It was really just
19 a -- a thank you. I wrote everybody who wrote letters of
20 reference for me, and because of that particular call
21 out, I called him. But I did write a note to everybody
22 that wrote a letter of recommendation for me. So that
23 would have included him.

24 Q. And I apologize. I know it sounds like I'm
25 asking the same question over and over but just to be

1 clear, at any point during your candidacy, have you
2 requested any third parties to contact a member of the
3 general assembly on your behalf?

4 A. No, sir.

5 Q. How do you know Mr. Nix?

6 A. My husband is a Home Builder. My son was a
7 lobbyist for the Home Builders. But before that, I think
8 when I ran in 2013, I was introduced to him and he
9 offered to come and stand with me as I ran, and he
10 offered to do it again in 2016. And the relationship
11 sort of built from that, more the latter, what he
12 observed in my qualifications or the way that I comported
13 myself.

14 Q. Does your son currently work for the Home
15 Builders Association?

16 A. He does not.

17 Q. And what is his name?

18 A. Alex James.

19 Q. Okay. And what was his most recent role with
20 the Home Builders Association?

21 A. Government affairs.

22 Q. Did you discuss -- have you discussed Mr. Nix's
23 letter with your son at any point?

24 A. I have.

25 Q. You have?

1 A. What was the nature of that conversation?

2 REPRESENTATIVE RUTHERFORD: Mr. Chairman, if I
3 could. At some point -- and I agree, you know,
4 these are -- this is our guy. This is our lawyer.
5 But at some point, are the question's not getting
6 into things that if it doesn't get into that she
7 directly or indirectly sought a pledge, then do we
8 need it? And if her son doesn't work for the Home
9 Builders anymore, then do we need to...

10 CHAIRMAN ALEXANDER: Well, let me let him have one
11 or two --

12 MR. RUTHERFORD: Okay. Okay.

13 CHAIRMAN ALEXANDER: -- more and then we'll
14 proceed from there.

15 REPRESENTATIVE RUTHERFORD: And he's great,
16 but -- I'm not trying to cut him off, but at some
17 point, like...

18 MR. JOHN: Well, that's --

19 CHAIRMAN ALEXANDER: I think it gets to that in
20 the next question, maybe.

21 MR. JOHN: Yes, sir.

22 REPRESENTATIVE RUTHERFORD: Okay.

23 BY MR. JOHN:

24 Q. Well -- and really that was -- this would be my
25 final question, whether you've discussed the matter with

1 **him and the nature of that conversation.**

2 A. The nature was more in really what I expressed
3 to you all earlier. Just the, beyond the personal sort
4 of regret that this circumstance has happened, but also
5 the -- the impact to each of your time and taking the
6 time to have to focus on this. So it's more a response
7 to the general circumstance than the specifics that
8 completes it.

9 CHAIRMAN ALEXANDER: Is there any questions for
10 any member of the committee or other staff or
11 anything?

12 (No response)

13 Okay, thank you. Ms. Williams, again, though, I
14 do want to remind -- I do want to remind you of
15 criteria and pursuant to that, we expect
16 you as a candidate to follow the spirit as well as
17 the letter of the state regulations.

18 MS. WILLIAMS: Yes, sir.

19 CHAIRMAN ALEXANDER: Any violation or appearance
20 or impropriety on your part would be deemed very
21 serious and potentially warrant calling you back
22 for further questions. Do you understand that?

23 MS. WILLIAMS: Yes, sir, I do. Very much so.

24 CHAIRMAN ALEXANDER: Okay. Thank you so much.
25 Thank you for being here this afternoon.

1 MS. WILLIAMS: Thank you. Thank you for doing
2 this to kind of uphold, no matter what decision
3 you make, the honorable nature of the -- the
4 decision that is forthcoming.

5 (Mr. Nix enters the room and is seated)

6 MR. JOHN: Mr. Nix, please raise your right hand.

7 CHAIRMAN ALEXANDER: I missed that part. I'm
8 happy to do it.

9 Raise your right hand to be sworn in.

10 (Mr. Nix complies)

11 WHEREUPON:

12 MARK NIX, being duly sworn and cautioned to
13 speak the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the
14 truth, testifies as follows:

15 EXAMINATION

16 BY MR. JOHN:

17 Q. Good afternoon, Mr. Nix. Thank you for being
18 here. Our purpose is just to ascertain whether any
19 ethical violations may have occurred in connection with
20 the letter of support for Ms. Carolee Williams and her
21 Public Service Commission candidacy that you sent to
22 members of the general assembly on January 13th of 2026.

23 Mr. Nix, are you -- are you aware that candidates
24 for the Public Service Commission are bound by the
25 state's ethics laws, including section 8-13-935, which

1 deals with indirect pledge seeking?

2 A. Yes.

3 A. Okay.

4 Q. Are you aware that the review committee has not
5 yet released its report as to the qualifications of all
6 candidates for the office?

7 A. No.

8 Q. Prior to you emailing your letter, did you ask
9 -- did Ms. Williams ask you to contact members of the
10 general assembly on her behalf?

11 A. No.

12 Q. Did you write the letter in question --

13 A. I did.

14 Q. -- that we referred to?

15 Did you have any discussion with Ms. Williams prior
16 to January 13th regarding support --

17 A. None whatsoever.

18 Q. -- or communicating with members of the general
19 Assembly?

20 Did you discuss the letter with any other individual
21 prior to sending it?

22 A. Just my lobbyist at the time.

23 Q. Who was that?

24 A. Alicia Hutto. I asked her -- since we use a
25 software called Voter Voice, I asked her to put it on the

1 Voter Voice for delivery.

2 Q. Since -- so in the time after your letter, have
3 you discussed this matter with Ms. Williams?

4 A. No.

5 Q. When's the last time that you spoke with
6 Ms. Williams?

7 A. I believe early December, late November.

8 Q. And during that conversation, did you discuss
9 Ms. Williams' candidacy for the Public Service
10 Commission?

11 A. No. I believe most of it was about her new
12 grandchildren, her new grandchild going into it.

13 Q. And what is your email address at the Home
14 Builders Association?

15 A. MNix@HBAofSC.com.

16 Q. And do you have any -- well, let me see. The
17 Voter Voice, does that -- do y'all have, like, a
18 centralized email address to which those messages come
19 in?

20 A. Correct.

21 Q. Is that email address Grassroots@HBAofSC?

22 A. I believe so.

23 MR. JOHN: Okay. And -- very good.

24 Mr. Chairman, that's all I have.

25 CHAIRMAN ALEXANDER: Okay. Thank you.

1 EXAMINATION

2 BY CHAIRMAN ALEXANDER:

3 Q. So the email address that was used on this, it
4 says, from Mark Nix, the Grassroots, that is something
5 y'all use on a regular basis?

6 A. Just during the session. Since the Voter Voice
7 is more -- it's the easier way to reach out to
8 legislators because it has all their email addresses
9 already in there. So that's why we use the Voter Voice.
10 Just for communication to legislators.

11 Q. Okay. Bear with us. There was no -- since
12 that conversation transpired back in 2025, you've had no
13 further communication with her?

14 A. No, sir.

15 SENATOR RANKIN: May I ask a question,
16 Mr. Chairman?

17 CHAIRMAN ALEXANDER: Yes, sir.

18 EXAMINATION

19 BY MR. RANKIN:

20 Q. You certainly didn't write this intending to be
21 brought up to a room that one has never been in before in
22 six years. Perhaps you've never been in --

23 A. This is the first time in 20 years I've been in
24 this room.

25 Q. I'm almost finished with Harry Potter's seventh

1 book. This would be called the Requirement Room. You
2 have to have a secret hand motion to get in.

3 I'm curious. Irrespective of the -- the wonkiness of
4 this inquisition, perhaps on your part, you didn't intend to
5 sully or jeopardize Ms. Williams' candidacy.

6 A. Oh no, sir. I'll tell you right now. I even
7 said this when I was called about it from the attorneys.
8 I was kind of surprised over four sentences that I wrote
9 just supporting a friend --

10 Q. Yeah.

11 A. -- and someone I think is capable and
12 intelligent. I mean, I'm a little shocked that I'm still
13 here today answering questions over four sentences.

14 Q. You believe today what you wrote then?

15 A. I still do.

16 SENATOR RANKIN: Okay. That's all I have.
17 Thank you.

18 MR. NIX: And I can tell you, I'll just add one
19 last piece. If I had said something to her,
20 she has the integrity where she would have self
21 reported it. Trust me.

22 MR. RANKIN: Thank you.

23 CHAIRMAN ALEXANDER: Okay. There's nothing else?

24 (No response)

25 CLOSING STATEMENT