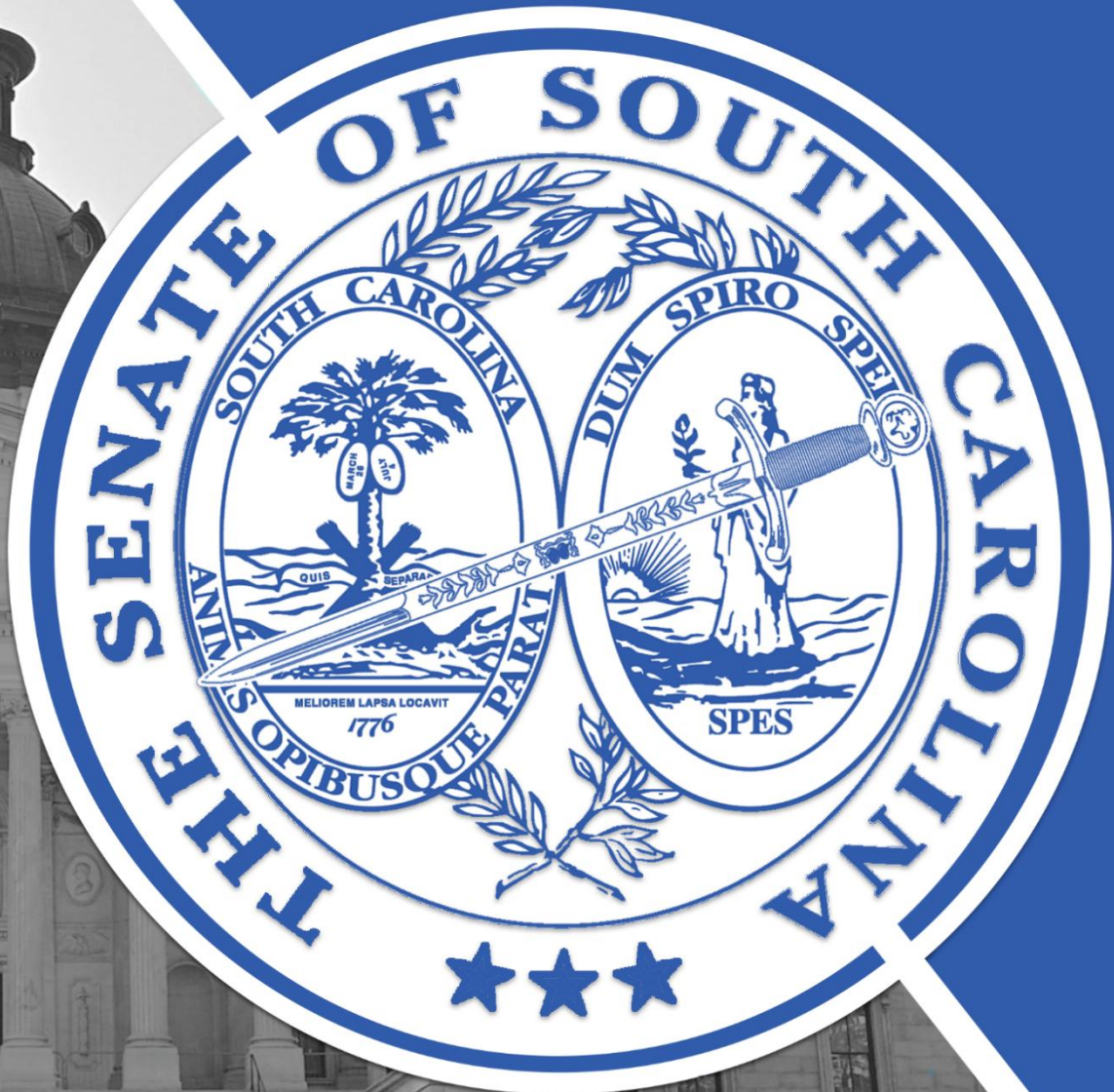


SOUTH CAROLINA SENATE
LEGISLATIVE OVERSIGHT
COMMITTEE



DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS
COMMITTEE REPORT
2026

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AGENCY OVERVIEW

Organization

The Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) was established by Act 26 of 2019, which elevated the former Office of Veterans' Affairs to a cabinet level agency. The department is a resource for veterans in South Carolina who need assistance with benefits, services, and the transition to civilian life. Since Act 60 of 2023 went into effect in 2024, the department has also managed the state veterans' nursing homes, a service that was previously administered by the Department of Mental Health.

The Secretary of Veterans' Affairs is appointed to a four-year term by the Governor with the advice and consent of the Senate. The Senate Family & Veterans' Services Committee has subject matter jurisdiction over the department.



Department of Veterans' Affairs Organizational Charts

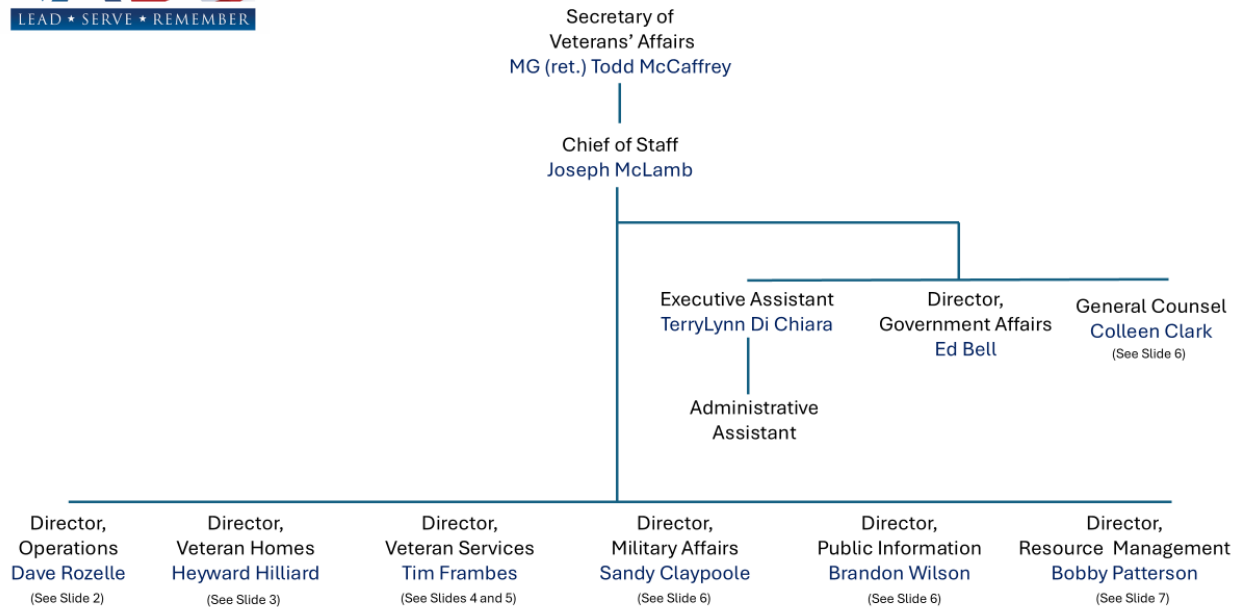


Figure 1 - DVA Organizational Chart, Source: Department of Veterans' Affairs

The Department of Veterans' Affairs is organized into 5 primary divisions. In addition to these programmatic areas, there is also a Resource Management division which oversees the agency's finances; a Public Information division; and an office of the General Counsel.

Military Affairs

The department supports the Governor-appointed Military Base Task Force, which advises on issues related to South Carolina's military installations and Fort Eisenhower in Georgia. It also administers the Military Enhancement Fund, which awarded \$14.99 million in grants last year to support projects that strengthen military operations or improve quality of life for service

members and their families in communities near active-duty bases. Additionally, the department organizes the annual Military Commanders' Brief, where base commanders update the Governor and legislative leaders on installation needs, with the department tracking and reporting state responses throughout the year.

Operations

The department administers several programs aimed at supporting South Carolina Veterans during and after their transition from military service to civilian life. The South Carolina Veteran Coalition connects veterans with over 110 service providers through an automated system that tailors services to individual needs. The Palmetto Pathfinder Program pairs transitioning service members with trained volunteer mentors to help them integrate into their communities, currently involving 167 mentors supporting 143 veterans. In addition, the department supports housing stability through the Veteran Homelessness and Transition Grant Program, which awarded \$2.8 million in grants last year to 13 organizations.

Other initiatives include support for the Veterans Trust Fund, through which the department provides staff assistance and grant assessments for the gubernatorially appointed eleemosynary corporation. The Veteran Treatment Court program, funded by a federal grant, supports alternative judicial processes for veterans charged with certain non-violent offenses, and is currently operating in four judicial circuits with trained mentors. The department is also developing a Virtual Transition Assistance Program to help attract and support service members moving to South Carolina. Additionally, it organizes the annual Governor's Summit on Veteran Affairs, updating state leadership on the status of the veteran population and ongoing initiatives.

Public Information

The department aims to inform and educate the public, state and local leaders, and veterans on all matters related to veterans. While there are no major programs specifically focused on this effort, effective and targeted communication with both veterans and the general public is essential to supporting the department's key initiatives. This is accomplished through an active presence on various social media platforms, video content shared with local news outlets, and articles submitted to print media.

Veterans Homes

As of July 1, 2024, the department has taken over management of five long-term care facilities for veterans from the Department of Mental Health. Each of these facilities is vendor-operated and located across South Carolina: Veterans' Victory House in Walterboro and Campbell Veterans Nursing Home in Anderson both house 220 beds, while Veteran Village in Florence, Palmetto Patriots Home in Gaffney, and Patriots Village in Sumter each have 104 beds.

Looking ahead, the department will assume responsibility for Stone Pavilion, a 90-bed facility in Columbia, on July 1, 2025, which will also shift to vendor operation. Additionally, applications are pending with the U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs for two new 104-bed facilities in

Horry and Orangeburg Counties, contingent on federal funding. A separate application has also been submitted for a new 129-bed facility in Lexington County to replace Stone Pavilion.

Veteran Services

The department carries out a range of programs and services in support of South Carolina veterans and their families. It operates the M.J. “Dolly” Cooper Veteran Cemetery in Anderson, where 527 veterans and family members were interred last year. The department also provides assistance with filing and appealing federal benefits claims, maintaining representatives at both USDVA medical centers in the state, running an appeals team in Columbia, and participating in outreach events such as claims clinics. Additionally, the department helps transitioning service members file claims before leaving military service in South Carolina and offers accreditation training for county Veterans’ Affairs office staff.

Beyond benefits and claims, the department verifies eligibility for a program offering free tuition at state institutions of higher learning to the children of qualifying veterans, processing 1,793 applications last year. It also administers several support and recognition programs, including the Veterans Service Organization Burial Honor Guard Support Fund (which disbursed \$57,000 last year), the South Carolina Military Family Relief Fund (providing grants to National Guard or Reserve members returning from federal activation), and the South Carolina Prisoner of War Medal program. Finally, the department maintains a war roster listing South Carolina military personnel who served during designated conflicts.



Budget

FY 2024-25 Budget			
Program	General Funds	Non-Recurring	Other Non-Recurring & Special Funds
ADMINISTRATION	1,665,227		
MILITARY AFFAIRS	70,996		
MILITARY ENHANCEMENT FUND	2,000,000		
STATE EMPLOYER CONTR	2,312,569		
VETERAN AFFAIRS	2,853,223		
VETERAN CEMETERY	1,764,680		
VETERAN HOMES	90,842,219		
SUBTOTAL	101,508,914	-	-
Special Recurring Items:			
MILITARY CHILD EDUCATION COALITION	350,000		
SUBTOTAL	350,000	-	-
Non-Recurring Items:			
VETERAN HOMES - CAPITAL PROJECTS		115,915,112	
VETERAN CEMETERY - CAPITAL PROJECT		75,000	
VETERAN CEMETERY - CAPITAL PROJECT - COMMITTAL SHELTER		1,280,000	
VETERAN CEMETERY - CAPITAL PROJECT - COLUMBARIUM			1,430,000
MILITARY CHILD EDUCATION COALITION			182,000
MILITARY ENHANCEMENT FUND			9,830,340
MILITARY BASE TASK FORCE			270,948
PASS-THRU / NON-PROFIT			1,596,595
VETERAN CEMETERY - FENCING			114,000
VETERAN CEMETERY - HEADSTONE RAISE & ALIGN			500,000
VETERAN CEMETERY INTERMENT FEES			2,576,739
VETERAN AFFAIRS - MILITARY FAMILY HOUSING RELIEF			163,804
VETERAN AFFAIRS - MILITARY FAMILY GRANTS			291,720
VETERAN AFFAIRS - VARIOUS			794,021
VETERAN AFFAIRS - HOMELESS TRANSITION			10,000,000
VETERAN TRUST FUND			1,000,000
VETERAN HOMES			67,236,547
SUBTOTAL	-	117,270,112	95,986,714
TOTAL	101,858,914	117,270,112	95,986,714
GRAND TOTAL			315,115,741

Figure 2 - DVA Fiscal Year 2024-2025 Budget, Source: Department of Veterans' Affairs

Positions

Department of Veterans' Affairs			
Area	Filled	Vacant	Total
Office of the Secretary			
Agency Head	1	0	
Classified FTE	3	0	
Unclassified FTE	1	0	
SUBTOTAL	5	0	5
Veteran Services			
Classified FTE	11	2	
SUBTOTAL	11	2	13
Veteran Services - Cemetery			
Classified FTE	11	2	
Temporary		1	
SUBTOTAL	11	3	14
Resource Management			
Classified FTE	8	1	
Temporary	1	0	
SUBTOTAL	9	1	10
Public Information			
Classified FTE	3	0	
Temporary	1		
SUBTOTAL	4	0	4
Military Affairs			
Classified FTE	3	0	
SUBTOTAL	3	0	3
General Counsel			
Classified FTE	2	1	
SUBTOTAL	2	1	3
Operations			
Classified FTE	12	3	
Temporary Grant	0	1	
SUBTOTAL	12	4	16
Veteran Homes			
Classified FTE	11	4	
Temporary	1	0	
SUBTOTAL	12	4	16
AGENCY TOTAL	69	15	84

Figure 3 - DVA Positions, Source: Department of Veterans' Affairs

FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Agency Administration

Finding 1 (*Shared Services*): The Department has a Resource Management Division, which is responsible for the agency’s finances, procurement, and information technology. Other similarly-sized agencies have agreed to partner with the Department of Administration to provide what are known as shared services. These shared services enable agencies to focus on their missions while relying on the Department of Administration to manage the administrative functions on behalf of the agency.

Recommendation 1 (*Shared Services*): **The Department of Veterans’ Affairs should engage with the Department of Administration to determine whether cost savings and efficiencies could be achieved with shared services. If savings or efficiencies are identified, the Department should further begin the process of transitioning to a shared services model.**

Finding 2 (*Project Transparency*): The (Charleston) Post and Courier newspaper published an article on October 24, 2024, concerning a project in Sumter County that was intended to provide community enhancement for nearby Shaw Air Force Base. The project, known as the Welcome Center at Shaw-Sumter Farm, was derided as being utilized far differently than originally intended.

On the same property, a separate project was pursued through a completely different process known as the Military Enhancement Fund for a “barn revitalization” in the

amount of \$4,277,000. This project was approved by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs following a review by the Military Base Task Force that, according to a memo dated September 22, 2023, rated the project considerably lower than others. While the task force has no prescribed threshold for scores that delineate projects they recommend for approval, they do rank them based on a set of criteria. At the time of the memo, the task force had six projects under consideration, as illustrated in Figure 4.

Project	Score	Approved?
Electrical Substation	307	Yes
Living Shoreline	266	Yes
Temporary Housing for Firefighters	139	Yes
Barn Revitalization	136	Yes
Centennial Park	103	Yes
TAG Complex	76	No

Figure 4 - Military Enhancement Fund, Source: Department of Veterans’ Affairs

In this September 22 memo, the task force recommended holding off on approving the barn revitalization project:

“Regarding the lowest four rated projects, the consensus was to allow for further development and refinement of their plans and resubmit them in the Spring 2024 rotation in the event there are future projects with greater mission and/or quality of life impacts for South Carolina.”

However, on October 30, 2024, the Secretary sent a letter to a Sumter County official informing them that the project had

been approved and fully funded. While the task force makes recommendations on projects, these recommendations are nonbinding and advisory in nature. The Secretary considered both the task force recommendations and other inputs when determining what projects to approve and ultimately decided to approve five of the six projects as shown in Figure 4.

Recommendation 2 (*Project Transparency*): The General Assembly should consider adopting a version of Proviso 101.3, proposed by the Senate, to require similar projects to seek approval from the Joint Bond Review Committee (JBRC) and to post all project proposals on the Department’s website for public review. However, the proviso may need to be modified to establish a threshold for consideration. One recommendation is to only require capital projects of at least \$1,000,000 to go before JBRC for approval. Regardless, the Department should work with the JBRC to determine the mechanics of how grants are submitted and presented for review.

Finding 3 (*Military Enhancement Fund Scope*): The Military Enhancement Fund may only be used in counties where a military base is located or adjacent to it including: Richland, Sumter, Charleston, Berkeley, Dorchester, Beaufort, and Orangeburg. This limits potential grant impacts in other areas of the state that may have a significant military population through the National Guard.

Recommendation 3 (*Military Enhancement Fund Scope*): The General Assembly should consider broadening the scope of the Military Enhancement Fund to include other worthy projects that will have a positive

impact on the readiness of our service members and the quality of life for their families.

Finding 4 (*Military Enhancement Fund Claw Back*): As of April 17, 2025, only about \$27,000 of the \$4,277,000 on the barn revitalization project had been spent. The Department has not, to this point, exercised its right to reclaim grant funds as detailed in the grant award agreement.

Recommendation 4 (*Military Enhancement Fund Claw Back*): The Military Enhancement Fund should have a prescribed timetable for when funds must be expended. The Department should be diligent in inspecting the management of grant funds and should, when appropriate, reclaim funds from grant recipients.

Finding 5 (*Appointment of Secretary*): Before the Governor can appoint a Secretary to lead the Department, §25-11-20(C) first requires that he receive recommendations from three separate and prescribed veterans service organizations: the American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and the Disabled American Veterans. Under the statute, if even one of these organizations fails to produce any recommendation, it could be interpreted that the Governor would be unable to proceed with a nomination.

Recommendation 5 (*Appointment of Secretary*): The General Assembly should consider amending §25-11-20(C) to require the solicitation of recommendations from relevant organizations and should give a reasonable period of time for those organizations to respond. The Governor should be allowed to proceed with a

nomination for Senate Confirmation even if the organizations do not respond within the reasonable period of time provided.

County Veterans' Affairs Offices

Finding 6 (County VAO Staffing and Accountability): Although §25-11-40 requires every county to have a county veterans' affairs officer, and ostensibly maintain a County Veterans' Affairs Office, there are significant disparities in resourcing, and therefore the quality and scope of services available to veterans can also vary considerably. Consequently, there are many veterans who cross county lines to seek services at a more resourced office. The chart in Appendix 2 on page 20 shows how many staff serve in each county.

Recommendation 6 (County VAO Staffing and Accountability): **The General Assembly should consider funding a minimum number of CVAO staff in areas that have the greatest need for support. It should further direct the inclusion of CVAO staffing needs as part of the study found in Recommendation 8 to assist with this assessment. Of course, counties may continue to resource their offices above and beyond any minimum set by the State and are encouraged to do so.**

Finding 7 (Claims Management System): Appendix 3 on page 21 shows that 34 of the state's 46 County Veterans Affairs Offices and the state office utilize VetPro, an intake software system designed for assisting veterans in obtaining services. The remaining 12 employ a variety of intake methods including direct mail, Citrix, and VetraSpec. The Department provides licenses to counties at no charge.

This patchwork approach reduces visibility at the state level and incurs unnecessary costs to counties. §25-11-50 requires the Secretary to:

“establish uniform methods and procedures for the performance of service work...”

This is difficult to achieve if some counties employ a system other than what is utilized at the state level and among a majority of counties. The Secretary does receive reporting data from these counties; however, such data is unverifiable. While the other digital program, VetraSpec, largely performs the same functions as VetPro, there are nuances to its functions and capabilities. Furthermore, some counties continue to use paper forms, faxing them to the USDVA for processing.

Recommendation 7 (Claims Management System): **The General Assembly should require all CVAOs to use a single digital claims management system provided by the state office. A transition period of up to one year would allow time for training and migration of data.**

Finding 8 (CVAO Appointment): County Veterans Affairs Officers are, in large part, appointed by the county legislative delegation. This is a model that once served a meaningful purpose, however it has become problematic when attempting to establish a statewide unity of effort and accountability. With the increasing

complexity of providing benefits to veterans and the ever-growing web of community resources available to them, it is becoming increasingly important to have a more structured, traditional approach to appointing county officers.

Recommendation 8 (CVAO Appointment): The General Assembly should consider amending §25-11-40 to grant the Secretary of Veterans' Affairs authority to hire and fire County

Veterans Affairs Officers, similar to most other cabinet agencies with similar organizational structures. It is further recommended that the General Assembly direct the Department of Administration to produce or contract with an independent firm to conduct an analysis of cost savings, efficiencies, and improvement of services, if the General Assembly were to transfer county veterans' affairs offices to the administration of the State under the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

Veteran Health & Wellbeing

Finding 9 (Future Veteran Homes): South Carolina is preparing to expand its network of state veterans' homes with the potential addition of three new facilities, including one that will replace the existing Stone Pavilion in Richland County. The proposed new homes are planned for Horry, Orangeburg, and Lexington Counties. Applications for federal support have been submitted to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, and the General Assembly has already allocated the necessary matching funds for each project.

However, the construction timeline for these facilities is heavily reliant on federal funding, which is typically subject to long delays. Projects of this nature often wait 8 to 10 years between approval and the receipt of funds, making it unlikely that construction will begin before 2030 unless there is a significant increase in federal appropriations. Once completed and operational, these additions will bring the state to its federally allowed maximum capacity for veteran long-term care, totaling 1,089 beds across eight homes.

Each new home will require substantial ongoing operational funding, averaging \$22 million annually. While part of this cost will be offset by contributions from the U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs and resident payments, the state will still need to cover approximately \$12 to \$15 million per home each year. However, when considering inflation, this figure is likely to grow significantly over time.

Recommendation 9 (Future Veteran Homes): The General Assembly should consider allocating recurring funding to sustain operations at these facilities. Further, given the likelihood of rising costs due to general and healthcare-specific inflation, it is important for the state to incorporate projected increases in its long-term budget considerations.

Finding 10 (Veteran Home Locations): Appendices 4 and 5 on pages 22 and 23, respectively, illustrate the locations of current and planned veteran homes as well as where their locations fall in the ranking of counties by veteran

population. While some current and planned homes are located in areas dense with veterans, others inexplicably fall outside of the top third of counties by veteran population. Of note, these current and planned home locations were determined prior to the General Assembly directing the Department to administer them under Act 60 of 2023.

Recommendation 10 (*Veteran Home Locations*): The General Assembly should direct the Department to study the best, long-term locations for veteran homes that will meet current and future needs of South Carolina’s veteran population. This should be done without regard to political considerations or the location of planned veteran homes that have yet to begin construction. A copy of this report should be provided to the Senate Legislative Oversight Committee and the Senate Family & Veterans’ Services Committee no later than January 30, 2026.

Finding 11 (*Veteran Suicide*): Despite years of dedicated efforts to address veteran suicide, South Carolina still lacks the timely and accurate data necessary to effectively combat the issue. Without this data, it is difficult to identify the specific risk factors most prevalent within the state’s veteran population or to assess whether current prevention efforts are making a meaningful impact. Tailored strategies and accurate evaluations require a clearer understanding of when, where, and why these tragedies occur—insight that is currently limited by gaps in the data collection process.

A key challenge is the absence of a unified, standardized system for reporting and analyzing veteran suicide data in South Carolina. Data typically originates from county coroners, who use their discretion in

determining whether a death is classified as suicide. Their judgments may be influenced by community sensitivities, cultural factors, or concerns for the deceased’s family, which can lead to underreporting. Additionally, if a coroner is unaware of a decedent’s veteran status—either due to oversight or a lack of information from family members—that case may not be recorded in veteran-specific statistics. These inconsistencies, coupled with the fact that federal suicide data reporting typically involves a two-year delay, make it nearly impossible to evaluate the effectiveness of any new prevention initiatives in a timely manner.

Recommendation 11 (*Veteran Suicide*): South Carolina needs a statewide system for reporting and analyzing suicides to accurately identify underlying risk factors and develop effective strategies to reduce suicide across all populations.

Finding 12 (*Declining Veteran Population*): The population of Veterans in South Carolina is steadily decreasing, following a national trend driven largely by the aging and passing of the Vietnam-era generation. While South Carolina’s decline is slower than the national average, the overall number of veterans is expected to fall significantly in the absence of a major military mobilization. No subsequent generation of service members has matched the size of the Vietnam cohort, which means that the veteran population will continue to shrink and ultimately stabilize at a much lower level than current citizens have ever experienced.

As a result, the demand for veterans in the workforce will intensify. Veterans are highly valued by employers and typically have lower unemployment rates than the general population. However, with a shrinking

supply, South Carolina will need to do more than simply be veteran-friendly. The state must implement a proactive, targeted strategy to attract transitioning service members to its workforce. This includes globally promoting job opportunities in South Carolina to those exiting military service and investing in the necessary expertise and resources to make the state a top destination for veteran talent.

Recommendation 12 (*Declining Veteran Population*): The Coordinating Council for Workforce Development, recently created by the General Assembly and Governor, is an effective vehicle for leading and supporting a statewide recruiting initiative. However, other incentives such as a targeted tax policy could augment these efforts. This could include addressing active-duty income taxes as a pipeline for veterans once they separate from service.

Veterans' Trust Fund

Finding 13 (*Fundraising*): Act 58 of 2023 amended the trust fund statute to permit the board of trustees to expend fund assets to engage in fundraising activities, subject to a spending cap. This was done to more specifically allow and encourage the board to raise funds, which in turn would allow for more money to become available to veteran causes. The General Assembly also appropriated one-time funds in the amount of \$1,000,000 to bring the fund above the minimum statutory threshold necessary to trigger larger disbursements.

Minutes from the September 2024 meeting of the Veterans Trust Fund Board of Trustees indicates that \$7,000 in funding is available, under the statutory limitation, to be used for fundraising purposes. These minutes also report discussion around fundraising options including corporate sponsorships, individual donations, and grant funding.

Since that time, however, little forward progress seems to have been made. While Department leadership indicates that, for the first time, electronic gifts are now accepted, by in large the fundraising efforts by board members have been stagnant.

Recommendation 13 (*Fundraising*): The Governor should strongly consider appointing board members who are community leaders, corporate citizens, and have the knowledge and experience to lead a major nonprofit. Further, these board members must place an increased emphasis on fundraising for the trust fund, not relegating it to a secondary activity.

Finding 14 (*Trust Fund Principal*): Now that the trust fund has surpassed \$1 million in assets, §25-21-40 permits the board of trustees to disburse:

“...all credited earnings plus all future annual deposits to the trust fund from contributions...”

However, if this were to be carried out in practice, then the principal of the trust fund would never grow or have the opportunity to yield more interest to support veterans' programs.

Recommendation 14 (*Trust Fund Principal*): The General Assembly should consider amending §25-21-40 to set aside a minimum percentage of

deposits, earnings, or both to be withheld and added to the principal. This would ensure the trust fund continues to grow and provide an ever-increasing, reliable stream of revenue for programs affecting veterans.

Finding 15 (Board of Trustees

Membership): Membership of the Board of Trustees for the Veterans’ Trust Fund of South Carolina is established under §25-21-20(A). The board is composed of the following eleven (11) voting members who are appointed by the Governor with the advice and consent of the Senate:

- seven (7) at-large;
- two (2) representing Veterans’ Service Organizations;
- two (2) representing County Veterans’ Affairs Offices; and
- the Secretary of Veterans’ Affairs serving as executive director and ex-officio.

Board of Trustees for the Veterans' Trust Fund of South Carolina			
Seat	Member	County	Appt. Year
At-Large	DF	Anderson	2022
At-Large	ND	Spartanburg	2022
At-Large	NM	Beaufort	2022
At-Large	SJ	Charleston	2022
At-Large	SP	Charleston	2022
At-Large	NW	Richland	2022
At-Large	AS	Richland	2022
VSO	MP	York	2022
VSO	JH	Lexington	2022
VSO	DE	Anderson	2014
CVAO	Vacant	N/A	N/A
CVAO	Vacant	N/A	N/A
Ex-Officio	Secretary	N/A	N/A

Figure 5 - Veterans' Trust Fund Board, Source: Department of Veterans' Affairs

The 7 at-large members serve an initial appointment of four years while the

remaining voting members serve an initial term of two years, becoming four years after the first appointment cycle. This staggers the board terms so that at no point will all the board seats be subject to either reappointment or turnover.

§25-21-20(A) also stipulates that no appointed member may reside in the same county and that at least half of the membership be comprised of veterans. The purpose of this is to ensure that the board is more representative of the state as a whole and to give veterans a strong voice in the decision-making process.

According to the SC Secretary of State’s Office and confirmed by the Department, Figure 5 shows more than one issue with the current sitting members of the board.

First, there are three individuals currently serving in two statutorily prescribed seats representing Veterans Service Organizations (VSO). Examples of VSOs include the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and the Military Officers Association of America. One of these individuals has continued to serve in holdover status since being appointed in 2014, which violates the provision in §25-21-20(B) prohibiting members from serving in holdover status for more than 180 days.

Second, there are three examples of current board members residing in the same county. These include DF and DE from Anderson County, SJ and SP from Charleston County, and NW and AS from Richland County. As previously stated, §25-21-20(A) prohibits more than one voting board member from residing in the same county.

Third, Act 58 of 2023 modified the terms of board membership including the staggering of board seat appointment dates. Two of the

voting members – both representing Veterans Service Organizations – were appointed in 2022. These seats, under the provisions of Act 58, should have been up for reappointment in 2024, but they also continue to serve in holdover status beyond the 180-day statutory limit.

Recommendation 15 (Board of Trustees Membership): The Governor should immediately resolve the board membership issues to bring the board into compliance with state law. If the General Assembly were to desire a different board constitution, then modifying the residential statute would preserve the desire to have fresh membership over time while giving the Governor flexibility to appoint well-qualified members of the public who can help the board achieve its mission.

Finding 16 (Board of Trustees Vacancies): As Figure 5 shows, there are currently two vacancies on the board, both representing County Veterans’ Affairs Officers (CVAOs). CVAOs serve an important role and have an active and vibrant association, supporting its members and advising the Secretary on various issues. With 46 officers statewide, the Governor has a sufficient pool to choose from, many, no doubt, willing and able to serve.

Recommendation 16 (Board of Trustees Vacancies): The Governor should work closely with the Secretary of Veterans’ Affairs and the South Carolina Association of County Veterans Affairs Officers to identify and recruit two volunteers to serve on the board.

Finding 17 (Rural Representation): §25-21-20(A) requires that at least 3 of the 7 at-large members be from rural counties as

determined by the U.S. Census Bureau. The problem is that the U.S. Census Bureau doesn’t appear to designate specific counties as urban or rural; rather, it identifies urban and rural areas, regardless of county borders. In fact, there is a wide range of definitions used when attempting to determine whether a county is considered urban or rural.

Most sources, however, would not define Charleston, Lexington, Richland, or York Counties as being rural. This would mean that, because of the current makeup of the board, at least one if not both of the CVAO seats would need to be filled by an officer representing a “rural” county.

Recommendation 17 (Rural Representation): The General Assembly should consider amending §25-21-20(A) to either repeal the rural requirement or to designate a more specific and accurate model for differentiating urban and rural counties. One model for consideration is that which is used by the Department of Revenue, which categorizes counties into four tiers based on unemployment rates and per capita income pursuant to §12-6-3360(B).

Finding 18 (Responsiveness to Issues Raised): All the issues raised in Findings 15 through 17 were shared with the Governor’s Office by Senate staff on April 16, 2024. More than a year later, the issues have largely gone unresolved.

Recommendation 18 (Responsiveness to Issues Raised): The Governor should act immediately to resolve the board membership issues and conduct a thorough assessment of the boards and commissions appointment process within his office to determine if procedural and administrative processes

can be improved to reduce the likelihood of similar cases in the future.

Legislative Modernization

Finding 19 (*Military Base Task Force*): Established by Executive Order in 2011 and codified in 2019, the Military Base Task Force was created to address a challenge that has become less pressing over time. In the early 2000s, the closure of military installations under the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process was a significant concern. Today, however, such closures are unlikely.

The current focus has shifted to strengthening the state's role in national security. This involves preparing South Carolina's military and civilian infrastructure for potential future global conflicts, where efforts to disrupt U.S. military operations from the state are anticipated.

Recommendation 19 (*Military Base Task Force*): **The General Assembly should consider adopting S.89 of 2025, which updates the name to the SC Military Affairs Advisory Council, adds the Secretary of Veterans' Affairs to the policy advisory process, and incorporates the area adjacent to Fort Eisenhower for inclusion given their significant military presence in South Carolina.**

Finding 20 (*Prisoner of War Commission*): Pursuant to §25-19-10, the department is tasked with providing staff support to the Prisoner of War Commission. However, the commission has not met since the department was established and currently appears to have no active members. As of November 9, 2021, only

eight former prisoners of war lived in South Carolina.

Recommendation 20 (*Prisoner of War Commission*): **The General Assembly should consider repealing §25-19-10, as it is no longer necessary.**

Finding 20 (*Confederate Pensions*): Chapter 13, Title 25 of the SC Code of Laws provides for Confederate Pensions, related definitions, and policies. This chapter has not been updated since at least 1962. Further, no known Civil War veterans or their widows survive in the United States, with the last remaining widow passing away in the State of Missouri at the age of 101 in 2020.

Recommendation 21 (*Confederate Pensions*): **The General Assembly should consider repealing Chapter 13, Title 25, as it is no longer necessary.**

Finding 22 (*Agent Orange Advisory Council*): Pursuant to §44-40-30, the department supports the South Carolina Agent Orange Advisory Council and collaborates with the Agent Orange Information and Assistance Program, now part of the Department of Public Health (formerly the Department of Health and Environmental Control). Many of the long-standing issues surrounding healthcare access for Vietnam Veterans exposed to Agent Orange have been significantly addressed by recent updates to federal benefits policy, particularly through the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson

Honoring our Promise to Address
Comprehensive Toxins Act (PACT Act of
2022).

**Recommendation 22 (*Agent Orange
Advisory Council*): The General
Assembly should consider repealing §44-
40-30, as it is no longer necessary.**

**Finding 23 (*Sale of Artificial
Flowers*):** §25-15-40 makes it a crime to
sell certain artificial flowers designated as
official flowers of World War veteran
organizations. It is a misdemeanor
punishable by a fine of up to \$100 or
imprisonment of up to thirty days if poppies
or forget-me-nots are sold or offered for sale
by a person other than at a regular place of
business or benefiting a World War veteran
organization or its auxiliary.

**Recommendation 23 (*Sale of
Artificial Flowers*): The General
Assembly should consider repealing §25-
15-40, as it is not reflective of modern
practices or principles.**



APPENDIX

Appendix 1 – DVA Organization



15 Apr 25

Office of the Secretary

Chief of Staff
Class: UA02-U

Executive Assistant
Class: AH20-07

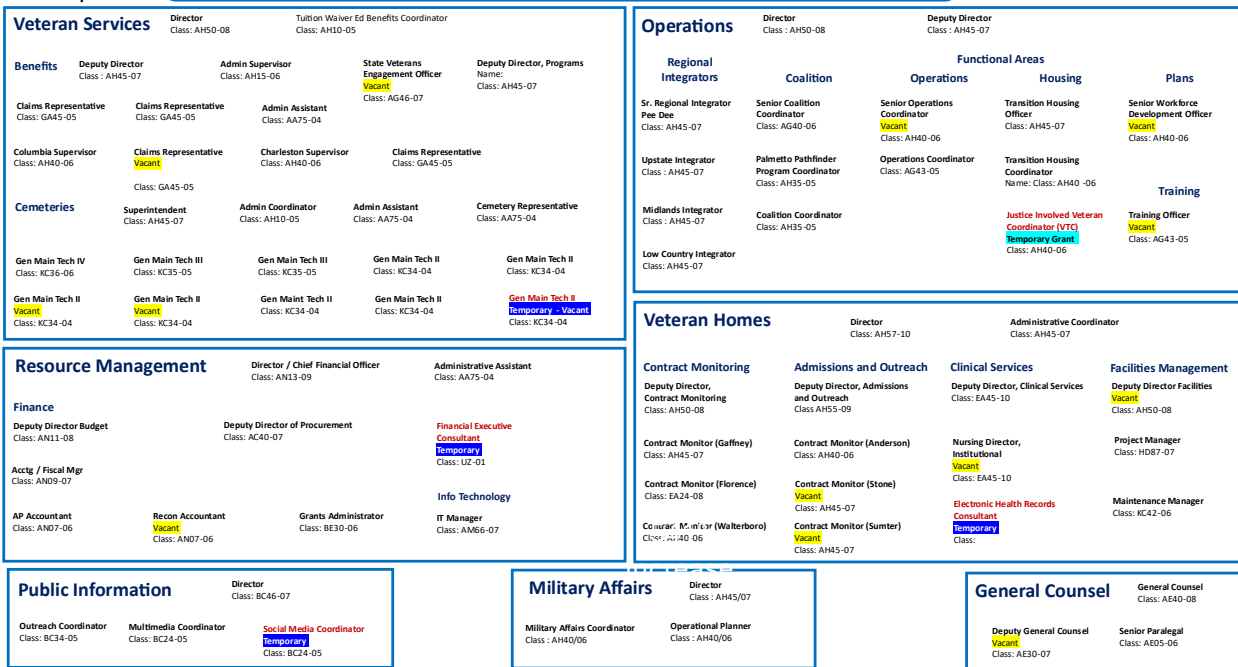
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
Class: UA01-U

Administrative Assistant
Class: AA75-04

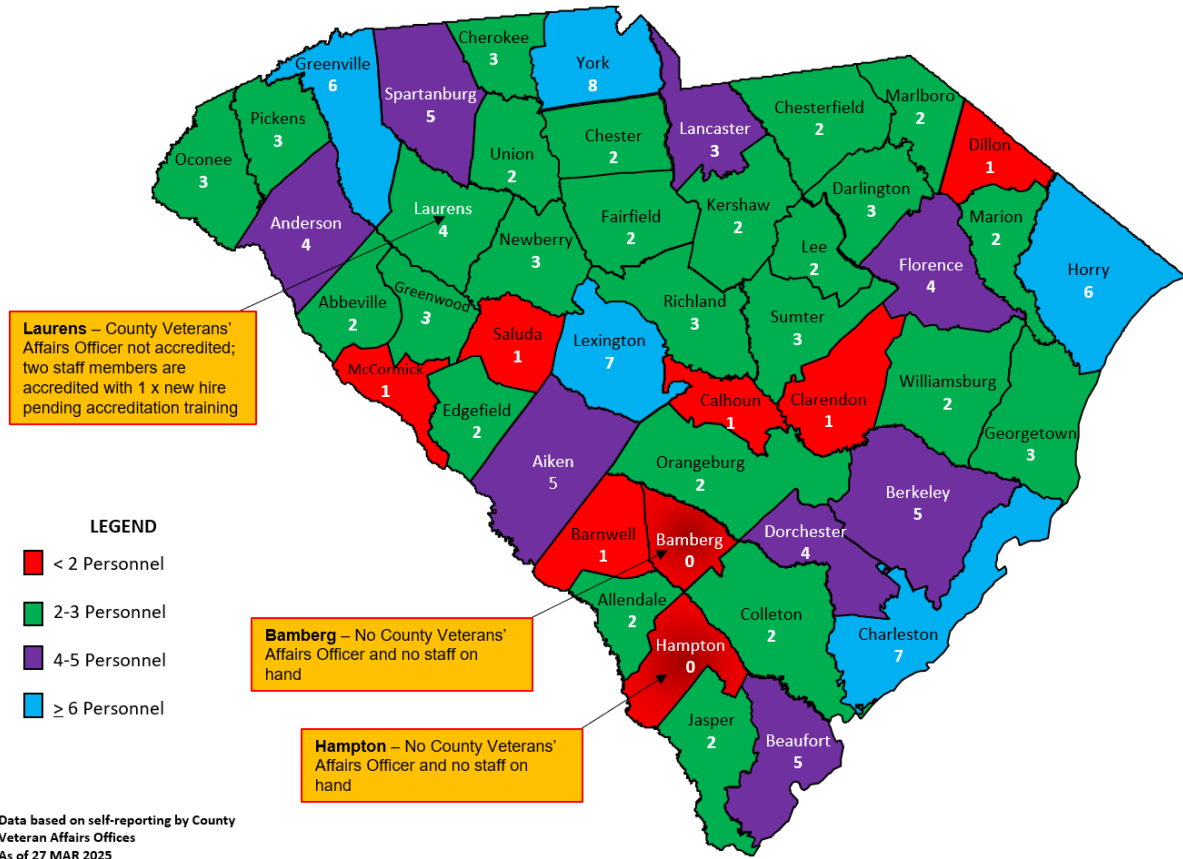
Government Affairs Director
Class: AB0-08

Positions in black text are active, with an FTE authorization
Positions in red are active, without an FTE authorization

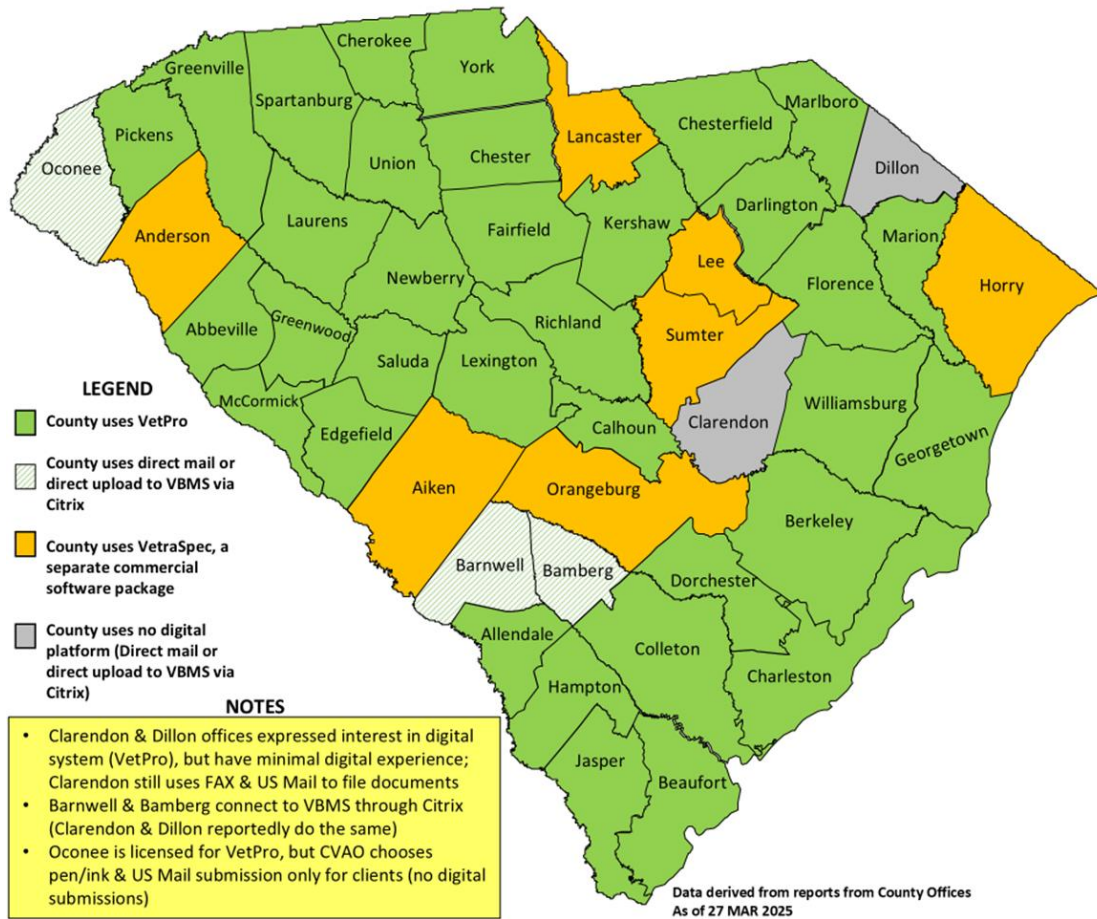
Vacant Temporary Grant-funded



Appendix 2 – County VAO Staffing



Appendix 3 – Use of VA Claims Systems

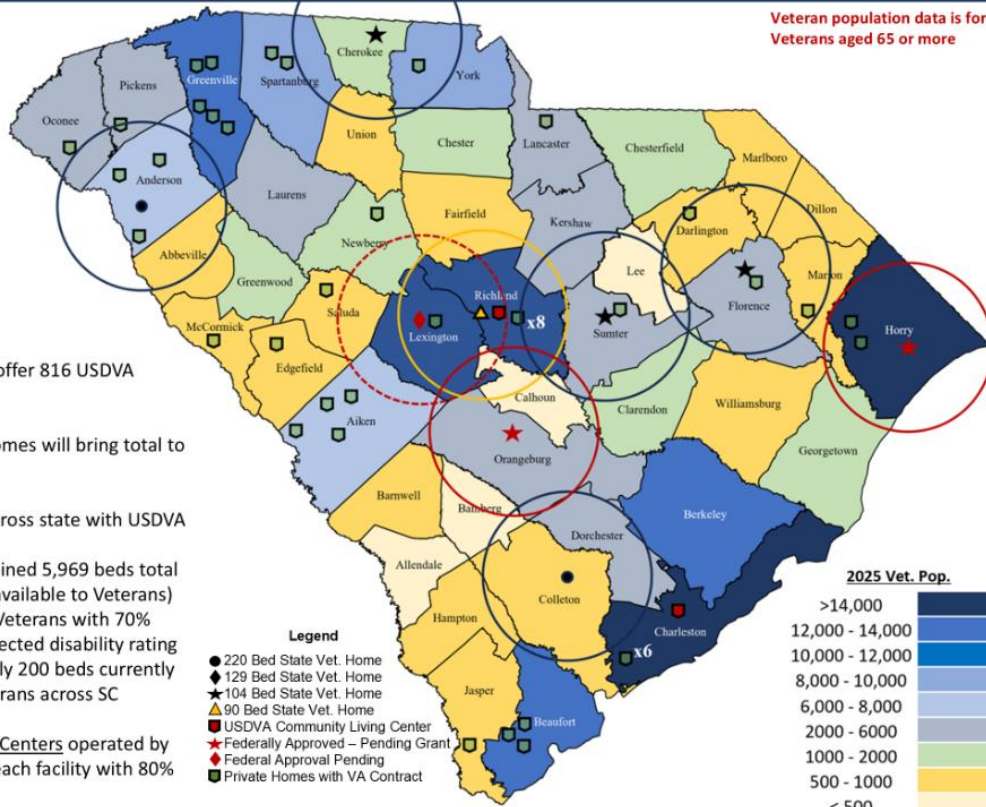


Appendix 4 – Veteran Population and Long-term Care



Veteran Population and Long-term Care, 2025

Veteran population data is for Veterans aged 65 or more



- 6 State-Run Homes offer 816 USDVA recognized beds
- (3 planned future homes will bring total to 1089 beds)
- 48 Private Homes across state with USDVA contract
 - Offer a combined 5,969 beds total (about 10% available to Veterans)
 - Available to Veterans with 70% service-connected disability rating
 - Approximately 200 beds currently filled by Veterans across SC
- 2 Community Living Centers operated by VAMCs; 20 Beds at each facility with 80% occupancy

Legend

- 220 Bed State Vet. Home
- ◆ 129 Bed State Vet. Home
- ★ 104 Bed State Vet. Home
- ▲ 90 Bed State Vet. Home
- USDVA Community Living Center
- ★ Federally Approved – Pending Grant
- ◆ Federal Approval Pending
- Private Homes with VA Contract



Dep. Director, Facilities Management, Dr. Robert Hoskins

*Based on US Census and USDVA Vet Pop 2023

Appendix 5 – Veteran Population Ranked by County

County	Vet Pop.	# CVAO Staff	Vet / CVAO Staff	Current Home
State	390,388	136	2870.50	Proposed Home
Richland	39,567	3	13189.00	
Charleston	31,614	7	4516.29	
Greenville	29,185	6	4864.17	
Beaufort	28,563	5	5712.60	
Horry	28,209	6	4701.50	
Berkeley	24,654	5	4930.80	
Lexington	22,838	7	3262.57	
Spartanburg	18,488	5	3697.60	
York	17,006	8	2125.75	
Dorchester	16,640	4	4160.00	
Aiken	13,996	5	2799.20	
Sumter	13,025	3	4341.67	
Anderson	12,973	4	3243.25	
Florence	8,435	4	2108.75	
Pickens	7,000	3	2333.33	
Kershaw	6,348	2	3174.00	
Lancaster	5,920	3	1973.33	
Oconee	5,502	3	1834.00	
Orangeburg	5,293	2	2646.50	
Georgetown	4,852	3	1617.33	
Laurens	4,232	4	1058.00	
Greenwood	3,771	3	1257.00	
Darlington	3,750	3	1250.00	
Cherokee	3,237	3	1079.00	
Colleton	3,158	2	1579.00	
Chesterfield	2,526	2	1263.00	
Newberry	2,305	3	768.33	
Clarendon	2,265	1	2265.00	
Chester	2,033	2	1016.50	
Jasper	2,025	2	1012.50	
Edgefield	1,843	2	921.50	
Marion	1,798	2	899.00	
Williamsburg	1,780	2	890.00	
Dillon	1,730	1	1730.00	
Abbeville	1,651	2	825.50	
Union	1,565	2	782.50	
Fairfield	1,427	2	713.50	
Marlboro	1,384	2	692.00	
Barnwell	1,212	1	1212.00	
Hampton	1,211	0	0.00	
Saluda	1,148	1	1148.00	
Lee	1,019	2	509.50	
Calhoun	1,012	1	1012.00	
McCormick	915	1	915.00	
Bamberg	863	0	0.00	
Allendale	420	2	210.00	



SOUTH CAROLINA SENATE LEGISLATIVE OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

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SenateOversight@scsenate.gov

