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**HOUSE WEEK IN REVIEW**

The House of Representatives met on Wednesday, April 8, and returned **H.3485** to the Senate with amendments that make **PROVISIONS FOR THE CONTINUED OPERATION OF STATE GOVERNMENT** in light of the current efforts taken to combat the 2019 Novel Coronavirus.

The legislation makes provisions for agencies and other state government functions to continue to receive recurring appropriations during the upcoming fiscal year that are set at the current funding levels laid out the Fiscal Year 2019-2020 state government budget should South Carolina reach the July 1 start of the next fiscal year without a Fiscal Year 2020-2021 state government budget in effect.

State boards, commissions, agencies, departments, and institutions of higher learning are authorized to receive funds directly from the federal government in response to the 2019 Novel Coronavirus to be expended for COVID-19 preparedness and response and in accordance with applicable federal laws and regulations.

The Executive Budget Office is directed to establish a separate Coronavirus Relief Fund to hold federal appropriations received by the Governor be expended only in response to the evolving public health emergency caused by COVID-19. While the General Assembly is not in session, the Governor is afforded certain authority to direct necessary expenditures from this account in consultation with the Joint Bond Review Committee.

$200 million is appropriated from the Fiscal Year 2018-2019 Contingency Reserve Fund with $20 million of this amount credited to the Disaster Trust Fund to be used for disaster relief assistance and $180 million credited to a newly-created COVID-19 Response Reserve account.

The Governor may direct the expenditure of funds from the COVID-19 Response Reserve account for expenditures necessary and appropriate for the health, safety, and welfare of the public in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Governor may direct reimbursement to local governmental entities and hospitals for expenses related to the state’s COVID-19 response, including emergency needs for hospitals to prevent closure or violation of bond covenants. Priority should be given to expenses related to the participation of first responders.

The Governor may also direct the expenditure of up to $15 million from the COVID-19 Response Reserve account to underwrite the cost for protection of the health and safety of voters, poll workers, and employees of a county election commission related to conducting the 2020 primary, runoff, and general elections.

The Superintendent of Education is afforded authority to exercise certain emergency powers in response to COVID-19 that address: waiving statutory requirements concerning testing, assessments, and reporting; allowing distance learning instruction to fulfill instructional day requirements; and providing maximum programmatic and financial flexibility. The State Superintendent of Education is authorized to promote and encourage districts to use summer reading camps and all other available tools to ensure appropriate time is spent by students to keep them on grade level and satisfy their learning needs.

State agencies and institutions of higher learning are afforded certain financial flexibility provisions during the state’s COVID-19 response that includes authority for implementing mandatory furloughs.

The provisions of Act 95 of 2019 are extended through Fiscal Year 2020-2021. The South Carolina Public Service Authority (“Santee Cooper”) may not take any action which would impair, hinder, or otherwise undermine from an economic, operational, feasibility, or any other perspective the ability of the General Assembly to complete its consideration regarding Santee Cooper’s status. Santee Cooper is prohibited from: (1) entering into any contracts with a duration of longer than one year, including contracts for the purchase of energy or generation capacity but not including those contracts necessary in the normal course of business; (2) entering into employment contracts with executive management with a duration longer than six months; and (3) beginning the construction, purchase, or lease of any new generation facility. An oversight process is establish for contracts that are longer than six months, but shorter than one year. The legislation includes a list of actions that Santee Cooper is specifically not prohibited from undertaking.

After sending this legislation to the Senate, the House of Representatives voted to adjourn to next meet at the call of the Speaker of the House.

**BILLS INTRODUCED IN THE**

**HOUSE THIS WEEK**

**MEDICAL, MILITARY, PUBLIC AND MUNICIPAL AFFAIRS**

**H.5452 *COVID-19 TESTING PRIORITIZATION FOR FIRST RESPONDERS WHO PRESENT***

***SYMPTOMS* Rep. Chumley**

In order to lessen the risk of health care associated infections and to maintain the integrity of the United States health care system, the Department of Health and Environmental Control shall require and ensure Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID 19) testing prioritization for first responders who present with symptoms of COVID 19.

**WAYS AND MEANS**

**H.5451 *PREPARED MEALS TAX EXEMPTIONS* Rep. Chumley**

This bill provides exemptions under the State Sales Tax the Local Hospitality Tax for prepared meals, prepared food, and beverages.

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