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BUDGET, TAXES, INSURANCE AND FINANCE

The Appropriations Bill Is Currently In Conference Committee.

State Government Budget Continuing Resolution (S. 769, R. 128)

S. 769, is the state government budget **continuing resolution (aka, "the CR")**. This joint resolution provides authority for the recurring expenses of state government to continue to be paid at the level of amounts set under the 2025-2026 Fiscal Year General Appropriations Act should the 2026-2027 Fiscal Year begin without a General Appropriations Act in effect. Provisions are made for meeting the state's debt obligations and making required contributions to reserve funds.

State Income Tax Reform and Elimination (H. 4216, A. 110)

H. 4216 (A. 110) allows for **state income tax reform and elimination**. The legislation establishes a tax reduction schedule that allows for the gradual lowering of the top marginal income tax rate and the ultimate elimination of South Carolina's income tax. Under the legislation, the state's current three-tiered system is collapsed into two income tax brackets, with the lower bracket of income up to $30,000 taxed at a rate of 1.99 per cent and the higher bracket for income above $30,000 taxed at a rate of 5.21 per cent, lowered from the current 6 per cent tax rate for the highest income level. The legislation establishes a schedule for further reducing the top marginal tax rate in years when revenue growth targets are met. In years when individual income tax revenue collections surpass a 5 per cent minimum threshold, a portion of the surplus revenue is devoted to tax relief until the top marginal rate reaches 1.99 per cent, achieving a flat rate. This single flat rate of 1.99 per cent is then subjected to the tax relief schedule so that it is lowered in years when the revenue targets are met until the rate reaches zero, eliminating the state's income tax altogether. Additionally, the legislation decouples South Carolina from federal income tax provisions so that state provisions would no longer mirror the exemptions and deductions found in the federal tax code. State income tax exemptions and credits are retained and can be used as the tax relief schedule is followed for phasing out state income taxes. The state's earned income tax credit is capped at $200. Provisions are made for a South Carolina Income Adjusted Deduction (SCIAD).

"Heirs' Property Tax Relief Act" (H. 4477, A. 149)

H. 4477 (A. 149), the **"Heirs' Property Tax Relief Act,"** revises property tax provisions for determining when an assessable transfer of interest occurs to exclude transfers made among family members to clear the title of heirs' property.

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Extension of Property Tax Exemptions and Special Assessment Rates Following a Homeowner's Death (H. 3841, A. 140)

H. 3841 (A. 140) authorizes the **extension of property tax exemptions and special assessment rates following a homeowner's death**. The legislation provides that when an owner receiving the special property tax assessment rate on a residence dies, the property shall continue to receive the special assessment rate until the decedent's estate is closed, upon the recording of a deed or deed of distribution out of the estate, or after December thirty-first of the year following the date of death, whichever occurs first. This extension does not apply if the property is rented for more than seventy-two days in or following the calendar year of the decedent's death or if a change of use occurs. The legislation provides a similar extension for any property tax exemption that the deceased owner had been receiving.

Municipal Tax Relief Act (S. 866, A. 228)

S. 866 (A. 228) is the **"Municipal Tax Relief Act,"** authorizes certain municipalities to impose up to a one percent sales tax to provide property tax relief to owner-occupied homes and to finance certain projects. The legislation specifies the manner in which the tax must be imposed and administered and the manner in which the property tax credit is calculated.

Taxation of Watercraft (H. 3858, A. 109)

H. 3858 (A. 109) revises the **taxation of watercraft** to simplify the process and lower tax bills, The legislation discontinues requirements for titling boat motors separately from boats, requiring a single title, instead, that is subject to a ten-dollar fee. The legislation establishes a property tax exemption for 42.8571 percent of the fair market value of watercraft. This exemption does not apply to houseboats or any watercraft classified as a primary or secondary residence. The legislation provides for the exemption to be phased in over the course of three years.

Taxation of Tobacco and Nicotine Products (H. 4303, A. 234)

H. 4303 (A. 234) addresses the **taxation of tobacco and nicotine products**, The legislation makes revisions to tax rates on products containing tobacco, by providing for **a tax upon all cigarettes for heating made of tobacco** or any substitute for tobacco of twenty-one and three hundred seventy-five thousandths mills on each cigarette. The legislation places upon all vapor products and electronic cigarettes, a tax of five cents per milliliter of consumable nicotine liquid solution or other material containing nicotine that is depleted as a vapor product is used.

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Education Capital Improvements Sales and Use Tax Criteria (H. 4589, A. 203)

H. 4589 (**A. 203)** addresses **Education Capital Improvements Sales and Use Tax criteria**. The legislation revises Education Capital Improvements Sales and Use Tax authority to allow the tax to be imposed by certain counties that do not meet the collection requirements.

Contingent Deferred Annuities (S. 857, A. 178)

S. 857 (**A. 178)** allows life insurers to sell **contingent deferred annuities** as a safety net should retirement account investments fail or pension accounts are otherwise depleted. The legislation revises insurance statutes to make provisions for a contingent deferred annuity, which is an annuity contract that establishes a life insurer's obligation to make periodic payments for the annuitant's lifetime at the time designated investments, which are not owned or held by the insurer, are depleted to a contractually defined amount due to contractually permitted withdrawals, market performance, fees, or other charges.

Regulatory Framework for Cryptocurrency Digital Assets (S. 163, A. 208)

S. 163 (**A. 208)** establishes a **regulatory framework for cryptocurrency and other digital assets**, The legislation establishes comprehensive provisions addressing cryptocurrency and blockchain protocol, including provisions relating to the acceptance of digital assets to purchase legal goods or services and provisions governing the conduct of digital asset mining.

Political Subdivision Retirees' Benefit Trust Allowed to Invest in Certain Corporate Debt (S. 420, A. 223)

S. 420 (**A. 223)** allows a qualified **retiree post-employment benefit trust maintained for the benefit of political subdivision retirees to invest in certain corporate debt**, The legislation provides that qualified retiree post-employment benefits trust may invest in notes, bonds, debentures, or other debt instruments issued by a United States corporation, provided that the instruments are rated investment grade by at least two in a list of nationally recognized statistical rating organizations.

Taxation of Commercial Aircraft (S. 436, A. 165)

S. 436 (**A. 165)** legislation addressing the **taxation of commercial aircraft**, The legislation revises property tax provisions for commercial aircraft to provide that, until June

30, 2027, fee in lieu of tax agreements may include commercial aircraft as part of a qualifying project in support of economic development, subject to all other statutory requirements for fee in lieu of tax agreements, as approved by the Coordinating Council for Economic Development.

Manufacturing Property Tax Exemptions (S. 439, A. 122)

S. 439 (**A. 122)** addresses **manufacturing property tax exemptions**, The legislation revises property tax exemption provisions to increase the maximum annual reimbursement amount for the exemption on certain manufacturing property allocated to the state's political subdivisions, including school districts, from $170 million to $300 million.

Tax Exemptions (H. 5093, A. 240)

H. 5093 (**A. 240)** establishes a sales tax exemption for amounts paid for contracts for services entered into by the State or political subdivisions for Emergency Services IP Network, also known as ESInet, in support of Next Generation 911 in South Carolina. The legislation provides an admissions tax exemption for admissions charged by local nonprofit chambers of commerce. The legislation revises the sales tax exemption on certain computer equipment to extend the exemption to certain related persons of the taxpayer.

Sales Tax Exemption for Internet Access Service Providers and Communications Service Providers (H. 5122, A. 242)

H. 5122 (A. 242) establishes a sales tax exemption for Internet access service providers and communications service providers, The legislation provides a sales tax exemption, capped at $10 million a year, for all supplies, technical equipment, machinery, and electricity sold to Internet access service providers and communications service providers, for use in producing, broadcasting, or distributing Internet access service, communications services, or any combination of such services. A data center may not claim or utilize these tax exemptions or refunds.

Sales Tax Exemption on Groceries (H. 5208, A. 217)

H. 5208 (A. 217) addresses the **application of the sales tax exemption on groceries**, and 217). The legislation revises provisions for the sales tax exemption on unprepared food that lawfully may be purchased with United States Department of Agriculture food coupons to specify that the exemption applies without regard to any demonstration project pursuant to United States Department of Agriculture regulations that would limit the use of food coupons on otherwise eligible items for a limited period of time.

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Insurance Funding Agreements (S. 619, A. 168)

S. 619 (**A. 168)** revises provisions of the "Insurers Rehabilitation and Liquidation Act" that establish the priority of distribution for claims by adding **insurance funding agreements** to the list.

Oversight of Charitable Solicitations (S. 715, A. 170)

S. 715 (**A. 170)** revises the **oversight of charitable solicitations** by streamlining the process for filing statements on charitable fundraising (with the Secretary of State) and enhancing transparency requirements for charitable solicitations. The legislation relieves more charitable fundraising efforts that are smaller in scale from the administrative burden of filing registration statements with the Secretary of State. Charitable organizations that solicit, collect, earn, or receive more than ten thousand dollars in a year, rather than the current yearly minimum of seven thousand five hundred dollars, are required to file registration statements with the Secretary of State and organizations whose yearly fundraising activities fall beneath this threshold amount are not required to undergo the filing process. Commercial co-venturers involved with charitable fundraising initiatives that exceed ten thousand dollars a year are subject to registration requirements, but fundraising that falls below this level does not require their registration with the Secretary of State. The legislation modifies the limits under which certain charitable organizations that have received a letter of tax exemption from the Internal Revenue Service are exempt from filing registration statements with the Secretary of State from twenty thousand dollars in charitable contributions to twenty-five thousand dollars in gross revenue. The legislation provides that, at the initial time of solicitation, a charitable organization, professional solicitor, commercial co-venturer, or other person engaging in the solicitation of charitable contributions must disclose the legal name and purpose of the charitable organization for which it is soliciting. The legislation prohibits commercial co-venturers from using registration with the Secretary of State as an endorsement by the state.

Consumer Home Loans (S. 780, A. 171)

S. 780 (A. 171) conforms South Carolina's **consumer home loans** statutes with federal provisions and practices. The legislation revises statutory definitions relating to high-cost and consumer home loans definitions to provide that the conventional mortgage rate means the average prime offer rate and to provide for how that average is calculated.

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Bridge Loans (S. 787, A. 172)

S. 787 (A. 172) authorizes **bridge loans**. The legislation provides authorization for a bridge loan, which is a consumer loan with a maturity of less than twelve months to facilitate the acquisition or construction of residential real property intended to be occupied by the borrower. All bridge loans shall be offered under the following terms and conditions: (1) the loan may be prepaid by the borrower at any time, without penalty; and (2) the balloon payment, upon coming due, is allowed to be extended one time at the borrower's request for a period of three months, provided that the borrower continues to make monthly installments set forth in the original loan agreement.

Limited Issuance of Insurance to a Non-Profit Organization (S. 830, A. 176)

S. 830 (A. 176) addresses **limited issuance of insurance to a non-profit organization**, The legislation revises provisions prohibiting insurers and agents from refusing to issue automobile insurance policies due to certain factors, by providing that nothing in these provisions prohibits any insurer from limiting the issuance of motor vehicle insurance policies only to members of a non-profit member organization.

CRIMINAL LAWS

Uniform Civil Remedies For Unauthorized Disclosure of Intimate Images Act (H. 3049, A. 131)

H. 3049 (A. 131) This legislation makes, what is typically referred to as **revenge porn,** distribution a basis for civil liability. This **"Uniform Civil Remedies for Unauthorized Disclosure of Intimate Images Act"** conforms with existing federal laws to set out definitions and create civil causes of action for anyone suffering harm from any intentional, or threatened, disclosure of falsely depicted --photograph, film, video recording, or still images generated via machine learning techniques or other computer generated methods --private, intimate images created without that subject's consent.

Civil actions can be sealed while pending, seek damages, recover all of any defendants profits from their activities, attorney fees, costs, injunctive and other extraordinary relief. In no event shall any plaintiff proven to have been harmed receive less than $10,000. Law enforcement officials, medical educators, attending physicians, or criminal investigators are exempt from this liability. Any action must be filed within three, or on specified cases four, years from any occurrence.

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Fargo's, Hyco's, Rico's, Coba's, Wick's, Mikka's, and Bumi's Law (H. 3034, A. 130)

H. 3034 (A. 130) now known as **"Fargo's, Hyco's, Rico's, Coba's, Wick's, Mikka's, and Bumi's Law"** denotes that harming or killing law enforcement dogs or horses acting in line with their duties—or while kenneled or stabled--now faces fines from $2,000 up to $20,000 and/or up to fifteen years in jail.

In addition to these penalties, felony violators can be required to perform one year of animal-related community service depending on the nature of the offense committed, and pay restitution including paying acquisition, training, and veterinary expenses for a killed service animal, and face other consequences for doing so. Violations also include anyone shooting into a vehicle while these service animals are inside it.

Self-defense can be claimed by anyone charged with this crime. In addition, bites by these animals must be documented in detail, and kept on file with the animal's law enforcement agency and our State Law Enforcement Division. A final feature of this legislation is establishing a $150,000 cap on claims against our State Accident Fund for law enforcement and other officers or first responders killed in the line of duty.

Discharging Firearms Into Dwellings and Other Conveyances (H. 3650, A. 138)

H. 3650 (A. 138) revises the criminal offense **of knowingly, intentionally, or with reckless disregard for the safety of human life discharging firearms at --or into-- homes,** other buildings, structures, enclosures, vehicles, aircraft, watercraft, or other conveyances, devices, or equipment, It is now on South Carolina's list of violent crimes. Violators face fines from $20,000 to $50,000 and jail time from up to 10 years in jail to up to 15 years in jail depending on the exact nature of the offense they have committed, and whether lasting bodily injury occurred as a result of these intentional actions.

Prostitution Prosecution Upgrades (S. 235, A. 192)

S. 235 (A. 192, R. 222) covers **grooming individuals for, soliciting for, or engaging in prostitution**. Sex workers, their recruiters, and their handlers, would face stiffer sentences for promoting these illicit services, or engaging customers to participate in paid sexual liaisons. The crime of prostitution would be more clearly defined as anyone engaging in sexual activity in exchange for money or for anything else of value.

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LAW ENFORCEMENT

Gold Shield Day (S. 868, A. 127)

S. 868 (A 127) designates June first of each year as **"Gold Shield Day"** in honor of first responders who have been killed in the line of duty, as well as the surviving spouses and children.

Personal Automobile Insurance Policies of First Responders (H. 3259, A. 133)

H. 3259, legislation addressing **personal automobile insurance policies of first responders**, and 133). This legislation provides that, in determining the premium rates for a personal automobile insurance policy of a law enforcement officer, firefighter, paramedic, or emergency medical technician, it is unlawful to consider the work-related driving records of the first responders if they are found to be noncontributing on a collision report or are involved in a collision when responding to an emergency call. The provision applies to volunteer first responders and first responders employed by local, state, or federal governments.

JUDICIAL, COURT AND LEGAL MATTERS

Judicial Salaries (S. 1005, A. 182)

S. 1005, legislation adjusting **judicial salaries**, and 182). The legislation provides that judges of the family court shall receive a salary in an amount equal to ninety-five percent of the salary fixed for Associate Justices of the Supreme Court, setting family court judges at the same salary level as the state's circuit court judges.

Annual Judicial Election Joint Session Dates (S. 336, A. 95)

Annual judicial election joint session dates (S. 336, A. 95) saves the necessity of having to enact annual Concurrent Resolutions for holding Joint Sessions for judicial elections. This legislation sets the first Wednesday in March of each year as the Joint Session date for conducting these judicial elections in the House Chamber. The Judicial Merit Selection Commission would also be required to release its formal report on judicial candidates twenty-three days prior to this annual judicial elections Joint Session.

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Additional Resident Circuit and Family Court Judges (H. 4805, A. 154)

H. 4805 (A. 154) converts existing at-large **circuit court seats to resident seats** in the First, Third, Fifth, Sixth, Eighth, Tenth, and Fifteenth Judicial Circuits. Note that a resident circuit judge from Kershaw County and another in Oconee County is required by this legislation.

Housing Authority Representatives in Magistrate Courts (H. 3335, A. 233)

H. 3335 (A. 233) allows **housing authority representatives to appear in magistrates court**. In addition to corporations designating a person who may appear on their behalf in magistrate courts, housing authorities are now able to do so after a written designation of their employees or managers who are authorized to appear *pro se* in magistrates court.

Second Pretrial Intervention Participation Opportunities (H. 4720, A. 216)

Defendants accused of nonviolent crimes could apply for pretrial intervention program participation a second time in H. 4720 (**A. 216**) **.** Applicants have to have successfully completed their prior pretrial intervention [PTI] program participation at least twenty years prior to qualify for a second trip through this process. Circuit solicitors still retain their authority to decide whether these applicants will be admitted to PTI for a second time.

LAW AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Requirements for Flags Made in the United States (H. 3514, A. 114)

H. 3514, legislation establishing **requirements for flags made in the United States**, and 114). The legislation provides that a state department, agency, institution, or political subdivision of the state, including a school district, may not use public funds to purchase a flag of the United States of America or the State of South Carolina unless the flag has been one hundred percent manufactured in the United States from articles, materials, or supplies that have been grown or one hundred percent produced or manufactured in the United States. Those that have already purchased foreign-made flags are allowed to exhaust their existing supplies before complying with the requirements.

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Guarantee Banking Act (H. 5538, A. 257)

H. 5538 (A. 257), the **"Guarantee Banking Act,"** prohibits financial institutions from discriminating against someone based on: their speech, expression, opinions, association, or exercise of religion that is protected by the First Amendment to the United States Constitution, federal law, or the Constitution or laws of the state of South Carolina; their participation in a lawful economic activity; or, any animus towards a person based on these protected beliefs or activities. Should a financial institution decline to provide someone with full and equal access in the provision of covered financial services, the legislation establishes a protocol for the affected individual to request and obtain an explanatory statement from the financial institution that includes a description of the principal reason for the adverse action. A violation of the legislation is considered an unfair or deceptive act or practice and the State Attorney General or other competent official may pursue remedies as provided for by law.

US Constitutional Convention Commissioners Conduct (H. 3558, A. 247)

The House and Senate overrode the Governor's veto of **H. 3558 (A. 247**), which sets out the **qualifications**, appointment, oath, **and duties of commissioners** appointed to represent South Carolina at **any Article V Convention.**

They would undergo citizenship verifications, criminal background checks, personal finance checks, and employment history verifications, among other things. An advisory committee would provide oversight of, and advice to, commissioners on the proper conduct for discharging their duties. South Carolina's Attorney General would investigate any allegations of commissioner misconduct.

Commissioners would receive compensation based on a *pro rata* share of the annual salary paid to General Assembly members. In addition, they would be reimbursed for mileage, collect subsistence, and paid *per diem*.

As part of discharging their duties, these commissioners could not consider the 13th, 14th, 15th, 19th, 23rd, 24th, or 26th amendments to the US Constitution. Anyone attempting, or succeeding in, bribing, or otherwise attempting to influence commissioners would face fines of up to $1,000 and up to one year of jail time.

Balanced Budget Amendment US Constitutional Convention (H. 3007)

The General Assembly adopted Concurrent Resolution **H. 3007** on January 14, 2026**.** Under it, South Carolina filed a continuing application, under Article V of the United States Constitution **for a convention of the states** to be called only for imposing fiscal

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restraints **on** the federal government via **a balanced budget amendment** to the US Constitution.

The only exception to this requirement would be instances of national emergencies. The 13th, 14th, and 15th US Constitutional Amendments could not be part of these delegates' actions or considerations at this proposed convention. In addition, delegates' qualifications, compensation, reimbursements, and actions at such a convention would be as prescribed by the South Carolina General Assembly.

GENERAL GOVERNMENT

State Employee Paid Parental Leave (S. 11, A. 249)

S. 11 (**A. 249)** revises **state employee paid parental leave** provisions, and 249). The legislation specifies that paid parental leave applies to stillbirths. The legislation revises the definition of an eligible state employee under parental leave provisions to mean any person employed by any department, institution, commission, board, or any other unit of government of this State who occupies a position eligible to earn annual leave. This includes any person employed by a four-year or postgraduate institution of higher education under the control of the State or a technical college supported by and under the control of the State who occupies a position eligible to earn annual leave. The legislation increases state employee paid parental leave from two weeks to four weeks for an eligible parent who has not given birth.

Memorial and Monument Protection Revisions (S. 508, A. 224)

S. 508 (A. 224) updates memorial and monument protections under South Carolina law. Through revisions including, but not limited to, adding new definitions for affinity organizations, historic figures, and monument preservation organizations, which would be regulated by the Department of Archives and History, this legislation requires a Joint Resolution passed by the General Assembly before any projected monument, memorial, name plate, or other installation going back to our colonial wars, and also involving any armed conflict South Carolinians served in, could be moved or modified, with only limited exceptions being set out in it.

The Department of Archives and History is responsible for replacing any lost items as well as repairing any of these objects that are damaged.

In addition, affinity organizations would be declared to be proper parties for bringing civil actions against violators. Declaratory judgment actions are included in this right. Affinity organizations bringing declaratory judgment or other civil actions for court awards will be able to collect only their actual damages as restitution for costs to repair

these damages, along with their reasonable attorney fees and legal costs. However, before any such legal action can be filed, an affinity organization must give notice at least ninety days' notice of any issue it has identified to allow for a cure of the damage or destruction of any monument or memorial.

Enforcing these new restrictions will have to be done with respect to protecting freedom of speech and the press to peacefully assemble, to associate with others, as set out in our federal and state constitutions. In addition, it does not limit adding conforming names to monuments-- including, but not limited to, names of service members in the United States Armed Forces, National Guard, reserve components, law enforcement, firefighters, or first responders who are killed in action or die in the line of duty, were prisoners of war, are missing in action, or otherwise honored for their service-- set up to have that done from time to time, have so-called QR codes and other electronic formats to add relevant, non-editorial information to the monument or memorial. Note that monuments which have opportunities for the addition of names by their original design could have those names added without any violation occurring.

Extending the Legislative Session for the General Assembly to Adopt a State Government Budget (S. 238, A. 246)

S. 238, legislation revising the protocol for **extending the legislative session for the General Assembly to adopt a state government budget**, and legislators overrode the Governor's veto to allow the bill to become law (Act 246). The legislation provides that if the general appropriations bill or Capital Reserve Fund resolution is not completed by the deadline for sine die adjournment of five o'clock p.m. on the second Thursday in May, the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives may call their respective bodies into session at any time after the date of sine die adjournment and until the last day in June to complete those matters as well as legislation that has been assigned to conference committees.

Salaries of the Governor and Lieutenant Governor (H. 5018, A. 239)

H. 5018, legislation addressing the **salaries of the Governor and Lieutenant Governor**, and 239). The legislation provides that, beginning January 20, 2027, salaries for the Governor and Lieutenant Governor must be based on recommendations by the Agency Head Salary Commission to the General Assembly. The legislation directs the commission to authorize a study to be conducted every four years to recommend a salary range for the Governor and Lieutenant Governor based on their job duties and responsibilities as well as the pay of governors and lieutenant governors in other states.

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Compensation of Legislators (S. 933, A. 200)

+ addresses the **compensation of legislators**. The legislation provides that, beginning with the 128th General Assembly, members of the General Assembly shall annually receive as legislative compensation $15,000 at a daily renumeration rate and an in-district legislative service allowance of $32,500. The legislative compensation and the in-district legislative service allowance shall be adjusted biennially after elections for the House of Representatives by an amount equal to the increase of the consumer price index using the chained methodology during the two previous years not to exceed five percent. For the members of the 128th General Assembly, to be eligible to receive the increased compensation, as compared to the 126th General Assembly, a member must file a written statement accepting the increase with the Clerk of the House of Representatives or the Clerk of the Senate. A member who does not file a statement of acceptance remains entitled to receive compensation in the same amount as a member of the 126th General Assembly received.

Restoration of Legislative Expense Allowances (S. 779, R. 99)

S. 779 (R. 99), is a Joint Resolution restoring **legislative expense allowances**. The legislation provides that all members of the 126th South Carolina General Assembly receive a legislative expense allowance of $1,000 per month and makes the restoration of these allowances retroactive to the July 1, 2025, start of the fiscal year when the South Carolina Supreme Court suspended the provision in the General Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2025-2026 authorizing payment of the allowances that included an increase above the $1,000 monthly amount. For members who served in the General Assembly for only a portion of the affected timeframe, provisions are included to ensure that they are paid allowances for the months they served as legislators. A member who was convicted of, plead guilty, or plead nolo contendere to a felony is not entitled to receive a legislative expense allowance under the terms of the legislation.

Human Trafficking Awareness and Prevention Training (H. 4343, A. 106)

H. 4343 (A. 106) is an effort to equip healthcare professionals with providing support to victims, the Act adds a requirement that licensees complete a one-hour training course on **human trafficking awareness and prevention** as part of their licensing process. This education requirement shall be in collaboration with the Director of the South Carolina Human Trafficking Task Force and the State Task Force Healthcare Subcommittee. This requirement applies to licensed practical nurses, registered nurses, advanced practice registered nurses, and physicians practicing in emergency medicine, primary care, internal medicine, family medicine, pediatrics, obstetrics, gynecology, or serving as hospitalists. It also includes certified registered nurse anesthetists (CRNAs) and licensees

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working in public health clinics, emergency departments, urgent care centers, and community-based centers. All licensees must complete this training by January 1, 2028, and every six years thereafter. For individuals licensed before January 1, 2026, the course must be completed by the 2028 deadline. For those initially licensed on or after January 1, 2026, the course must be completed within two years of licensure and then every six years thereafter.

Coroners and the Disposition of Unidentified or Unclaimed Remains (H. 4188, A. 145)

H. 4188 (A. 145) deals with **coroners and the disposition of unidentified or unclaimed remains.** The legislation states that unclaimed or unidentified remains may be cremated thirty days from the date of death or date of discovery. A body is considered unidentifiable if the dead person's identity is unknown or cannot be established after all available methods have been exhausted. In addition, a body is unclaimed if a person cannot be located to take custody of the body or there is a person to take custody of the body but that person cannot or will not assume financial responsibility for disposition of the body.

Firefighters' Occupational Diseases under Workers' Compensation (H. 3163, A. 132)

H. 3163 (A. 132) addresses **firefighters' occupational diseases under Workers' Compensation**. The legislation includes stroke among occupational diseases compensable under Workers' Compensation and conditions presumed to have arisen out of and in the course of employment for firefighters. The legislation provides for more detailed presumption entitlement criteria to clarify that they include conditions developed while actively engaged in fighting a fire, a technical rescue incident, or a strenuous training exercise. Clerical, administrative, or sedentary activities are specifically excluded from the presumption.

Medical Fee Schedules Approved by the Workers' Compensation Commission (H. 3874, A. 185)

H. 3874 (A. 185) addresses **medical fee schedules approved by the Workers' Compensation Commission**. The legislation revises provisions relating to fees of attorneys and physicians and hospital charges approved by the Workers' Compensation Commission to provide for the commission to establish a medical fee schedule in consultation with a cost containment committee. In establishing the fee schedule, the commission must strive to assure the delivery of quality medical care in workers' compensation cases and access by injured workers to primary and specialist care while controlling prices and

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system costs. The legislation provides for the composition of the cost containment committee, requires public hearings and specifies factors that must be considered in the development of the medical fee schedule, and subjects the fee schedule to an annual review process.

South Carolina Rental Kart Age Act (S. 150, A. 163)

S. 150 (Act 163), the **"South Carolina Rental Kart Age Act,"** revises provisions within the South Carolina Amusement Rides Safety Code that govern the operation of rental karts, which have been referred to as super karts in statutory provisions. The legislation revises minimum age provisions for operators and safety requirements for these open-wheel motorsport vehicles, with or without gearbox or shifter capability, used for racing in excess of fifty miles per hour. In addition to those who are at least eighteen years old, the legislation also allows those who are at least fifteen years old and hold a valid driver's license or permit to operate rental karts so long as the vehicles operated by these younger drivers are equipped with an occupant restraint system and a rollover protection system. Rental karts may operate, but are not limited to operating, within the containment system of a defined track.

Transferring Ownership of National Guard Armories (H. 5537, R. 220)

H. 5537, legislation **transferring ownership of National Guard armories,** is a joint resolution directing the Department of Administration, the State Fiscal Accountability Authority, or the appropriate agency, to: transfer ownership of the National Guard Armory located at 1119 SC-34 in Dillon, South Carolina, to Dillon County; transfer ownership of the National Guard Armory located at 620 John G. Rose Drive in Timmonsville, South Carolina, to the City of Timmonsville; and, transfer ownership of the National Guard Armory located at 10233 Marlboro Avenue, Barnwell, South Carolina, to Barnwell County.

Poll Worker Pay (H. 3551, A. 183)

H. 3551 (A. 183) addresses **poll worker pay**. The legislation revises income tax provisions relating to the computation of South Carolina Gross Income to exclude certain amounts paid to managers and clerks of elections. The legislation also provides that certain amounts paid to managers and clerks of elections are not considered earnable compensation under South Carolina Retirement System provisions.

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Continuing Education Requirements for Funeral Professionals (S. 583, A. 112)

S. 583 (**A. 112)** addresses **continuing education requirements for funeral professionals**. The legislation revises continuing education requirements for licensees of the Board of Funeral Examiners by making provisions that the physical attendance of a licensee is required for two of the four hours of instruction. The remaining two hours may be satisfied through virtual, remote, correspondence, or other instructional formats. The physical attendance requirements do not, however, apply if there is a declaration of a pandemic or if a natural disaster has occurred.

South Carolina 211 Network (S. 697, A. 126)

S. 697 (A. 126) transfers to the Department of Consumer Affairs the **South Carolina 211 Network** which coordinates information and referral services provided through the use of the 2-1-1 dialing code that are intended to promote and provide access to health and human services and to aid in disaster response and recovery.

Insurance Adjuster Consumer Protection Provisions (S. 196, A. 209)

S. 196 (A. 209) establishes **insurance adjuster consumer protection provisions.** The legislation provides comprehensive revisions for the licensure and regulation of insurance adjusters and public insurance adjusters to protect policy holders from unscrupulous practices. The provisions are designed to put a stop to fraudulent and inflated claims that are particularly prevalent following natural disasters when catastrophic losses incentivize adjusters to inflate claim amounts.

Restructuring the Department of Consumer Affairs (S. 325, A. 221)

S. 325 (A. 221) restructures the Department of Consumer Affairs as a cabinet agency. The legislation establishes the Department of Consumer Affairs within the executive branch of government headed by an administrator who is appointed by the Governor upon the advice and consent of the Senate. The legislation eliminates the Commission on Consumer Affairs governing body.

Replacing Manufactured Homes (H. 5113, A. 241)

H. 5113 (A. 241) establishes provisions that prohibit local governments from preventing the continuance of lawful nonconforming use of property when a **preexisting manufactured home** is replaced with a manufactured home that is not more than five years old. The legislation allows a property owner whose manufactured home has been destroyed in a fire, tornado, or other disaster to replace that manufactured home despite

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any local ordinance which might, for instance, require site-built construction for a new structure on the property. If the property is in a designated flood zone and the replacement of a preexisting manufactured home occurs the replacement must meet current federal and local flood elevation standards and building codes for the flood zone in which the property is located, such applicable standards and codes must be actively enforced on all dwelling types. The legislation also makes revisions to the South Carolina Residential Improvement District Act to provide that a jurisdiction and authority of another government entity may create a district which includes a geographic area or areas within the jurisdiction and authority of another government entity and may exercise the powers and provisions of this chapter within such geographic area or areas with the consent, expressed by resolution, of the governing body of that other government entity.

Suspends Special Purpose Districts' 2027 Sunset Dates (H. 3731, A. 139)

H. 3731 (A. 139) suspends certain provisions of Act 201's (2024) special purpose districts' 2027 sunset dates. This legislation repeals Section 2 of Act 201 of 2024, removing the existing sunset date (which was June 30, 2027) for a special purpose district authority to own, dispose, acquire, purchase, hold, use, lease, convey, sell, transfer, or otherwise dispose of their property.

South Carolina Drone Regulation and Public Safety Act (H. 4679, A. 150)

H. 4679 (A. 150), is the "South Carolina Drone Regulation and Public Safety Act." The Act establishes guidelines for unmanned aircraft systems, (i.e., drone) operations statewide. Among other things, it sets out proposed definitions for critical infrastructure fenced facilities, unmanned aircraft vehicles, drones, commercial operators, recreational operators, controlled airspace, large live events, military installations, operating a drone, takeoff and landing sites, weaponize, and other relevant terms for setting out the duties of drone operators as well as the penalties violators would suffer for failing to properly operate these devices in these places and at these events.

Violators are subject to penalties ranging from up to thirty days in jail, or 1,000 in fines, to up to fifteen years in jail or fines of up to $50,000 depending upon the nature of their unlawful drone use. Law enforcement seizures of these devices would also be allowed in this current version. However, law enforcement officials, emergency responders, military personnel, government employees using these devices on official government business, utility providers and their agents providing essential services, FAA-authorized commercial drone operations, and state-approved research and agricultural uses are exempt from these prohibitions.

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Racing Facilities Noise (H. 4706, A. 238)

H. 4706 (A. 238) regards **racing facility noises**. Specified racing facilities cannot be sued or otherwise reported by surrounding landowners under its provisions. This protection is limited to a three-mile radius, and applies to landowners who bought their property after the facility was authorized or built.

These facilities have to make reasonable progress toward being built within two years after being permitted. In addition, law enforcement or government entities are still able to commence nuisance actions against these facilities.

Duties of the Register of Deeds (H. 5284, A. 218)

H. 5284 (A. 218) relates to the performance of the duties of a register of deeds, so as to include Abbeville county among the counties exempt from the requirement that these duties be performed by the clerk of court; and relating to counties where the county governing body appoints the register of deeds, so as to include Abbeville county.

GENERAL LAWS

Domestic Violence Incident Survivors as Protected Tenants (H. 3569, A. 184)

H. 3569 (A. 184) allows domestic violence incident survivors to be able to terminate their leases without penalty. They have to show a documented qualifying incident within 60 days of it before making a written request to end their lease agreement obligations. Co-tenants on any lease would remain obligated to pay any rent due. If protected tenants remain in the residence during the 60-day notice period, they will have to pay rent, but cannot be made responsible for any fees, penalties, or other payments in addition to the monthly rent for exercising their rights. No future landlord could use any tenants' protected designation to refuse to rent to them, or otherwise discriminate against them.

Billboard Structure Exemption from Contractor Requirements (H. 4730, A. 151)

H. 4730 (**A. 151)** provides a **billboard structure exemption from contractor requirements**. The legislation revises provisions exempting the installation, repair, or maintenance of signs and billboards from contractor provisions to specify that this exemption also applies to single pole billboard structures.

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Physical Fitness Service Contracts (H. 4635, A. 255)

H. 4635 (A. 255) The legislation allows fitness service providers to add electronic notification as a permitted method for notifying customers of the automatic renewal of fitness service contracts. The legislation updates that renewal notifications shall be provided no later than ten days before the expiration date of the initial contract date.

Mail Theft (S. 357, A. 121)

S. 357 (A. 121) sets out the **elements of a new state mail theft.** Depending on the nature and number of violations, as well as whether any attempt to defraud any addressee is involved, offenders face fines ranging from $5,000 to $10,000 or imprisonment from three to ten years in jail, or both.

Erasing Eviction Records (H. 4270, A. 214)

H. 4270 (A. 214) removes past evictions, or actions seeking evictions, of tenants. All eviction cases seven years or older must be purged from public view of any kind. Act 214 is effective January 1, 2027.

Check Fraud and Mistaken Identity Arrest Expungements (S. 428, A. 248)

The House and Senate overrode the Governor's veto of **S. 428 (A. 248), criminal convictions involving fraudulent checks qualifying for expungement.** As passed, these convictions would include multiple convictions within a three-year period for multiple bad checks being written, so their expungments would be available after ten years have passed since the writers' last conviction. It also would require the destruction of arrest records of anyone taken into custody in cases of mistaken identity.

Ejectment of Unlawful Occupants of Residential Dwellings or Recreational Vehicle Parks (H. 3387, A. 252)

H. 3387 (A. 252) the "**Ejectment of Unlawful Occupants of Residential Dwellings,"** extends additional rights to residential property **and recreational vehicle [RV] park owners** whose tenants, guests, or transient guest cause them any, of an assortment of listed, problems. Transient guests are defined as guests of the person who have rented an RV space.

It establishes an alternative remedy to removing anyone trespassing unlawfully occupying in a residential dwelling. It also sets out the authority of county sheriff department deputies to charge any squatters with trespass criminal offenses.

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Dwelling owners, their agents, or personal representatives, with buildings not open to the public, that are occupied without permission by anyone who is not a former tenant or family member are subject to this legislation. In addition, these buildings could not have been leased within the past three months, there is no pending litigation about that building, and if anyone present is there without any authority to be there, then they can be removed. Violators face up to five years in jail and/or fines of up to $5,000. Restraining orders could also be obtained.

It also grants immunity from civil liability for authorized law enforcement officials removing these unwanted interlopers. Dwelling owners also could seek reimbursement for any damages done to their dwellings, a $1,000 statutory award, and court costs.

Appeal of any order to vacate the premises would not stay its effect, and an appellant can file an affidavit, on a form with the information set out in this legislation, to pay rent to the owner during the pendency of any appeal to stay the execution of any ejectment order.

This legislation additionally covers recreational vehicle parks. Any guest in these parks who have illegal drugs, engage in disorderly conduct, damage the park or its facilities, violate posted rules, or fail to pay space rent fees, can be removed once owners show they have complied with all prerequisites to effect the removal of that park guest, their recreational vehicle, and any transient guests who may also be present.

ELECTIONS

Only A Citizen May Vote Constitutional Amendment (S. 582, A. 245)

S. 582 (A. 245), amends Section 4, Article II of the 1895 Constitution of South Carolina. This amendment, which did not require the Governor's signature, was prepared under the terms of General Assembly 2024 Joint Resolution S. 1126 (A. 227 of 2024) and was approved by voters in a 2024 referendum. It sets out that ***only*** **a United States and South Carolina citizen, who is properly registered to vote, can participate in elections held within South Carolina's borders**

Reforming Primary Protest and Local Government Election Procedures (H. 3556, A. 213)

H. 3556 (A. 213) updates primary protest and local government election procedures.

State executive committees will hear protests and contests in the case of partisan county officers, less than partisan county officers, and partisan municipal officers, within two weeks of these protests being filed.

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Municipal general elections will now be held in odd-numbered years on designated dates in April or November, with some exceptions. It also applies these provisions to municipal party primaries, conventions, and petition nominations. Municipal election contests have to be filed by noon on the Monday following the certification of election results. County board of voter registration and elections would conduct and certify election results in municipal elections for populations less than ten thousand citizens. City ordinances must now set out when successful candidates assume office, but that has to occur at least forty-eight hours after all votes are certified and no more than eighty days after that occurs. Only municipalities of ten thousand or more people can have a municipal election commission after January 1, 2027. Please see this Act to verify the effective dates for other changes to our state elections law.

State executive committees can now adopt resolutions at least sixty days prior to an election to require election protest or contest filers to post a bond with a surety for up to $750 to cover the costs of reviewing and hearing any protests. Successful election disputers and protesters whose complaints are accepted by our Supreme Court are allowed refunds of this payment. An appeals process for state executive committee decisions is now directly to our South Carolina Supreme Court.

General Election Candidacy Reforms (H. 3557, A. 137)

H. 3557 (A. 137) (effective January 1, 2027), **shortens candidate filing periods** by five days, **requires** all **candidates** from each political party in this state to **pay filing fees, and** authorizes political parties to **charge** up to **$100 certification fee** to be paid by their candidates. All candidates have to pay even if a primary is not conducted. The shortened filing period would be from March 16 to 25th [currently set by law to be March 30th]. It also changes the date for party pledges to be filed on specified forms to March 25th. Another feature is specific procedures required for reopening candidacies.

BUSINESS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

"State of South Carolina Small Business Tax Cut of 2026" (S. 688, A. 243)

S. 688 (**A. 243)** is the **"State of South Carolina Small Business Tax Cut of 2026."** This legislation establishes a property tax exemption for the first $10,000 of net depreciated value of business personal property owned by a small business. The property tax exemption applies to each of the state's independently owned and operated small businesses that employs fewer than one hundred full-time employees or has gross annual sales of less than ten million dollars. A taxpayer who submits a form, on an annual basis, to the Department of Revenue certifying that he has less than ten thousand dollars of net depreciated value of business personal property is not required to pay business

personal property taxes or file the pertinent tax returns. The legislation provides that all business personal property required to be returned for ad valorem taxation must be returned to the Department of Revenue, and that the property is subject to the tax imposed by the taxing jurisdiction in which the property is situated. The legislation revises provisions governing the license tax on corporations to provide that a corporation whose corporate headquarters is in South Carolina may exclude the first fifty million dollars of equity contributions from a qualifying source from its paid-in or capital surplus subject to the annual license fee. To qualify for this exclusion, the corporation must obtain certification from the South Carolina Research Authority that the exclusions result from equity contributions from a qualifying source, such as a venture capital fund, an angel investor, and a private investment firm that does not solicit capital from investors, excluding another qualifying entity or the general public, and meets one of the exemptions outlined in the Investment Company Act of 1940. Reporting and record keeping requirements are included for a corporation claiming this exclusion. The legislation also adjusts contributions and payments to the Unemployment Trust Fund and penalties for noncompliance. The legislation establishes new Unemployment Trust Fund solvency targets and provides for a solvency surcharge to be imposed on contributory employers in each year the Unemployment Trust Fund is solvent, but the trust fund reserve does not meet the fund solvency target.

Small Business Regulatory Freedom Act (H. 3021, A. 251)

H. 3021 (A. 251) is the **"Small Business Regulatory Freedom Act."** The legislation makes revisions to the administrative rule-making provisions under which state agencies promulgate regulations and submit them to the General Assembly for approval. A formal regulation review process is established, to be administered by the Legislative Audit Council, under which regulations will be reviewed on a rotating five- to eight-year cycle to determine whether they remain necessary, are consistent with statutory authority, and have been updated to reflect changes in law. The Legislative Audit Council is charged with providing an annual report to the General Assembly summarizing completed reviews and identifying regulations that it has determined to be obsolete or outside the scope of enabling statutory authority. The legislation provides for enhanced legislative review of regulations with an estimated economic impact of one million dollars or more over a five-year period. Such regulations must be approved by the Senate and the House of Representatives by a joint resolution before becoming effective. The legislation directs courts to interpret regulations based on the text of the document itself rather than deferring to an agency for interpretation. Additionally, the membership of the Small Business Regulatory Review Committee is expanded to provide additional representation for the agribusiness community.

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Renewable Natural Gas Tax Credits (S. 556, A. 225)

S. 556 (A. 225) provides for **renewable natural gas tax credits** The legislation establishes a tax credit against income taxes and/or license fees for twenty-five percent of the costs incurred by a taxpayer for the purchase and installation **of equipment** used to collect landfill gas and upgrade this biomethane to a quality similar to fossil natural gas suitable for commercial purposes. These renewable natural gas tax credits are set to expire in 2030.

Abandoned Buildings Revitalization Act Revisions (S. 853, A. 227)

S. 853 (A. 227) makes revisions to the **Abandoned Buildings Revitalization Act** to: clarify that the existence of an income-producing use prior to the period of abandonment is not a requirement for eligibility; clarify certain timing considerations related to the filing of a notice of intent to rehabilitate an abandoned building and to clarify that abandoned building tax credits may not serve as collateral for any debt; and, eliminate a requirement for certain certifications of state-owned abandoned building sites. The legislation also authorizes the Department of Revenue to hold off on granting final approval of certain applications for affordable housing tax credits in situations where a nonprofit housing corporation owns only a small percentage of the property.

"South Carolina-Bahamas Trade Commission" (H. 4476, A. 236)

H. 4476 (A. 236) establishes the **"South Carolina-Bahamas Trade Commission"** to advance bilateral trade and investment between South Carolina and The Bahamas.

Requirements for Buying American Iron and Steel (H. 4709, A. 256)

H. 4709 (**A. 256)** establishes **requirements for buying American iron and steel** for state and local government public works projects. The legislation provides that contracts for the purchase of materials for the construction of buildings, bridges, and other public works projects utilizing state funds must include in the contract a requirement that any iron or steel product permanently incorporated in the project be produced in the United States.

MILITARY AND VETERAN'S AFFAIRS

South Carolina Safeguarding American Veterans' Benefits Act (S. 695, A. 211)

S. 695 (A. 211) enacts the "South Carolina Safeguarding American Veterans' Benefits Act." The legislation is designed to protect veterans from excessive or unfair compensa-

tion practices by claims service providers and to ensure they receive responsible, qualified representation. Under the legislation, no person may charge an upfront or nonrefundable fee. Any person seeking compensation for advising, assisting, or consulting on a veterans' benefits matter must first enter into a written agreement, signed by both parties, that clearly outlines the terms of payment before any services are rendered. Compensation is limited to a one-time fee contingent upon an increase in benefits awarded and may not exceed either five times the monthly increase in benefits or $12,500, whichever is less. Additionally, any installment payment plan agreed to by the parties must be interest-free and may not extend beyond twelve months. The provisions do not apply to licensed attorneys handling VA medical lien matters; accredited representatives, agents, or attorneys recognized under federal regulations governing those who assist veterans in preparing, presenting, and prosecuting claims for Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits; or employees of South Carolina Veterans' Homes acting within the scope of their employment.

Guard, Militia, and Unorganized Militia Chaplain Communications Confidentiality (H. 3798, A. 104)

H. 3798 (A. 104) includes active and reserve **national and state guard, organized militia, and unorganized militia chaplains** under priest-penitent confidential communication legal protections. They have to be duly qualified by meeting Department of Defense standards. Also, they are required to be in uniform when serving. By doing so, their **communications with penitents** are now **considered privileged and confidential**. This privilege can be waived by penitents, or can be ordered to be inapplicable by a judge in certain circumstances, however.

Veterans Homes added to the List of Certificate of Need (CON) Exemptions (H. 4799, A. 153)

H. 4799 (A. 153) adds veterans homes owned or operated by the Department of Veterans' Affairs to the list of **Certificate of Need Exemptions**.

Residency Requirements Waived for Children of Retired Service Members and Honorably Discharged Veterans (H. 3453, A. 135)

H. 3453 (A. 135) waives residency requirements free tuition for children of **retired service members** and honorably discharged veterans who have been a resident of the state since birth.

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FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S ISSUES

Protection from Financial Exploitation for Seniors and Vulnerable Adults (S. 851, A. 226

S. 851 (A. 226) legislation to provide **protection from financial exploitation for seniors and vulnerable adults**. The legislation provides a procedure for establishing emergency contacts for those who are at least fifty-five years old or who are classified as vulnerable adults that may be used by banks and other financial institutions when it is suspected that these eligible adults are the targets of financial exploitation. The procedure includes authority for financial institutions to decline or place a hold on suspicious transactions, notify trusted contacts on the account holder's list, and report suspected exploitation to the proper authorities.

Homicide by Child Abuse Age Modifications (S. 405, A. 101)

S. 405 (A. 101) modifies the age associated with homicide by child abuse. The Act addresses an identified prosecutable age gap under our existing state criminal law by raising the maximum age of minors considered to have been killed by child abuse from eleven years old up to less than sixteen years old. This legislation allows these charges to be made when an offense is committed against a special needs person, with intellectual or related disabilities, up to their eighteenth birthday.

Stop Harm From Addictive Social Media Act (SHASM) (H. 4591, A. 237)

H. 4591 (A. 237), the **"Stop Harm from Addictive Social Media (SHASM) Act"** represents a comprehensive legislative effort that, among other things, requires covered social media platforms earning one billion dollars or more in annual advertising revenue to meet several requirements. They include using reasonable means to estimate, and verify, the age of certain South Carolina account holders, create default account settings for certain users, and require parental consent -and parental privacy settings-before children (i.e., anyone sixteen years old or younger) will be able use their product or access their content. Their default treatment of accounts is to treat these account holders as children.

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It excludes certain other platforms where a sender emails, videoconferences, direct messages, shares photographs, videos or other messages to specified recipients, and does not publish them publicly, or share them with other users not specifically identified by those senders as recipients.

The personal information protected under this legislative effort is as described in the federal Children's Online Privacy Protection Act, 15 U.S.C. Section 6501 and federal regulation 16 C.F.R. Part 312.4.

Violators would not face liability to children or their parents if they use reasonable means to correct their violations. In other instances, these platforms could face investigations and actions by the Attorney General, $10,000 civil penalties, or pay actual damages, whichever amount proves to be higher, and are also subject to the remedies under the Unfair Trade Practices Act.

The Act becomes effective on January 1, 2027.

Juvenile Record Sharing with School Principals (H. 5120, A. 205)

H. 5120 (A. 205) clarifies when **juvenile case dispositions involving certain offenses must be provided to school principals**. These cases include violent crimes, weapon offenses, high and aggravated assaults and batteries committee on school grounds or at school events, assaults on school employees and volunteers, and distributing or trafficking unlawful drugs. Schools are required to develop policies for handling this information. The South Carolins State Law Enforcement Division [SLED] is also responsible for overseeing the maintenance and distribution of this information to the correct parties. Fingerprint protocols are also contained in the provisions of this Act.

Fingerprint-Based Criminal Background Check in SC Department of Social Services [SC DSS] Cases (S. 996, A. 232)

S. 996 (A. 232) clarifies that **all volunteers or employees of contractors or subcontractors** who contract to deliver child welfare services or programs in **SC DSS cases must undergo fingerprint-based criminal background checks**.

Tougher Sentences For Sexually Exploiting Minors (H. 4804, A. 189)

H. 4804 (A. 189) increases minimum criminal penalties for sexual exploitation of a minor . These increases range in First Degree offenses, whose elements are specified in this Act, from five years to twenty years imprisonment. For defined Second Degree sexual exploitation of a minor offenses, these penalties have been increased to three years to

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ten years in jail. For defined Third Degree sexual exploitation of a minor offenses, penalties are based on the number of images violators possessed. These penalties range from up to ten years in jail if there are one to twenty-five images, to one to ten years if there are twenty-six to two hundred fifty images, and a penalty of two to ten years if there are more than two hundred fifty images. Minors committing these offenses will have their misdemeanor charges heard in Family Court.

Those convicted under this crime are required to register as sex offenders, and would not be eligible for parole until they have served the minimum amount of their jail time.

Any violator who was previously convicted of a criminal offense that required registration on the state sex offender registry will have to be sentenced to an additional five years jail time.

Legal Pinball Machine Playing by Minors (H. 3020, A. 212)

H. 3020 (A. 212) allows minors to play pinball by repealing antiquated South Carolina laws prohibiting them from doing so.

EDUCATION

Uniform System of Compulsory School Attendance (H. 4257, A. 100)

H. 4257 (A. 100) requires school districts to uniformly apply the approval of absences for the purpose of participation in interscholastic activities. Approval may not depend on whether the activity is sanctioned by the South Carolina High School League or any other entity that governs interscholastic activities and competitions. The Act mirrors legislation adopted in Act 6 of 2025 which deals with FFA, 4-H, and similar programs. Districts policies must ensure that students who participate in an interscholastic activity are in good academic standing and may not miss more than ten school days per school year.

Evaluate Public School Students for Health, Behavioral Health, or Therapeutic Needs (H. 3974, A. 186)

H. 3974 (A. 186) allows private providers who deliver ABA therapy to enter public schools during the school day for the purpose of assisting students with an autism diagnosis. While many districts already allow outside providers onto campus to provide medically necessary services, some prohibit private providers from entering schools. The bill stops such outright bans; however, requests for services are not to be automatically granted. Districts must make case-by-case determinations as established in the act. Services must be medically necessary during school hours in the school and cannot be

administered solely for the convenience or personal preference of the family or provider. The act also sets guidelines districts must use when evaluating requests for services under the Americans with Disabilities Act. The State Board of Education is to establish a model policy that districts must adopt, and the Department is to develop and provide training for districts regarding private services in school settings. The policy must set parameters for services and require districts to have a written agreement with providers.

Omnibus Education General Requirements (H. 4738, A. 188)

H. 4738 (A. 188) revises and updates code sections applicable to the Commission on Higher Education (CHE). Among the items included in the Act is the requirement that the State Department of Education become the agency responsible for hosting and updating the South Carolain Educator Preparation Report Card, with the assistance of CHE.

The Act further provides that annual net lottery proceeds and investment earnings must be used and carried forward to ensure that all LIFE, Palmetto Fellows, and HOPE Scholarships are fully funded on an annual basis. CHE is removed from the review and approval process when it comes to the performance appraisal procedure for teaching and research faculty, academic administrators, and all other faculty at post-secondary institutions.

Finally, the Act modifies the disbursement of higher education scholarship grants from CHE to Tuition Grants for the purpose of providing need-based scholarships and grants to students attending independent colleges and universities in the state.

Applied Baccalaureate in Culinary Arts Management Degree (S. 863, A. 179)

S. 863 (A. 179) provides for an **Applied Baccalaureate in Culinary Arts Management Degree** from institutions that are part of the State Technical and Comprehensive Education System. These degree programs are only allowed if state funds are not appropriated to fund the programs.

Safeguarding American Families Everywhere (SAFE) Act (S. 585, A. 125)

S. 585 (A. 125), "**Safeguarding American Families Everywhere (SAFE) Act**," allows a person, or the parent or guardian of someone, with a listed conditions to *voluntarily* place a "SAFE" notation on their vehicle registration to alert law enforcement of the condition before approaching the vehicle during a traffic stop. The list of conditions includes autism, PTSD, and hard of hearing.

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Northeastern Technical College Area Commission (H. 5064, A. 156

H. 5064 (A. 156) creates the **Northeastern Technical College Area Commission**, to provide that the representation from local industry may include certain ex officio members.

Name, Image, and Likeness (H. 4902, A. 119)

H. 4902 (A. 119) relates to an exemption of an intercollegiate athlete's **Name, Image, and Likeness** compensation contract documentation maintained by public institutions of higher learning from public disclosure under the South Carolina **Freedom of Information Act**.

Higher Education Comprehensive Safety Training Program (H. 5205, A. 161)

H. 5205 (A. 161) establishes comprehensive campus safety training, reporting, and transparency requirements for state institutions of higher learning. Public colleges, universities, and technical colleges are to develop and implement a comprehensive campus safety training program for all new students beginning with the 2027-2028 school year.

The Act enumerates the format and material that must be incorporated in the training and requires the institutions to report on the training program, which must be publicly available. Institutions are to submit their annual security report (required by federal law) to the Commission on Higher Education (CHE) or the South Carolina Technical College System (SCTCS) as well as the State Law Enforcement Division (SLED) by specified dates. Each institution, CHE, SCTCS, and SLED must make the reports available on their websites and provide a summary to the General Assembly by December first of each year.

All public and private institutions of higher education in the state to make opioid and fentanyl prevention education and awareness information available to students beginning with the 2027-2028 school year. Institutions of higher education may possess, store, and maintain opioid overdose reversal medication for the purposes of responding to a suspected overdose on institution-owned property, and must provide training on the administration of overdose reversal medication to residence hall staff.

Official Choral Anthem (H. 3949, A. 144)

H. 3949 (A. 144) names *Dum spiro* spero, translated as "While I Breathe, I Hope," as the official choral anthem of the State.

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Robert Smalls Monument (H. 4962)

H. 4962, a Concurrent Resolution, approves the proposed design and location for the Robert Smalls Monument, as required by Act 183 of 2024, which was approved by the State House Committee.

School Guards Requirements (S. 711, A. 169)

S. 711 (Act 169) allows school districts to hire individuals to direct traffic during school drop-off and pick-up hours. These individuals are separate from volunteer crossing guards. Those hired to direct traffic must receive training from the South Carolina Criminal Justice Academy.

Requirements for Public School Grading Practices (H. 5073, A. 204)

H. 5073 (A. 204) addresses grading practices in public schools to include charters and provides that grading must "promote college and career readiness by measuring student mastery of rigorous material as demonstrated through completed assignments and assessments." Schools may not use a grading system that assigns a minimum grade exceeding the student's actual performance on completed assignments. In other words, schools may no longer use "grading floors." SDE must withhold ten percent of a district's state funding if a school violates this section.

The act addresses credit and content recovery courses. To participate in recovery, students must submit all required assignments pursuant to district policies. Districts may use a student's score on an administered formative assessment to calculate a course grade, but only if the test was developed by, or directly accessible to, the teacher before it was administered, and that it measures material already taught.

Prior to next school year, the State Board of Education must establish a task force to evaluate revisions to the Uniform Grading Policy (UGP). Recommendations must include the use of term weighting in calculating final grades, the method of awarding quality points on the basis of unique numeric final course averages when calculating grade point averages, and the use of a 100-point grading scale.

The task force must report its findings to the State Board of Education before June 1, 2027. The State Board shall then adopt, and school districts shall implement updates to the UGP by no later than the 2028-2029 School Year. The UGP must be reviewed every seven years.

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An Official State Song (H. 5168, A. 206)

H. 5168 (A. 206) establishes *Carolina When I Die* as an official state song. South Carolina has two other songs that are named "Official State Songs."

Religious Liberty Day (S. 1038, A. 201)

S. 1038 (A. 201) designates the first day of March of each year as "Religious Liberty Day" in South Carolina.

Model Code of Ethics for Local School Board Members (S. 70, A. 191)

S. 70 (A. 191) creates the School Board Member Code of Ethics that applies to anyone, whether by election or appointment, serving on a local board. This includes charter school and charter authorizer boards, but not members of the State Board. The State Board is to adopt a model code of ethics, and local boards are to adopt a code that includes, at a minimum, the model code. The code adopted by the State Board must be consistent with standards established by the South Carolina Ethics Commission.

The bill addresses board training by requiring SDE to adopt a required training program for local board members who have been re-elected or reappointed. The program is to be delivered by the department or designee. Instead of requiring training within one year of taking office, this is reduced to nine months and applies to both new and reelected or reappointed members. Currently, training must include topics on policy development, personnel, superintendent and board relations, instructional programs, district finance, school law, ethics, and community development. The Act adds nepotism and conflicts of interest as topics.

SDE must offer the training, and it must be completed, within nine months after the election, reelection, appointment, or reappointment of the member. The State Board is to keep a record of trustees who complete the training. The Governor is to remove trustees who are non-compliant with the training requirements. The Act strikes language that exempts members who have been in office continuously since July 1, 1997, and removes the requirement that SDE must reimburse school districts for conducting orientations.

School Mapping Data Program (H. 5179, A. 160)

H. 5179 (A. 160) establishes the School Mapping Data Program which is designed to facilitate and assist public safety agencies when responding to emergencies at institutions of higher learning.

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Subject to funding, the State Law Enforcement Division (SLED) is to contract with a vendor whose job is to provide mapping data for each institution of higher learning. The data must be provided to the institution, local law enforcement agencies, and other public safety agencies for use in response to emergencies and must be compatible with software used by the public safety agencies. Each public institution of higher learning is to review all campus facilities and infrastructure every two years and report any material changes to SLED and the vendor. Mapping data must be regarded as confidential.

In any given fiscal year, and subject to available funding after the initial contract period, SLED is responsible for the annual cost of maintenance, which may not exceed fifteen percent of the initial cost of the mapping. Every public institution of higher learning must establish and maintain a secure electronic reporting system for each employee to annually disclose any business with which they are associated and require the institution to adopt policies and procedures necessary to implement this system.

Charter Schools (S. 454, A. 123)

S. 454 (A. 123) is the Charter School Accountability Act. It provides greater transparency and accountability for schools and their authorizers with significantly increased responsibility for oversight given to the State Department of Education (SDE).

SCHOOL TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY:

- Charter schools must elect boards in a timely manner or face closure.
- Registers for checks and credit cards must be posted online like traditional schools.
- Child abuse and criminal record checks must be obtained for anyone interacting with students at schools.
- Conflicts of interest are removed.
- A school leader must be on campus when school is in session.
- Clearer procedures for charter school board elections are established.

AUTHORIZER TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY:

- Authorizers must review the admission policies of schools.
- Authorizers are specifically subject to the Freedom of Information Act.

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- Authorizers may not contract with schools for services over which they have oversight and may not influence the selection of vendors. Authorizers may not receive compensation from their schools.

- Management contracts cannot allow profit sharing with the authorizer.

- SDE is to approve applications for higher education institutions to become authorizers.

- Authorizers must post their budgets and the fees charged to schools.

- Authorizers are specifically covered by the public employee ethics and accountability requirements.

- Authorizers are subject to the State Procurement Code and audits by the Legislature Audit Council.

- The Freedom of Information Act applies to authorizers and schools.

- College and university authorizers may establish an affiliated non-profit association to perform the duties of a school district. The association must be directly affiliated with its higher education institution, and its members are to serve pursuant to the oversight and control of the college's board of trustees.

- The association must maintain nonprofit status.

STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION OVERSIGHT

- SDE is to develop a process for receiving and reviewing complaints about schools and authorizers.

- Transfer protocols in the event an authorizer closes are established.

- Annual reports on each authorizer are to be issued and SDE and may revoke authorizers' authority if it finds poor or inappropriate performance.

VIRTUAL CHARTERS:

- Requirements for virtual instruction are added. Students are to have access to teachers during the entire instructional day and regularly scheduled synchronous instructional opportunities.

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OTHER KEY ITEMS:

- Alternative Education Campuses (AECs) are made more transparent, and unsatisfactory schools may not obtain the designation. Authorizers must review the performance of existing AECs and may revoke charters if certain conditions are not met.

- Existing schools wanting to expand beyond their current location must apply for replication. Schools with an overall rating below "Average" may not replicate.

- Schools must disclose proposed management organization contracts.

- In its application, a charter school is required to disclose any proposed management organization contracts and include a scope of services. Charter school boards must retain independent fiduciary oversight, authority over their budget, and the ultimate responsibility for the schools performance.

- Charter closure and transfer processes are clarified and defined to align with budget provisos.

- SDE is to provide technical assistance, oversight, and guidance to authorizers for compliance with district responsibilities to the same extent as other LEAs in this State. The Department is to annually review the policies, procedures, and performance of each authorizer.

Standards for Physical Activity and Physical Education (H. 3195, A. 202)

H. 3195 (A. 202) requires that students in kindergarten through fifth grade be provided 150 minutes of physical education and activity each week, with most of that time being devoted to physical education. Students in grades six through eight must be provided with a minimum of sixty hours of physical education and physical activity during each school year, a majority of which must be physical education.

For students in four-year-old-kindergarten through fifth grade, the act requires a minimum of twenty minutes of unstructured outdoor recess daily. Allowances will be available for short-term interruptions that do not exceed three consecutive school days due to facility and staffing availability. In the event of inclement weather, the school must have recess period indoors. Recess may not be used to fulfill time requirements for physical education, and time dedicated to instruction in the arts may not be replaced or reduced in favor of physical education. Removal of recess periods cannot be used a form of punishment.

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Noncertified staff or adult volunteers may assist in implementing and supervising structured physical activities, including the daily recess requirement, if approved by the district superintendent. If volunteers are used, appropriate liability insurance must be provided.

Waivers from physical education may currently be granted for medical or religious reasons. If a middle school student must travel off-campus to attend high school classes, an additional waiver is allowed, but only if the school has made reasonable efforts to accommodate the student's participation in physical education. A waiver is also possible for students in eighth grade who seek middle school level physical education credit, are taking three or more units of ninth grade or higher work for high school credit, and the school has made reasonable efforts to accommodate the student's participation in physical education

Foster Care of Children's Board (S. 858, A. 199)

S. 858 (A. 199) amends state law regarding local **foster care boards**. The Act allows the members of the Division for Review of the Foster Care of Children's seven-member board to succeed themselves, but a member cannot serve on the board in a holdover capacity for more than 180 days.

In addition to the regulations the Department of Children's Advocacy (DCA) is already required to promulgate, the act requires it to develop regulations regarding local review boards to include board jurisdiction, membership standards, and other necessary policies. 10

The requirement of creating sixteen local boards is removed, and the number of boards is left up to the Department. Local boards are to be appointed by the director upon the recommendation of the legislative delegation. If DCA determines that a local board is no longer necessary, it may dissolve the local review board upon notice to the local legislative delegation. Members of local boards who are guilty of wrongdoing are subject to removal by the director. Before removing a member, the director must inform him and the legislative delegation and give an opportunity to be heard. A majority of the delegation is needed to remove a local board member.

Language requiring local boards to conduct meetings in the judicial circuit which they represent is removed and, instead, each board must be provided with sufficient staff. The department is directed to provide administrative and technical assistance to each board.

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Former members may no longer substitute for absent members at board meetings. Training for members is required to be provided by DCA, and all public agencies providing services to children in foster care are added to the list of agencies that must cooperate with the Department.

South Carolina STEM Opportunity Act (H. 3863, A. 142)

H. 3863 (A. 142) merges the South Carolina Coalition for Mathematics and Science (SCCMS) and S2TEM Centers SC into the South Carolina STEM Coalition. The new entity is to help ensure that "students are prepared for STEM career opportunities…." STEM pathways, leadership training, and mentoring programs must be open to women and men, and the organization is encouraged to foster environments that minimize bias and harassment and encourage the merit-based development of women and men.

A STEM Education Fund comprised of appropriations and donations is created. Funds must be used solely for the advancement of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics and be managed by Clemson University or its foundation. The SC STEM Coalition Advisory Council is established to approve expenditures from the Fund. The board is comprised of eleven members who represent and are appointed by the Technical College System, University of South Carolina, Clemson University, Commission on Higher Education, General Assembly, Governor, and Superintendent of Education. The Chair of DEW or his designee serves as chair.

Members may not receive compensation, but are eligible for mileage, subsistence, and per diem. The Council is to identify appropriate outcomes and measures of the Coalition, ensure applicable allocation of resources, and promote activities of the Coalition with other organizations. The Coalition must be administered by a director approved by the advisory council and hired through Clemson University.

South Carolina High School League Oversight and Accountability Act (H. 4163, A. 187)

H. 4163 (A. 187) modernizes and reforms the operations of the South Carolina High School League (SCHSL). In order for public schools to join an interscholastic athletic association, such as the SCHSL, the athletic association must meet certain requirements. Among those is a requirements to have an executive committee comprised of the following 23 members: three members from each classification—one superintendent, one principal, and one athletic administrator for a total of fifteen; two appointments each by the Chairs of the House and Senate Education Committees. Appointees may not be employees of a league member or district; the State Superintendent of Education or designee; one representative each from the private school and charter school sectors and

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one representative from middle schools; and, the executive board elects the chair annually. Chairs may not serve more than two consecutive years. create regions for schools' participation based on geographic and student population; establish a multiplier system for the purpose of classification, to include that out-of-attendance zone students and an adequate number of players to safely field a team are considered; develop a playoff system and championship in each sport for participating schools; provide for a range of sanctions that may be applied to a student, coach, and team; create a process for a student attending a non-member private or public school to participate, with the caveat that not more than ten percent of a public school team can consist of private school students; require that the League abide by State Board eligibility determinations; and, complete an annual accountability report identifying program areas and expenditures.

The League must also ensure that it does the following: the League may be audited by the Legislative Audit Council. It must submit its annual budget to the General Assembly and annually appear before the House Ways and Means Committee and Senate Finance Committee. It is also subject to legislative oversight in the same manner as state agencies. The Commissioner must file a statement of economic interest, and any employment contract may not exceed three years or have an automatic rollover provision. The Commissioner's contract may not be renewed yearly prior to its expiration.

School Safety (S. 416, A. 193)

S. 416 (A. 193) amends state law regarding the expulsion and suspension of public school students. Definitions of expulsion and suspension are expanded so that the banishment from school grounds now includes "day or night school functions or riding a school bus." Even if suspended or expelled, students may enroll in alternative education programs which include adult education or virtual programs. The act removes existing law prohibiting a school district board of trustees from expelling or suspending students under eighteen years of age who are convicted of buying a lottery ticket.

Previously, students who were "determined" to have brought a gun to school were to be expelled for no less than one year. The act amends the statute to include "determined to have knowingly" brought a gun to school. Additionally, the term "hearing" is added to align with other parts of the chapter. The one-year expulsion period for firearms is subject to modification by a local board on a case-by-case basis if the board conducts the hearing. If the hearing is conducted by an authority other than the board, the one-year period may be modified by the district superintendent.

If a student knowingly and willfully communicates a threat to commit bodily harm by using a weapon against students or school employees, he must be expelled for no more

than one academic year, but this may be modified on a case-by-case basis. Expelled students must receive access to educational services through an alternative or virtual setting. Local boards shall establish a policy which requires the student to be referred to the local county Department of Juvenile Justice office.

Limitations on Local Authorities to Regulate Campus Events (S. 832, A. 197)

S. 832 (A. 197) limits the authority of counties and municipalities to regulate events held on the campuses of state-supported colleges and universities and provides that the campuses are exempt from South Carolina Code Section 53-1-10 (permits required for holding sports and entertainment events).

Counties and municipalities may not prohibit, restrict, condition, delay, or require any local land-use approval for events held on these campuses if the event has been approved by the institution's governing board. In effect, local zoning and land-use regulations cannot be used to block or regulate campus events; however, local governments' authority to enforce generally applicable building, fire, life-safety, health, and traffic laws and regulations is preserved.

Public notice must be provided of events to be held in an outdoor venue within 1,000 feet of a residential neighborhood. This provision requires that impacted neighborhood associations receive at least thirty days' notice before the scheduled vote for approval by the governing board of the institution. This portion of the Act applies only to non-athletic events and allows the affected public and neighborhood associations to have the right to appear before the governing board of the institution.

HEALTH AND MEDICAL AFFAIRS

"Pregnancy Resource Act" (S. 32, A. 162)

S. 32 (**A. 162)** is the **"Pregnancy Resource Act."** The legislation establishes an income tax credit, not to exceed fifty percent of total tax liability, for those who make voluntary cash contributions to an eligible charitable organization that is a pregnancy resource center, crisis pregnancy center, maternity home, or residential program for human trafficking victims which provides services for: the prevention and diversion of children from custody with the Department of Social Services; the safety, care, and well-being of children in custody of the Department of Social Services; the express purpose of creating permanency for children through adoption; the prevention of abuse, neglect, abandonment, exploitation, or trafficking of children; or the provision of assistance related to

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carrying a pregnancy to term, preventing abortion, and promoting healthy childbirth. The legislation is scheduled to sunset at the end of 2030.

Long-Term Care Council Membership (H. 3022, A. 129)

H. 3022 (A. 129) updates the **Long-Term Care Council's** membership provisions by allowing agency heads to appoint a designee. The legislation also authorizes the sharing of data among member agencies for planning purposes and directs the council to establish and maintain a statewide access system through which consumers can obtain information about long-term supports and services.

Physician's Examination (H. 3254, A. 103)

H. 3254 (A. 103) allows for an **additional required examination to be waived for physicians practicing** in certain state agencies if the Board of Medical Examiners determine that the applicant possesses the necessary general medical knowledge to competently practice medicine.

Patient Billing for Health Services (H. 4069, A. 253))

H. 4069 (A. 253) deals with **patient billing for health services**. Beginning January 1, 2027, healthcare facilities must provide patients with an itemized bill, either electronically or in writing, when requesting payment for medical services or supplies. Patients must be informed of their right to choose how they receive the bill and may waive that right, while still being able to request an itemized bill later. The bill must include plain language descriptions of services and supplies, the amount owed by the patient, and any insurance or third-party payment information. Healthcare facilities may issue bills through electronic methods such as patient portals. Violations may result in disciplinary action.

Smart Heart Act (H. 3831, A. 108)

H. 3831 (A. 108) is the "**Smart Heart Act**" and requires each public and charter school to develop a cardiac emergency response plan. If a school competes in interscholastic activities, its plan must address the appropriate use of school personnel to respond to incidents involving sudden cardiac arrest.

The State Board of Education is to develop standards and practices that must be adopted by districts and schools. If a current plan meets the Act's requirements, a new one is not required. Schools are to work with emergency providers to integrate emergency management protocols. Private schools whose teams compete against public schools must comply with this section for the applicable team or sport.

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Subject to funding by the General Assembly or the State Department of Education, appropriate school staff must be trained in first aid, CPR, and the use of an AED . Employees or volunteers who undertake an act covered by this section are not subject to liability for damages caused by injuries. This immunity does not apply to gross negligence or willful, wanton, or reckless conduct. 6

Schools must have AEDs accessible on each campus athletic venue, but having an emergency services provider, trainer, nurse, or coach equipped with an AED satisfies the requirement. AEDs must be made accessible by the host team at each off-site athletic event, and all coaches are required to obtain and maintain training in CPR, first aid, and the use of AEDs.

Physical Therapist Certify Temporary Disability (H. 3842, A. 141)

H. 3842 (A. 141) allows a **physical therapist to certify that an individual has a temporary disability** on the initial application for a temporary disability placard. It further states that physical therapists may not certify the renewal of temporary placards.

Sales of Nonprescription Ephedrine, Pseudoephedrine, and Phenylpropanolamine (H. 4382, A. 235)

H. 4382 (A. 235) addresses **sales of nonprescription ephedrine, pseudoephedrine, and phenylpropanolamine**. The legislation revises provisions governing the sale of nonprescription products containing ephedrine, pseudoephedrine, or phenylpropanolamine to require that manufacturers of these drugs pay monthly fees to support the data collection system that tracks sales of these products to counter their use in the illicit manufacturing of methamphetamine. Penalties are established for failure to comply.

Wellness Reimbursement Programs (H. 4305, A. 215)

H. 4305 (A. 215) establishes provisions governing the operation of **wellness reimbursement programs**, a type of employee benefits program that employers may offer under federal provisions to provide their employees with financial incentives to engage in healthy behaviors by reimbursing them for eligible health and wellness expenses, such as gym memberships, fitness classes, wellness coaching, and wearable fitness trackers. The legislation provides guardrails in state law for the operation of wellness reimbursement programs that establish consumer protection provisions, provide penalties for violations, and require registration with the South Carolina Department of Insurance.

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Nursing Homes TB Testing (S. 819, A. 174)

S. 819 (A. 174) codifies current practices by establishing **procedures for tuberculosis (TB) testing for nursing homes and community residential care facilities'** new employees as well as for applicants with prior or newly positive results or those exhibiting symptoms.

Collaborative Practice Agreements (S. 449, A. 166)

S. 449 (A. 166), under the South Carolina Pharmacy Practice Act, outlines that physicians are authorized to enter into **collaborative practice agreements with pharmacists**. "Collaborative practice agreement" means a written agreement between a pharmacist and a physician, actively practicing to provide evidence-based medication management services and other related patient care services. The State Board of Pharmacy and the State Board of Medical Examiners must each promulgate regulations governing the use of collaborative practice agreements before these agreements go into effect.

Teledentistry (S. 453, A. 210)

S. 453 (A. 210) establishes standards and regulations for providing **dental services through teledentistry**. "Teledentistry" has the same meaning and may be used interchangeably with the term "telehealth." The legislation defines key terms, outlines when and how teledentistry services may be provided, and requires dentists to establish a bona fide patient relationship. It further states to obtain informed consent, verify patient identity and location, and maintain appropriate records. It prohibits treatment based solely on online questionnaires, bans experimental or non-evidence-based care, and limits delegation of duties outside an individual's legal scope of practice. Further the legislation directs the Board of Dentistry to adopt regulations governing teledentistry services.

Justified Emergency Hallway Beds (S. 958, A. 230)

S. 958 (A. 230) states that during a justified emergency, and when all hospital treatment space has been exhausted, patient beds may be placed in hallways, corridors, and other means of egress with approval from a designated member of the Emergency Department leadership team. The bill defines a "justified emergency" as including, but not limited to, a natural or manmade disaster or a declared state of emergency. In an effort to provide for the health and safety of patients and visitors, the bill outlines that hospitals shall maintain a clear pathway in hallways, corridors, and means of egress and shall not block exits. Hospitals shall not erect or construct partitions or structures that obstruct the building's fire protection systems including automatic sprinkler systems or fire alarm and detection system components. Hospitals shall develop written protocols

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for justified emergency conditions and shall require all employees responsible for the care or treatment of patients to familiarize themselves with these protocols.

Seizures in the Workplace (S. 935, A. 229)

S. 935 (A. 229) requires the SC Department of Public Health to create an informational pamphlet or poster for state governmental entities on **rendering evidence-based seizure first aid to an individual who has experienced a seizure in the workplace**. This pamphlet shall be clearly visible and accessible in location frequented by employees.

Electronic Filing and Transmission of Death Certificates (S. 894, A. 128)

S. 894 (A. 128) pertains to the **electronic filing and the transmission of death certificates.** The legislation revises that the death certificates must be electronically filed within five days after a Burial Removal Transit Permit (BRTP) is issued or upon the funeral director assuming the physical in-person custody of the decedent, whichever is later. If the funeral director, after a good faith effort, is unable to collect the personal data of the decedent, the funeral director must immediately inform the bureau of the reason for the delay. The bill adds in that in the event that a five-day period terminates on a weekend or a federal or state holiday, then the death certificate must be electronically filed at the end of the next business day.

Rural Emergency Hospitals (S. 895, A. 181)

S. 895 (A. 181) addresses rural hospital closures and expands access to healthcare by revising the definition of "hospital" under the "State Health Facility Licensure Act" to include facilities that convert to **rural emergency hospitals** for purposes of state licensure and Medicare reimbursement.

Self-Administered Hormonal Contraceptives Protocols (S. 477, A. 167)

Under **S. 477 (A. 167), self-administered hormonal contraceptives protocols,** the State Board of Medical Examiners and Board of Pharmacy are responsible for setting out protocols for dispensing self-administered orally taken, or injected, hormonal contraceptives either with or without a standing order for them being in place. This protocol will be the case for anyone 18 years or older, or who is emancipated and has had a previous prescription issued to them. This is to clarify implementation of the provisions of the 2022 Pharmacy Act.

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Restricting Electronic Nicotine Delivery System [ENDS] (S. 287, A. 97

S. 287 (A. 97) restricts electronic nicotine delivery system [ENDS] sales in South Carolina -- among other things, it adds definitions, standards, responsibilities, and penalties that will be utilized against violators under this new South Carolina state code. It provides more comprehensive oversight of the making and selling of electronic nicotine delivery systems, including so-called VAPE pens.

AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Coastal Tidelands and Wetlands Permit Applications (H. 3931, A. 116)

H. 3931 (**A. 116)** addresses **Coastal Tidelands and Wetlands Permit Applications**. The legislation revises timelines for the Department of Environmental Services to take action on permit applications for coastal development plans. Within the ninety-day timeframe, a fifteen-day window is established for DES to request any additional technical information that the department needs from an applicant. The legislation provides authority for DES to hire one or more third-party, independent engineers to assist the department in its duties.

State Underground Petroleum Environmental Response Bank Revisions (S. 893, A. 180)

S. 893 (A. 180) revises **State Underground Petroleum Environmental Response Bank** provisions (SUPERB). The legislation increases the amounts of fees paid into SUPERB accounts to alleviate contamination from underground petroleum storage tanks and revises the membership of the SUPERB Advisory Committee.

Conforming Statutes to Restructure DHEC (H. 4189, A. 146)

H. 4189 (A. 146) provides for the conforming of statutes to address the **restructuring of the former agency South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control** provided by Act 60 of 2023. The bill also repeals various statutes related to the restructure of DHEC.

Hunting Protections on Managed Lands Owned by the Department of Natural Resources (H. 3872, A. 143)

H. 3872 (A. 143), concerns **managed lands owned by the Department of Natural Resources under the "Hunting Heritage Protection Act."** The legislation provides that, to the greatest practical extent, decisions made by the Department must not result in any

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net loss of land acreage available for hunting opportunities. Additionally, the department is required to submit an annual report to the Senate Fish, Game and Forestry Committee and the House Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs Committee detailing the acreage available for hunting on wildlife management areas owned by the Department, as well as any efforts made to offset the loss of hunting opportunities on those lands. This Act takes effect January 1, 2027.

South Carolina Protected Lands and Conservation Coordination Act (H. 5069, A. 190)

H. 5069 (A. 190) creates a priority for a **long-term land protection goals for the South Carolina** beyond the current 3.4 million acres to seven million acres by 2050 under the "South Carolina Protected Lands and Conservation Coordination Act."

Blue Catfish Limits (S. 337, A. 120)

S. 337 (A. 120) outlines that it is unlawful to possess more than twenty-five **blue catfish** a day in Lake Marion, Lake Moultrie, the section of the Pee Dee River from the state border with North Carolina to the Highway 301 bridge, and the upper reach of the Santee River, and it is unlawful to possess more than one-hundred-fifty blue catfish a day in all other state waterways. It further states that it is unlawful to possess more than two blue catfish greater than thirty-two inches in length in any one day in Lake Marion, Lake Moultrie, the upper reach of the Santee River, the section of the Pee Dee River from the state border with North Carolina to the Highway 301 bridge, and the Congaree and Wateree rivers.

Shrimp and Shrimp Products (H. 4248, A. 254))

H. 4248 (R. 271) deals with shrimp and shrimp products. The legislation which provides for definitions, in particular, domestic shrimp. The legislation requires food service establishments to clearly disclose when they serve foreign imported shrimp. It outlines that restaurants that serve both domestic and imported shrimp must post a notice stating that some menu items may contain foreign imported shrimp. Establishments that serve only imported shrimp must post a notice stating that the items contain foreign imported shrimp. Notices must appear on menus, if available, and at the main entrance. The Department of Agriculture would enforce the law by issuing a warning for a first violation with three days to correct it, and fines ranging from one hundred dollars to five thousand dollars per repeated violation. The legislation goes into effect 120 days after approval by the Governor.

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State Migratory Bird Act (S. 383, A. 98)

S. 383 (A. 98) designates the Prothonotary Warbler as the official **State Migratory Bird of South Carolina.**

Public Boat Landings on Lakes (S. 463, A. 124)

S. 463 (A. 124) addresses the safety of **public boat landings on lakes**. The bill outlines that it is unlawful for a person to swim within fifty feet of a public boat landing or ramp maintained by the South Carolina Public Service Authority, if the landing or ramp is clearly marked with signage prohibiting swimming.

Red Drum Fish Catch and Size Limits (S. 961, A. 231)

S. 961 (A. 231) revises the **catch and size limits for red drum fish** in order to remain in compliance with the Federal Fishery Management Plan. This bill will help rebuild the population due to overfishing. The Act limits the catch to one red drum per person and no more than two per boat per day. In addition, the slot size requirement provides that the fish must measure between 18 and 25 inches in length to be kept.

Deer Tags (S. 961, A. 231)

S. 961 (A. 231) revises the **deer tags** legislation in an effort to reduce the deer population. As a result, the Act increases the number of antlerless deer tags from two to three to be issued with the purchase of a hunting license and big game permit from two to three. This provision does not affect the ability to purchase additional tags.

Deer Tags (H. 5217, A. 207)

H. 5217 (A. 207) regards **deer tags**. In an effort to reduce the deer population, this Act increases the number of antlerless deer tags provided with the purchase of a hunting license and big game permit from two to three, while reducing the number of antlered deer tags from three to two. One of the antlered deer tags is restricted to deer with a minimum of four points on one antler. This provision does not affect a hunter's ability to purchase additional tags.

Restricted Faculty Veterinary License for Veterinary School Faculty (H. 4342, A. 105)

H. 4342 (A. 105) outlines that the South Carolina State Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners may issue a **restricted faculty license to individuals serving as faculty at an AVMA-accredited veterinary school in South Carolina**. Applicants must either be li-

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censed veterinarians in another state or hold appropriate veterinary education credentials, including a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine or equivalent. The board may waive certain requirements for individuals holding a full-time academic appointment at the rank of assistant professor or higher. This license allows the holder to practice veterinary medicine only within the scope of their faculty duties and only in the clinical, hospital, or field service units of the veterinary school where they are employed. The license cannot be issued to anyone who has had a veterinary license denied, revoked, suspended, or relinquished in any jurisdiction. It will be cancelled if the individual leaves the faculty position. Applicants must submit an application, provide required documentation, and pay applicable fees, and the license remains subject to other relevant South Carolina veterinary regulations.

Restricted Instructor's Licenses in Dentistry (H. 4342, A. 105)

H. 4342 (A. 105) allows the State Board of Dentistry to waive certain requirements for **restricted instructor's licenses in dentistry** for applicants who hold a full-time academic faculty appointment at the rank of assistant professor or higher. The purpose of this legislation is to support the state's only School of Dentistry by easing licensing requirements for qualified instructors. This provision will allow for the school to increase its capacity to educate and train new students in dentistry.

Roadside Markets (H. 5097, A. 157)

H. 5097 (A. 157) allows certain **roadside markets operated by farmers** who sell the public products they produce and who are not considered commercial operations. For purposes of this provision, "roadside markets" are defined as markets located near a roadway on farm property that is owned or leased and controlled by the farmer. This legislation does not include multi-vendor farmers' markets or alike outlets. Hemp based products designed to be ingested are not permitted to be sold in a roadside market. These roadside markets are exempt from certain local and state regulatory requirements. Local governments shall not be held liable for matters arising under these exemptions outlined in the bill.

Public Water System Connections (H. 5111, A. 158)

H. 5111 (A. 158) regards public water system connections and provides that a political subdivision may not adopt, enforce, or maintain an ordinance, resolution, regulation, or rule that prohibits or unreasonably restricts the drilling, servicing, repair, installation, operation, or maintenance of a private water well on agricultural or single-family residential property of at least one-half acre. Property owners who use a private well while also connected to a public water system must install appropriate backflow prevention

devices, which must be inspected and approved by the water provider. In addition, property owners are required to register the well with the political subdivision. The bill does not apply to public or community wells and it does not permit disconnection from an existing public water system.

Fishing Prohibited on Certain Bridges (H. 5473, A. 219)

H. 5473, (A. 219) prohibits fishing on certain bridges, specifically named the J. Foster Jeffords Causeway in Florence County. The Act outlines penalties for violation.

Veterinarian Telehealth Services (H. 3223, A. 102)

H. 3223 (A. 102) establishes parameters for veterinarians to use telehealth services. "Telemedicine" means the remote practice of veterinary medicine through the use of telecommunications technology allows a licensed veterinarian with an established veterinarian-client-patient relationship to evaluate and treat an animal virtually. In order to receive telehealth services from a licensed veterinarian, there must first be an established in-person client-patient relationship with the physical examination of the animal or timely visits to the premises where the animal is kept. This bill also allows for prescriptions to be written by way of telehealth.

Forestry Commission Timberland Acquisitions (H. 3629, A. 107)

H. 3629 (A. 107), in an effort to help the declining timber industry, allows the Forestry Commission to acquire timberland . The State Commission of Forestry is prohibited from purchasing land at a price above its fair market value. Also, the Act cleans up and clarifies language as a result of the House Legislative Oversight Committee report on the State Forestry Commission. The legislation repeals two sections dealing with the "use of revenue for scrub oak eradication, reforestation, timber stand improvement, and harvest cutting in state parks" and the "use of revenue for scrub oak eradication and reforestation in Manchester and Sandhills State Forests."

Biomass and Bioenergy (H. 3967, A. 117)

H. 3967 (A. 117) provides new opportunities for the forestry industry to utilize leftover materials from wood product manufacturing as **sources for biomass or bioenergy**. Bioenergy produced from agricultural harvesting is recognized as renewable and carbon neutral. When this bioenergy is combined with carbon capture and storage technology, it is considered carbon negative. Forest products manufacturing residuals may include, but are not limited to, pulping liquors, pulping byproducts, woody manufacturing residuals, and paper recycling residuals.

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Payroll Deductions for South Carolina Wildlife Law Enforcement Officers' Association Dues (S. 765, A. 195)

S. 765 (**A. 195)** legislation authorizing **payroll deductions for South Carolina Wildlife Law Enforcement Officers' Association dues**. The legislation authorizes the Comptroller General to deduct dues for the South Carolina Wildlife Law Enforcement Officers' Association from the compensation of state employees and retirees.

TRANSPORTATION

South Carolina Department of Transportation Modernization (S. 831, A. 177)

S. 831 (**A. 177)** legislation providing for **South Carolina Department of Transportation modernization**. Drawing upon the work of the South Carolina Department of Transportation Modernization Ad Hoc Committee appointed by the Speaker of the House, the legislation restructures the South Carolina Department of Transportation to enhance accountability and makes changes to the ways in which the state's roadways are planned, financed, and maintained that emphasize expediting projects and making the most of taxpayers' dollars. The legislation provides for the Department of Transportation to be under the direction of a Secretary of Transportation who is appointed by the Governor with the advice and consent of the Senate, rather than selected by a governing commission. The Commission of the Department of Transportation is eliminated. The legislation specifies that the scope of SCDOT's internal audit services shall cover the entire department, including all the Department's activities, assets, and personnel. The scope of internal audit activities also encompasses all, but is not limited to, objective examinations of evidence to provide independent assurance on the adequacy, effectiveness, and efficiency of governance, risk management, control processes, and compliance for the department. The department's chief internal auditor must be a certified public accountant, a certified internal auditor, or a certified fraud examiner. Every four years the State Auditor is charged with employing an independent external firm to perform a performance and organizational audit on the Department of Transportation. The position of Deputy Secretary for Planning is established and charged with the duties of developing statewide strategic transportation plans and coordinating these plans with federal and state-funded regional and local transportation planning organizations. The legislation includes authorization for the department to enter into public-private partnership arrangements for the purpose of planning, designing, financing, constructing, or maintaining the highways, roads, streets, bridges, public transit, and other facilities that include design-build agreements, franchise agreements, pre-development agreements, and performance-based payments agreements. Such arrangements would allow

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for financing projects through the issuance of private activity bonds and similar instruments. The department is authorized to make use of phased design-build project delivery arrangements and award highway construction contracts using construction manager/general contractor (CM/GC) procedures that allow for guaranteed maximum price agreements. Provisions are included to facilitate adding self-funded choice lanes in high traffic areas that afford drivers the option of paying a usage charge to access the restricted lane in order to avoid congestion. No toll or usage charge may be imposed on an existing roadway unless expressly authorized by the General Assembly. Any such structure must be disclosed before the execution of the agreement and must include rate limitations or other mechanisms to protect the public. The legislation authorizes a revised protocol for addressing National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Assignment Program responsibilities to expedite the delivery of transportation projects. The legislation increases the share of gas tax revenue that is distributed to counties as "C" funds and makes provisions for the county legislative delegation to appoint the county transportation committee, ensuring that the committee includes fair representation from municipalities and unincorporated areas of the county. The legislation provides that all members of the county transportation committee must be residents of the county, and any official or employee of a county transportation committee is subject to the State Ethics Act. Provisions are included to enhance transparency in CTC proceedings. A felony offense is established for members of county transportation committees, engineers, agents, or other employees, acting for or on behalf of committees who make use of their positions to obtain an illicit profit. Those convicted of the offense must be imprisoned for not more than five years and are forever disqualified from holding any office of trust or profit. A Pothole Mitigation Program is established within the Department of Transportation to allow the public to report pothole locations along the state highway system by telephone, the internet, a website application, or other electronic means. SCDOT must ensure that a pothole is repaired within seven days of receiving notice of its location. In addition to existing funding, SCDOT is to receive a $15 million allocation each year from the Infrastructure Maintenance Trust Fund for pavement repairs of potholes identified through the mitigation program.

Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) Clean-Up" Act (H. 3856 (A. 115))

H. 3856 (A. 115) is the "**Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) Clean-Up" Act**. It addresses items in Title 56 that were not included in Act 51 of 2023 and includes changes to several sections of the code, including rental trailers, identification cards, dealer licenses, and driving school permits.

The Act amends language included in Act 167 of 2024--which allows for blood type to be disclosed on driver's licenses--to include all medical information voluntarily added

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to the driver's license or record at DMV. It also updates the definition of "bus" to match the definition in Title 12, increasing the number of passengers from ten to sixteen. Provisions are added to include rental trailers in the method for licensing and registering trailers and creates a new class of license plate for rental trailers that is a smaller size (similar to motorcycle plates). Rental trailers will be subject to the $75 license fee.

For dealers, the Act removes contradictory language and emphasizes that the requirement for a dealer license is fifteen sales per year, not twenty. It amends language regarding licenses for wholesale car auctions to expand the length of the license from twelve to thirty-six months. To match the new license validity, the license fee is raised from $50 to $150. This change was not included in Act 51 of 2023, which did the same for regular dealers but left out wholesale dealers.

Addressing the dealer point system within DMV, the point violation of dealers who issue temporary license plates to unauthorized persons is increased from two points to six. Dealers who issue a second temporary plate to purchasers without authorization from the department receive a two-point violation.

Regarding licenses for wholesale car auctions, the license is now valid for thirty-six months instead of twelve and the license fee is raised from $50 to $150. DMV may notify dealers of the suspension of their license by certified mail or certified mail with electronic tracking. The requirement for rental fleet vehicles to have company logos on the side of the cars is removed.

The Act also addresses electronic titling, creating a new section to provide for electronic titling to be paid for through transaction fees paid by commercial entities engaging in vehicle titling. The electronic titling system will be functional by March 31, 2027.

Transportation Improvement Projects And Responsibility Of Costs (H. 3768, A. 244)

H. 3768 (A. 244) extends the sunset date of Section 57-5-880 regarding transportation improvement projects and responsibility of costs from July 1, 2026, to July 1, 2031. Section 57-5-880 provides that an entity undertaking a transportation improvement project must bear the full cost to relocate water and sewer lines for small government-owned water or sewer utilities and up to four percent of the original construction bid amount for large public water or sewer utilities. Without extending the sunset, government-owned water and sewer utilities will be responsible for those costs beginning July 1, 2026.

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Tribal Government License Plates (H. 5131, A. 159)

H. 5131 (A. 159) allows tribal governments located in the State to receive a permanent license plate labeled "TG." The fee for the plate is the standard fee of two dollars.

The Act also included amendments to address the South Carolina Revolutionary War Sestercentennial Commission plate. A new plate design be submitted no later than January 1, 2027. Further adding to the state license plate options, the Act includes "I bike," "Quail Forever" and blackout special license plates.

Roadway Protection and Safety Act (H. 4292, A. 148)

H. 4292 (A. 148), the **Roadway Protection and Safety Act,** defines participants, organizers, and abettors and prohibits them from taking over highways, streets, and rights-of-way. These defined prohibited activities include, but are not limited to, burnouts, drifting, doughnuts, speed contests, and wheelies performed in the public right of way. Permitted activities on private property are not subject to these proscriptions.

Violators face up to $3,000 in fines and/or up to three years in jail depending upon the nature of their violation of this new, proposed criminal law. Spectators face penalties that would range up to five hundred dollars or sixty days in jail, depending on the number and nature of their offense. In addition, most offenses outlined in this pending legislation would be triable in magistrates or municipal courts.

It also converts a total of four at-large family court seats to resident seats in the Fifth (two of these four seats), Tenth, and Twelfth Judicial Circuits.

A final provision vests judges in the judicial retirement system after serving for eight years, as is already the case for Chief Public Defenders and Circuit Solicitors.

Emergency Scene Management (H. 4249, A. 147)

H. 4249 (**A. 147)** referred to as the "Move Over" bill, requires a driver to change lanes when approaching or passing a vehicle that is stopped or on the shoulder of a road. Current law requires drivers to move over for emergency scenes and authorized emergency vehicles but does not require the same for civilian vehicles on the shoulder or right-of-way. Fines for violations of the Act range from $300 to $500.

Utility Terrain Vehicle (S. 222, A. 164)

S. 222 (A. 164) addresses the use of UTVs and other similar vehicles on public roads of the state. This change allows for use of the vehicles on public roads if: the driver is at

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least seventeen years old; holds a valid driver's license on their person when driving the vehicle; the vehicle is plated and registered with the SC DMV; and there is proof of liability insurance.

The UTV or similar vehicle can be driven only on roads with a speed limit of 55 miles per hour or lower and must be operated within ten miles of the registered address. The UTV must have working head and taillights and be equipped with seatbelts.

Golf courses are not required to equip their golf carts with seatbelts and golf carts may operate along a primary highway or other road within a one-half mile radius of a Division I collegiate athletic event.

Traffic-Control Signals and Bicycles (S. 812, A. 173)

S. 812 (A. 173) amends state law related to cyclists pausing at red lights. The Act removes the requirement to pause for 120 seconds before going through the light so that a cyclist may now stop and proceed through the light when it is safe to do so. It allows cyclists to make right and left turns on red when it is safe to do so. This mirrors the existing statute in place for motorcyclists.

Limousines /Transportation Network Company Act Provisions (H. 3474, A. 136)

H. 3474 (A. 136) includes limousines in Transportation Network Company Act provisions, and 136). The legislation allows a vehicle registered or licensed as a charter limousine with the South Carolina Public Service Commission or as a limousine or other for-hire vehicle by the governing body of a county or city to be considered a personal vehicle that is authorized to offer prearranged rides through a digital network controlled by a transportation network company.

Pee Dee Regional Airport Authority (H. 5506, A. 220)

H. 5506 (220) provides for the members of the **Pee Dee Regional Airport Authority** to be appointed by the Governor upon the recommendations of their respective county legislative delegations. The authority is granted a perpetual exemption from the imposition or assessment of any stormwater fee, charge, assessment, or similar exaction relating to stormwater runoff imposed by any state, county, or municipal governmental entity, or by any private contractor or third party acting on behalf of such governmental entities. The legislation authorizes the Pee Dee Regional Airport District to make application to the Foreign-Trade Zones Board for the purpose of establishing, operating, and

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maintaining foreign-trade zones in Chesterfield, Darlington, Dillon, Florence, Horry, Marion, and Marlboro counties.

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South Carolina General Assembly, South Carolina House of Representatives, *Legislative Update*, 2025. https://www.scstatehouse.gov/hupdate.php

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