**A** **BILL**

TO AMEND THE CODE OF LAWS OF SOUTH CAROLINA, 1976, SO AS TO ENACT THE “HIGH SCHOOL EQUIVALENCY DIPLOMA ACCESSIBILITY ACT” BY ADDING SECTION 59‑43‑25 SO AS TO PROVIDE THAT BEFORE JANUARY 1, 2015, THE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION SHALL SELECT A TEST OR TEST BATTERY THAT ELIGIBLE CANDIDATES SUCCESSFULLY MAY COMPLETE AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE GENERAL EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT TEST BATTERY TO RECEIVE A HIGH SCHOOL EQUIVALENCY DIPLOMA, THAT AN ESSENTIAL TRAIT OF THIS TEST OR TEST BATTERY MUST BE THAT IT ONLY MAY BE OFFERED IN A HANDWRITTEN, PAPER AND PEN OR PENCIL FORMAT AND MAY NOT BE DEPENDENT ON COMPUTER TECHNOLOGY FOR ITS ADMINISTRATION, TO REQUIRE THE BOARD SHALL AUTHORIZE THE ADMINISTRATION OF THIS TEST BY THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION PURSUANT TO CERTAIN REGULATIONS AND POLICIES, AND TO PROVIDE THE BOARD SHALL ISSUE HIGH SCHOOL EQUIVALENCY DIPLOMAS TO ELIGIBLE CANDIDATES WHO COMPLETE SUCCESSFULLY THE TEST OR TEST BATTERY AFTER JANUARY 1, 2015; AND TO AMEND SECTION 59‑43‑20, RELATING TO POWERS OF THE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION WITH RESPECT TO BASIC ADULT AND SECONDARY EDUCATION, SO AS TO MAKE CONFORMING CHANGES.

Whereas, the South Carolina General Assembly finds that the Palmetto State’s path to economic prosperity involves creating jobs and improving education, among other essential elements; and

Whereas, the South Carolina General Assembly finds that approximately four hundred eighteen thousand working‑age South Carolinians between ages eighteen and sixty‑four have not earned a high school diploma or its equivalent, which must be rectified to provide a workforce that will attract jobs and improve our overall economy; and

Whereas, the South Carolina General Assembly finds that the only test currently available to earn a high school equivalency diploma in South Carolina is offered only in a computer‑based format, requiring technology that limits the places in which it can be offered, thus limiting opportunities for people to take the test and earn their high school equivalency diploma; and

Whereas, the South Carolina General Assembly finds that adopting an alternative high school equivalency test that must be offered in a paper and pen or pencil format not dependent on the availability of computer‑based technology is essential to broadening the accessibility of the testing needed to earn a high school equivalency diploma to those who need it most. Now, therefore,

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of South Carolina:

SECTION 1. This act must be known and may be cited as the “High School Equivalency Diploma Accessibility Act”.

SECTION 2. Chapter 3, Title 59 of the 1976 Code is amended by adding:

“Section 59‑43‑25. Before January 1, 2015, the State Board of Education shall select a test or test battery that an eligible candidate successfully may complete as an alternative to the General Education Development test battery to receive a high school equivalency diploma. An essential trait of this test or test battery must be that it only may be offered in a handwritten, paper and pen or pencil format and may not be dependent on computer technology for its administration. Upon making its selection, the board shall authorize the administration of this test by the State Department of Education under policies that the board shall establish by regulations promulgated by the board and policies of the Commission on Educational Credit and Credentials of the American Council on Education, and other procedures that the board considers appropriate. The board shall issue a high school equivalency diploma to an eligible candidate who successfully completes the test or test battery after January 1, 2015.”

SECTION 3. Section 59‑43‑20 of the 1976 Code is amended to read:

“Section 59‑43‑20. (A) The State Board of Education may:

(1) make and enforce regulations for the organization, conduct, and supervision of adult basic and adult secondary (GED, alternate testing, and high school diploma) education;

(2) determine the qualifications of teachers and issue teaching certificates for teaching adult basic and adult secondary (GED, alternate testing, and high school diploma) education classes;

(3) determine the tuition which may be required of persons attending adult basic and adult secondary (GED, alternate testing, and high school diploma) education classes;

(4) determine the subjects which may be taught in adult basic and adult secondary (GED, alternate testing, and high school diploma) education classes.

(B) The State Board of Education is also responsible for the administration, coordination, and management of adult basic and adult secondary (GED, alternate testing, and high school diploma) education for the purpose of facilitating and coordinating adult basic and adult secondary (GED, alternate testing, and high school diploma) education programs for South Carolina adults whose level of educational attainment is below high school, as prescribed by state and federal laws and regulations. The State Board of Education and the local school districts are responsible for effective coordination and utilization of literacy councils, the technical education system, the educational television network, nonprofit groups, business and industry representatives, and other state and local agencies and private persons interested in adult basic and adult secondary (GED, alternate testing, and high school diploma) education programs to deliver programs to the state’s undereducated adult population.

(C) Any funds distributed by the State Board of Education for local literacy councils or programs must be made available to those councils or programs either in kind or in money.

(D) The requirements of this section apply to alternate high school equivalency testing required in Section 59‑43‑25.”

SECTION 4. This act takes effect upon approval by the Governor.

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