**A** **BILL**

TO AMEND THE CODE OF LAWS OF SOUTH CAROLINA, 1976, BY ADDING SECTION 59‑17‑165 SO AS TO REQUIRE EACH COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD TO PROVIDE ANNUAL PUBLIC NOTICE OF WHICH, IF ANY, SCHOOLS IT PLANS TO CLOSE OR CONSOLIDATE, TO PROVIDE A VOTE BY A BOARD TO CLOSE OR CONSOLIDATE A SCHOOL MUST BE STAYED BY A PETITION OF AT LEAST TEN PERCENT OF THE QUALIFIED ELECTORS OF THE SCHOOL DISTRICT SUBMITTED NOT MORE THAN SIXTY DAYS AFTER THE VOTE, TO PROVIDE THIS PETITION MUST BE PRESENTED TO THE COUNTY BOARD OF VOTER REGISTRATION AND ELECTIONS FOR CERTIFICATION, TO PROVIDE IF THE PETITION IS SO CERTIFIED THE CLOSURE OR CONSOLIDATION PLAN MAY PROCEED BUT OTHERWISE MAY NOT WITHOUT REFERENDUM APPROVAL THAT THE COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD MAY SEEK, AND TO PROVIDE THE COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD ALSO MAY RESCIND ITS CLOSURE OR CONSOLIDATION VOTE; AND TO AMEND SECTION 59‑17‑50, RELATING TO THE CONSOLIDATION OF SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL DISTRICTS BY COUNTY SCHOOL BOARDS, SO AS TO MAKE A CONFORMING CHANGE; AND TO MAKE THE PROVISIONS OF THIS ACT APPLICABLE TO SCHOOL CLOSINGS AND SCHOOL CONSOLIDATIONS THAT OCCUR AFTER DECEMBER 31, 2015.

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

SECTION 1. Chapter 17, Title 59 of the 1976 Code is amended by adding:

“Section 59‑17‑165. (A) Before October twenty‑sixth annually, each county public school board shall provide public notice of which, if any, schools the district recommends closing or consolidating. The board shall provide this notice to the State Board of Education, on the district’s Internet website, and in a newspaper of general circulation in the district.

(B) The vote by a board to close or consolidate schools must be stayed by a petition of at least ten percent of the qualified electors of the school district that is submitted not more than sixty days after the vote. The petition to reverse the decision of the board must be presented to the county board of voter registration and elections for certification. If the petition does not contain at least ten percent of the registered voters of the school district, the board may proceed with the closure or consolidation plan. If the petition does contain at least ten percent of the registered voters, the board has the option of submitting the question in a special referendum that will be held on a Saturday not later than eight weeks after the certification. In the alternative, the board may submit the question in the next general election or it may rescind its previous vote to close or consolidate schools. Once the petition is certified, the board may not proceed to close or consolidate schools without the referendum approval. The ballot question shall read:

‘The School District of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Board of Trustees recommends the closing of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_or consolidation of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. Do you approve or disapprove of the board’s recommendation to close \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ or to consolidate \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_?

Yes 

No ’”

SECTION 2. Section 59‑17‑50 of the 1976 Code is amended to read:

“Section 59‑17‑50. A county board of education may consolidate schools and school districts, in whole or in part, whenever, in its judgment, such consolidation will promote the best interests of the cause of education in the county. Consolidation of a school by a county board of education is subject to the provisions of Section 59‑17‑165.”

SECTION 3. This act takes effect upon approval by the Governor and applies to school closings and school consolidations that occur after December 31, 2015.

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