

2025 End of Session LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

South Carolina Legislative Shared Legislative Report from the SC General Assembly

Important New Laws

The General Assembly passed legislation to address various issues facing people in South Carolina. The bills that were signed into law include:

H. 3276 – South Carolina Hands-Free and Distracted Driving Act: This law prohibits the use of handheld mobile devices while driving, aiming to reduce accidents caused by distracted driving. This law takes effect on September 1, 2025, but law enforcement will only issue warnings until March 1, 2026. First-time offenders face a \$100 fine, with subsequent violations resulting in \$200 fines and potential points on the driver's license.

H. 3430 – Tort and Liquor Liability Insurance Reform: To address soaring insurance rates for establishments that serve alcohol, this bill allows restaurants to reduce required liability coverage by implementing measures such as alcohol server training and ID verification. The bill also limits liability for establishments and prohibits “knowingly” selling liquor to persons in an intoxicated state.

H. 3309 – South Carolina Energy Security Act: This law reforms the state's energy utility regulations and authorizes a 2,000 megawatt natural gas power plant in Colleton County to generate more energy to meet our state's growing needs.

S. 28 and S. 29 – Prohibitions of obscene visual representations of child sexual abuse: The legislature passed several bills related to images of child sexual abuse, with an aim to prevent images generated by artificial intelligence (AI). The bill strengthens law enforcement authority to crack down on these images.

S. 2 – Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities – This bill aims to consolidate South Carolina's mental health, disabilities, and substance abuse agencies into a singular Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities. The bill brings oversight directly under the governor and establishes specialized offices to better serve South Carolinians.

Changes to South Carolina's Public Education System:

H. 3196 – Educator Assistance Act: This law strengthens support for teachers by making teaching certificates permanent, expanding leave-sharing options, and requiring earlier notice of assignments and pay. It increases planning time as well and improves the flexibility of teacher contracts.

H. 3578-requirement that cursive writing be taught in public elementary schools, cursive writing instruction must begin in second grade and continue in each grade through fifth grade. B

S. 165 – South Carolina Conservation Education Act: This law establishes the South Carolina Conservation Education Act fund, dedicated to supporting programs that connect youth with nature through the classroom and resource education.

S. 425 – School meals for students in poverty – This law expands access to breakfast and lunch for students living in poverty by including students who qualify for Medicaid, SNAP, TANF, or are homeless, transient, or in foster care.

S. 62 – Private School Vouchers – This bill establishes the Educational Scholarship Trust Fund to allow public funds to pay for private school tuition for eligible students. The state Supreme Court ruled a similar law was unconstitutional last year, so legal challenges are expected to this new law.

Hate Crimes Law

10 years after the tragedy at Mother Emanuel, South Carolina remains just one of two states without a hate crime law:

H. 3039 – Senator Clementa C. Pinckney Hate Crimes Act: This bill would establish penalty enhancements for violent crimes committed against victims based on their race, color, religion, sex, gender, national origin, sexual orientation, or physical or mental disability. It is my hope that this bill will finally be passed and signed into law next year.

State Budget Highlights for Fiscal Year 2025-2026

This year's state budget totaled \$41 billion, which included...

- \$14.5 billion in recurring State General Funds
- \$1.7 billion in non-recurring (one-time) State General Funds
- \$13.4 billion in other state funds
- \$12.5 billion in Federal Funds

Lowering Taxes

- \$300 million in new income tax relief – as state income tax rates are lowered to a top marginal tax of 6%
- \$814 million from the Tax Relief Trust Fund for property tax reimbursements.

Raising Teacher Pay

- \$1,500 salary increase to each cell of the State's Minimum Teacher Salary Schedule.
- New minimum starting salary of \$48,500. This constitutes an increase of 74% since 2015-2016. Minimum teacher pay now exceeds that of North Carolina and Georgia.

Increasing Public Education Funding

- \$4.4 million increase to 4K funding.
- \$30.5 million to expand summer reading camps to strengthen literacy.
- \$75 million for high-quality instructional materials.
- \$20 million for school facility safety, including updated door locks, secure entry points and access, and perimeter fencing.
- \$38 million for school buses.

Increasing Access to Higher Education and Job Training

- Increased funding for grants and scholarships, including an allocation of \$289.8 million for LIFE, HOPE, and Palmetto Fellows scholarships
- \$71.3 million to freeze tuition for in-state students.
- Increased funding for programs designed to address workforce shortages, including \$91.4 million for SC WINS and \$5 million for ReadySC.

Investing in Health Care

- \$25 million to support the well-being of infants and children, including mobile maternity care, hospital care for critically ill children, and more.
- \$50 million for in-patient, residential, and community treatment options for serious mental health and substance abuse issues.
- Care for seniors and individuals living with disabilities, including \$21 million for residential services at DDSN and more.
- \$150 million for USC's Neurological Critical Care & Rehabilitation Center

Protecting Public Safety

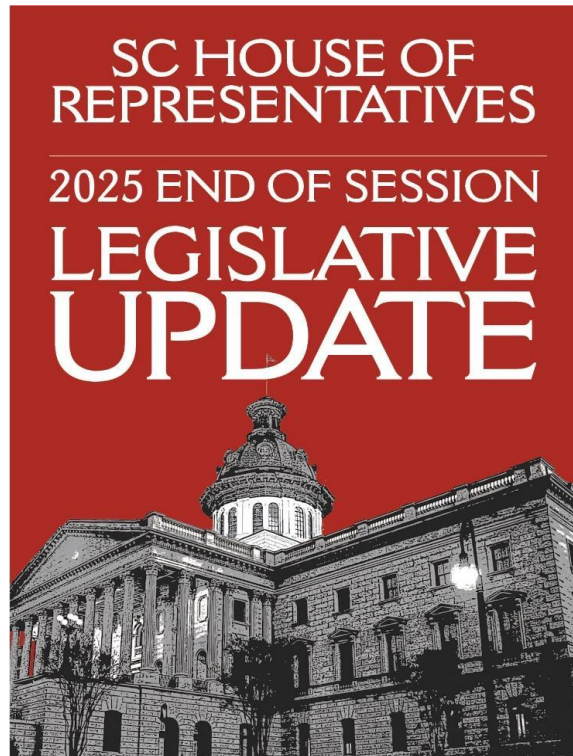
- Fully funds \$60 million requested by the Department of Public Safety, including funding an SRO in every public school.
- Funding for pay raises, including recruiting and retaining Highway Patrol Troopers
- \$19.4 million for Crime Victim Assistance SAVS Program

Conserving Natural Resources

- Over \$60.5 million combined for public land acquisition and preservation
- \$13.3 million to DNR, securing a \$40 million FEMA disaster grant for Hurricane Debby and Hurricane Helene recovery

Contact me

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