



# South Carolina Commission on Higher Education

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## South Carolina Commission on Higher Education Providing Clarity, Best Practices, and Sustainability

### Executive Summary

In each legislative session since 2003, bills have been submitted in the General Assembly to create a Board of Regents in South Carolina to oversee and regulate the state's higher education system. Although the proposals have had limited support in past years, the 2015 fiscal crisis at SC State University provided new momentum for the idea.

In March, 2015, Rep. Merrill introduced an amendment to defund the Commission on Higher Education (CHE), in an effort to force progress on creating a regulatory agency for higher education. As a result of the ensuing debate, Rep. Allison assembled an ad hoc committee to consider H. 3249, which would dissolve both CHE and the State Technical College Board, replacing both with a Board of Regents.

Following testimony from stakeholders throughout South Carolina and from national experts in higher education, the committee asked CHE to clarify our duties as defined in the SC Code of Laws. As a part of that process, we instituted a thorough review of the statutes, conducted a SWOT analysis, and then drafted a new budget to reflect the resources needed to bridge the gap between what we are required to do and what we are currently able to do.

The attached document represents the body of work compiled by CHE to respond to the ad hoc committee's request and to begin the process of developing a sustainability plan and implementing best practices within our agency.

As you can see from our SWOT reports (green: what we are currently doing; yellow: what we are partially doing; and red: what we cannot do due to inadequate resources), CHE has been given an enormous task. As the statutes currently read, we have less than \$156,000 to address 47 legislatively mandated areas of responsibility that are currently classified as red or yellow. It simply cannot be done within our current budget. It will take \$2.1 million to move everything into the green column.

Regardless of the General Assembly's decision on the best vehicle for oversight, South Carolina must have a strong, adequately funded coordinating body.

Higher education in South Carolina is more than a \$4.5 billion industry, and the state is a significant financial stakeholder. By 2020, 65% of all jobs will require some education after high school, but rising costs are making it increasingly difficult for students to attain the skills necessary to meet the needs of our state's workforce. Every time there's a tuition or fee increase, another SC family is priced out of higher education and our state loses an opportunity for economic growth.

When you consider that education, or the lack thereof, affects every segment of our state's well-being, the role of CHE is more important than ever.

- It is our job to look beyond the goals of individual institutions and to focus on the overall needs of the state for the greater good.
- It is our job to provide timely, accurate, and relevant input and advice to the General Assembly.
- It is our job to work with SC's institutions of higher education and the business community to develop a comprehensive plan to positively position our state to face the challenges of a global economy.
- It is our job to provide a layer of accountability, ensuring that our limited educational resources are being managed wisely, and to alert the General Assembly of potential financial crises within our higher education system.

Our job is to provide the leadership and expertise to keep everyone focused on *access, affordability and excellence*, the North Star by which we navigate.

Public education is a powerful investment, and as a state, we have an obligation to monitor and protect that investment. Institutional decisions rest first with each college and university board, and ultimately, with the Legislature, but without effective coordination, our state will continue to struggle with issues like student debt, educational attainment, cost of attendance, institutional accountability, and financial sustainability.

Section 59-103-15 of the SC Code states: "The General Assembly has determined that the mission for higher education in South Carolina is to be a global leader in providing a coordinated, comprehensive system of excellence in education by providing instruction, research, and life-long learning opportunities which are focused on economic development and benefit the State of South Carolina."

The Commission on Higher Education accepts and embraces this responsibility. In order to meet the expectations of the General Assembly and the citizens of SC, however, we must have the necessary authority and resources to fulfill our mission. Without both, our input and recommendations will provide little more than a false sense of security.

With a renewed sense of purpose, we have turned our focus to one job: ensuring that higher education in SC is accessible, that it is affordable, and that it offers academic excellence.

H. 4833 is not about rewriting the law or developing a new public agenda. It represents a simple clarification of CHE's responsibilities, as requested by the ad hoc committee.

The process to determine what type of regulatory authority the state wants for higher education began last March. Today, the question is clear: Can the Commission on Higher Education provide a viable alternative to a Board of Regents? We believe that with proper authority and adequate resources, it can.

Should you have any questions or require additional information, we encourage you to contact the SC Commission on Higher Education.

Tim Hofferth, Chair  
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