

Legislative Updates of interest for Higher Education

Week of February 19-23, 2007:

In the House – The Ways and Means Committee met during the week to consider the FY 2007-08 Appropriations bill and passed its recommendations on Thursday for consideration of the full House. It is expected that the House will begin its deliberations March 13.

Ways and Means has recommended increased general funds of just under forty-two million for higher education institutional operations and special programs and just over thirty million dollars in one-time funds for facilities and other colleges and university projects. Recommendations also provide increased funding to fully support the state's continued participation in SREB programs and services and higher education requests' for activities in support of the Education and Economic Development Act. Additionally, new funding of one million dollars is recommended to support an initiative, One Voice One Plan, to enhance recruitment and retention of nurses and nurse faculty. Of note, the Ways and Means Committee did not recommend continued funding of two million dollars that has been provided the past three years for the Higher Education Statewide Electronic Library. Ways and Means also adopted provisions, among others, to limit tuition increases for SC residents in public institutions to the higher education price index, to end the tuition prepayment program and limit annual tuition increases for participants, and to provide a three-percent pay increase for state employees.

Ways and Means also supported continued and increased funding for the state's higher education scholarship and grant programs. Increases were recommended for Palmetto Fellows, LIFE, and SC HOPE that totaled, across these programs, just over eighteen million dollars. Lottery Tuition Assistance, Need-based Grants, SC Tuition Grants, and the National Guard Loan Repayment program continue to be funded at this year's level of lottery funding. However, a provision was added to the lottery funding recommendations that would increase the Need-based Grant program by any unclaimed prize funds available in excess of the ten million dollars that is recommended in unclaimed prize funds for other items. CHE's request to re-establish the SC Lottery Teacher Grant Program was not recommended. Other higher education programs supported last year and in the past with lottery funds continue to be supported at this year's level including: the Research Centers of Economic Excellence, Technology for Two-Year and Four-Year Public Institutions, and the Higher Education Excellence Enhancement program.

On Wednesday, the Higher Education Subcommittee of the Public Works and Education Committee met and considered bills relating to the Teacher Loan program (H.3162) and Teacher Certification (H.3476). H.3162, which establishes a program advisory board, received a favorable report as amended and will be reported next to the full Committee. H.3476, relating to alternative teacher certification, remains in subcommittee and is scheduled to be discussed at the next subcommittee meeting scheduled on February 28. The Hydrogen Infrastructure Fund Development Act (S.243) continues to move through the process and was introduced in the House on Tuesday where it was referred to Ways and Means.

In the Senate – A Senate Education subcommittee on higher education met on Wednesday and gave favorable report to legislation (S.291) that would provide repayable loans for Palmetto Fellows and LIFE recipients majoring in science and math disciplines. The subcommittee adopted a recommendation to also include participation by teacher education majors. This bill is expected to be considered by the full Education Committee next week. Legislation (S.322) was approved by the Senate for consideration of the House that will provide for tuition assistance for National Guard members and close the National Guard Loan Repayment program to future participants. New legislation (S.484) was introduced which would add institutions headquartered in SC before 1962 as eligible for the SC Tuition Grants program.