

Title: **The Post and Courier of Charleston on ethics reform in the state**

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The Post and Courier of Charleston on ethics reform in the state

The odds against meaningful ethics reform in our state, like the odds against the Gamecocks winning a Southeastern Conference football championship, have long been daunting.

Yes, in June Gov. Nikki Haley signed two ethics reform bills passed by the General Assembly. But those measures, while advancing needed changes on a couple of fronts, still fell short of the full-accountability goal line.

Maybe the Legislature will gain more ethics ground next year.

However, its focus should be on something more substantial than nitpicking USC's practice of giving governors use of season football tickets and Williams-Brice Stadium executive suites at the Gamecocks' home games.

The State Ethics Commission ruled last September the governor could use the tickets and suite for any purpose, providing the "priority" was state-related. Then on July 20, the commission revised that decision.

As we reported the next day, Ethics Commission attorney Michael Burchstead explained the update: "Rather than saying 'using the tickets for state-related purposes is a priority,' the opinion states these tickets need to be used for state-related purposes, period."

However, commission member Frank Grimball, who had asked for the review of last year's opinion, found the change insufficient. He wanted the rule to restrict use of the tickets to "economic development."

Chaney Adams, a spokeswoman for the governor, said Wednesday that as in previous gubernatorial administrations, Haley has strictly used the suite "for state-related purposes, including economic development and business recruitment, because there's no better way to showcase the great things going on in our state."

Haley, a Clemson graduate, also has a Death Valley suite, provided by that university's board members and others, for the Tigers' home games.

And as long as those tickets and suites for either school's games aren't being sold to benefit Haley or anybody else, this gubernatorial perk hardly seems excessive or corrupting.

Instead, it seems like a home-field advantage for the state's top elected official in the big game of bringing more business investment — and good jobs — to South Carolina.

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Author:

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Pigskin perk not out of bounds

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And as long as those tickets and suites for either school's games aren't being sold to benefit Mrs. Haley or anybody else, this gubernatorial perk hardly seems excessive or corrupting.

Instead, it seems like a home-field advantage for the state's top elected official in the big game of bringing more business investment — and good jobs — to South Carolina.

As for the Gamecocks, their chances of winning an SEC title in their first season under coach Will Muschamp look even slimmer than usual, coming off a 3-9 season that included a loss to The Citadel.

On the other hand, USC has won five out of its last seven games against Clemson.

— *The (Charleston) Post and Courier*

Title: **S.C.'s long-ignored child safety net slowly mends**
 Author: by jamie self jseif@thestate.com
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S.C.'s long-ignored child safety net slowly mends

■ Two years after the deaths of children involved with the state's child-welfare agency and spurred demands for reforms, South Carolina's long-ignored Social Services agency is slowly on the mend, critics and advocates agree. But fixing the agency will take years. How did it ever get this bad?

BY JAMIE SELF
 jseif@thestate.com

COLUMBIA

Natalie Thompson says she whispered in her nephew's ear whenever she could. "Yeah, you going to be OK. ... You're going to be fine."

Despite her furtive promises to her nephew — meant to evade the boy's parents, whom Thompson was reporting to the S.C. Department of Social Services for abusing the child — 4-year-old Robert Guinyard was beaten to death with a metal rod in his home in 2013.

Today, the autistic boy's parents, convicted of homicide by child abuse, are

serving life sentences. Recently, Robert's estate won a \$590,000 settlement from the state, according to Joyce Cheeks, the family's attorney.

The suit alleged Social Services ignored reports from Thompson and others that Robert was being abused. Social Services had forewarned Robert's mother was dangerous, the suit added, having investigated her for child abuse before.

In his death, Robert became the face of scores of children who fatally fell

through the cracks at the S.C. Department of Social

SEE DSS, 2C

“

IT'S NOT THAT I DON'T BELIEVE THAT WE AREN'T GOING TO GET AT THE GOAL. WE WILL. WE'LL KEEP AT IT. BUT MY FEAR IS THAT WE WON'T STAY THERE. AND I DON'T WANT TO BE PART OF THAT.

— Susan Alford, S.C. Department of Social Services director

FROM PAGE 1C

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Services. The 4-year-old was one of 67 children with prior Social Services records whose deaths were investigated by the state in 2013, one of 681 such child deaths investigated from 2009 through mid-June.

Two years later, South Carolina's long-ignored Department of Social Services is making progress toward improving its child-welfare

services. But it still is struggling to enact needed reforms — mostly aimed at reducing child-welfare workers' caseloads and retaining employees.

● Crippling turnover rates among child-welfare workers — exceeding 100 percent in Richland County and 39 percent statewide in 2014 — fell to 14 percent in Richland and a little more than 7 percent statewide during the first three months of this year, according to Social Services.

● However, caseloads — while lower than four years ago, when some caseworkers had more than 100 children to protect at one time — still exceed the agency's new limit of 24 children for about half of front-line child-welfare workers.

● In the state's general fund budget that took effect July 1, spending for Social Services surpassed the agency's pre-recession funding for the first time. The extra money has helped give pay raises to child-welfare work-

ers. But those workers' salaries still trail what their peers were paid two years ago in two neighboring states.

● A plan aimed at preventing children from slipping through the cracks at Social Services also has hit a major snag. The initial roll out of a new, statewide call-in system to screen reports of abuse and neglect was halted after reaching only about half the state's 46 counties. The rollout was paused because the new system was



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producing so many reports of abuse and neglect that Social Services, still understaffed, could not handle the calls, new director Susan Alford said.

● Despite focusing on hiring more staff since 2014, Social Services still is climbing its way out of a nearly decade-old worker shortage. The agency lost 845 filled positions from 2007-08, before the Great Recession,

to 2011-12 - when staffing bottomed out at 2,888 filled positions.

Long-lasting improvements at the agency could take years to take effect fully, says child-welfare advocate Laura Hudson, noting it takes six months to train a caseworker and years more for that new worker to become good at his or her job.

"Ms. Alford has a really

difficult job, like turning a battleship around in a bathtub," Hudson said. "But is her heart in the right place?" "Absolutely."

REBUILDING A WORKFORCE

The push to reform Social Services climaxed in 2014, when child-welfare advocates sounded alarms about the number of children dying under the agency's watch.

Critics blamed the deaths, in part, on child-welfare workers' heavy caseloads. Those caseloads contributed to widespread, high turnover among the agency's child-

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welfare staff.

S.C. Gov. Nikki Haley's Social Services director, Lillian Koller, resigned in mid-2014 amid mounting criticism and calls for new leadership.

Alford, Koller's successor, took over in December 2014 as lawmakers clamored for improvements at the agency, long in crisis.

The S.C. Legislative Audit Council issued a scathing review of Social Services shortly after Koller's exit. The report cited high worker caseloads and high employee turnover as serious problems, issues that had been threatening the welfare of children for years. The council had sounded the same alarms in reviews in 1985, 1991 and 2006.

Historically, Social Services has struggled to retain employees and fill vacancies.

In mid-2014, Social Services had 360 job openings. Turnover among child-welfare workers was 66 percent from 2011 to 2013, the Audit Council found.

Today, turnover rates have declined dramatically, officials say.

- Turnover fell to 7.4 percent from January through March, down from 27 percent in 2015 and 39 percent in 2014.

- In the first three months of this year, half of Social Services' 46 county offices did not lose a child-welfare worker – a stark reduction compared to last year, when only four county offices retained all their employees.

- In this year's first quarter, the highest turnover rate at any Social Services' county office was 17 percent. Only 11 counties have turnover rates in the double digits. That is a marked improvement from 2014, when nine county offices had turnover

rates higher than 50 percent, including Richland, where turnover was 104 percent. This year, turnover in the Richland office has dropped to 14 percent. In Lexington, turnover fell to 3 percent in the first three months of this year, down from 45 percent last year and 39 percent two years ago.

For some observers, the turnaround is hard to believe – “almost unrealistic,” said state Sen. Katrina Shealy, a Lexington Republican and member of a Senate committee that investigated the agency.

Alford, too, said the drop in turnover is promising. But, she added, the problem has not been solved.

Turnover could rise again and delay reaching the agency's goal of having no child-welfare caseworker manage more than 24 children, she said.

Alford said her goal is to correct the underlying causes of excessive turnover and high caseloads, and ensure each call reporting abuse and neglect is screened correctly.

Only those changes will lead to long-term improvements in the state's child safety net, she said.

“My biggest fear would be that (Social Services) in 2020 is going to have the same report (of problems highlighted in previous reviews of the agency),” Alford said.

“It's not that I don't believe that we aren't going to get at the goal. We will. We'll keep at it,” she added. “But my fear is that we won't stay there.”

“And I don't want to be part of that.”

HIRING KEY TO LOWERING CASELOADS

After taking over as direc-

tor, Alford visited each of Social Services' 46 county offices. Employees told her that impossibly heavy workloads were the top reason that workers were quitting.

Now, Alford is betting that lowering workloads will help retain quality employees and improve services.

Since 2014, the agency has made progress toward lowering caseloads, once obscenely high. But it still is struggling to push caseloads down below its own, newly established limits.

Those limits say child-welfare caseworkers who assess families for potential abuse and neglect, and then work to help the family correct problems, should have no more than 24 children to look after. Also, foster care workers should have no more than 20 children to manage.

Still, as of June 20, about half – or 482 – of Social Services child-welfare caseworkers had more than 24 children to oversee. And 77 caseworkers had caseloads of more than 50 children. But that was down from 142 caseworkers who shouldered similar caseloads a year

earlier.

Offering lawmakers a sense of what it would take to reach its new caseload goals, Alford said Social Services could have 80 percent of child-welfare workers managing caseloads within the agency's new lower lim-

its by December.

But that would require all new positions be filled and no turnover.

To lower caseloads and turnover rates, the agency started a drive to hire more caseworkers and pay them more in 2013, before Alford came on board. That year, Social Services requested 50 new positions after lawmakers questioned why – since 2010 – the agency had not asked for more employees despite its workers' oppressive caseloads.

To help with that effort, state lawmakers – with Gov. Nikki Haley's encouragement – are spending more than they have in a long time on Social Services.

In the budget that took effect July 1, general fund spending for Social Services is \$149 million, the highest level since 2007-08. That year, the agency received \$139 million from the state's general fund. Then, spend-

ing took a nose dive due to the recession.

“There are certain things that money can't buy,” Haley told The State newspaper recently, adding her goal is to improve the way that agencies operate before spending more on them.

For example, the Republican added, “It (money) can't buy a foster family. (But) I can recruit a foster family.”

South Carolina has more children in need of foster homes than it does families to shelter them, the governor noted. To address that shortfall, Social Services, with Haley's encouragement, has launched a program to recruit more foster families and make easier for them to start fostering children.

Haley also said giving smartphones to all front-line

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caseworkers has helped make their jobs easier.

"We've seen morale go up. ... We've seen the caseloads go down," she said. "We're not there yet. We've got a long way to go. But I think we've seen some improvements."

Before improving its child-welfare operations became a top priority, Social Services' focus had been elsewhere.

Taking office in 2011, in the wake of the Great Recession, Haley made jobs her top priority. Koller, Haley's former child-welfare director, focused largely on getting South Carolinians off welfare.

But lawmakers started hearing complaints that Social Services' child-welfare operations were in a shambles and children were dying as a result.

Testifying before a special Senate committee, Koller unnerved lawmakers when she told them the average caseload for child-welfare workers was six or seven. When critics objected it was much higher, Koller later said the number was so low because it included trainees and supervisors, handling single cases.

After Koller's exit, Haley said she had no idea that Social Services, which reports directly to the governor, had caseload problems.

In the state budget starting in mid-2015, lawmakers approved more than 280 new positions for the agency, including 177 child-welfare caseworkers and 67 caseworker assistants.

The newly created assistants help with paperwork and other time-consuming tasks that keep caseworkers from getting face time with families in crisis. They also give entry-level experience to workers with an interest in

child welfare, creating - in theory - a pipeline of caseworkers.

Starting July 1, the agency has the OK to hire 171 additional child-welfare workers, including 51 new hires for second- and third-shift positions to follow up with families or respond to after-hours calls for help. The agency recently added late-shift workers in Richland and Greenville counties - two of the largest and busiest Social Services offices.

The agency also, for the first time, is hiring its own training directors - a move to provide year-round training for child-welfare workers, targeting topics that employees need the most help in.

"Things are definitely moving in the right direction," said state Sen. Joel Lourie, one of the loudest critics of Social Services two years ago.

"The whole process of hiring and training caseworkers takes time," said the Richland Democrat, who pushed for reforms as a member of the Senate panel that investigated Social Services. "But I look for continued improvement in the services they deliver as well as the caseloads going down."

SOCIAL SERVICES PAYING MORE

Social Services also has given its child-welfare workers raises.

"It probably will in no way compensate them for all the

SEE DSS, 4C

Prescription for crisis

South Carolina's child-welfare agency was on the verge of collapse in 2014. Why? A combination of factors:

1. MONEY DRIED UP ...

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In the wake of the Great Recession, general fund spending for the state Department of Social Services was slashed. Only this year did state spending for the agency exceed pre-recession levels:

2007-08: \$139 million

2008-09: \$110 million

2009-10: \$119 million

2010-11: \$119 million

2011-12: \$120 million

2012-13: \$122 million

2013-14: \$122 million

2014-15: \$124 million

2015-16: \$134 million

2016-17: \$149 million

2. TURNOVER RATES SKYROCKET ...

As spending collapsed, turnover at Social Services skyrocketed – hitting more than 100 percent in Richland County in 2014 – as child-welfare workers left the agency. Since then, turnover has slowed. A look at turnover rates at Midlands Social Services offices compared to the state as a whole:

County	2014	2015	1Q 2016
Kershaw	82%	17%	8%
Lexington	39%	45%	3%
Richland	104%	61%	14%
Statewide	39%	27%	7%

3. AS OVERWORKED CHILD-WELFARE STAFFERS QUIT ...

Susan Alford, brought in to head Social Services after its 2014 crisis, says agency workers told her that employee were leaving because of impossibly heavy workloads, which the agency now is trying to reduce

100+: In 2014, senators hear that some child-welfare workers have to oversee more than 100 children at a time, far above recommended levels.

24: The number of children a child-welfare worker should oversee, according to Social Services' new standard.

482: Number of S.C. child-welfare caseworkers overseeing more than 24 children as of June 20 of this year

77: Number of S.C. child-welfare caseworkers overseeing more than 50 children on June 20, down from 142 a year earlier

4. AND LOW PAY TAKES ITS TOLL ...

Low pay has contributed to high turnover at the state's child-welfare agency. How the pay of S.C. child-welfare workers compares to their peers in other states:

\$28,005: Starting salary for an entry-level child-welfare caseworker in Georgia in 2014; salary increased to \$30,869 after a year of experience

\$30,582: Starting salary for an entry-level S.C. caseworker in 2014

\$31,968: Starting salary for a similar job in Tennessee in 2014; salary increased to \$36,276 after a year of experience

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\$34,733: Starting salary for an entry-level S.C. child-welfare caseworker as of July 1 of this year

\$34,474: Starting salary for a similar job in North Carolina in 2014

5. LEAVING AGENCY UNABLE TO FILL ITS VACANCIES

With its budget slashed and turnover rates skyrocketing, Social Services has had been unable to fill its vacancies. In 2011-12, for instance, more than a quarter of its authorized jobs were vacant. A look at how many of its authorized jobs the agency has been able to fill:

2007-08: 92 percent of 4,040 authorized jobs filled

2008-09: 92 percent of 4,066 authorized jobs filled

2009-10: 83 percent of 4,066 authorized jobs filled

2010-11: 78 percent of 3,955 authorized jobs filled

2011-12: 73 percent of 3,954 authorized jobs filled

2012-13: 87 percent of 3,466 authorized jobs filled

2013-14: 90 percent of 3,452 authorized jobs filled

2014-15: 92 percent of 3,502 authorized jobs filled

2015-16: 91 percent of 3,786 authorized jobs filled

2016-17: 87 percent of 3,957 authorized jobs filled; hiring for additional positions began July 1

SOURCES: S.C. Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office, S.C. Department of Social Services, S.C. Legislative Audit Council

FROM PAGE 2C

DSS

things that they do, but it's more equitable when you look at other states and what their entry salaries are," Alford said.

The pay raises were long overdue, say critics, who cite the difficulty of recruiting and retaining quality caseworkers when they can earn more in neighboring North Carolina or in other fields.

The average minimum starting pay for an S.C. caseworker was \$30,582 in 2014, up only slightly from \$29,797 eight years earlier, according to a state audit. Last year, the starting salary increased to \$33,640. On July 1, the starting salary increased to \$34,733.

The pay raises make S.C. child-welfare salaries more competitive than in Georgia, where caseworkers' pay two years ago ranged from

\$28,000 to \$34,000.

But the S.C. salaries do not compete with Tennessee. Two years ago, a Tennessee child-welfare workers with one year of experience was paid more than \$36,000.

Creating another challenge to retaining caseworkers, the 2014 Audit Council report found S.C. child-welfare workers can find higher paying jobs in their own communities – working at schools or for other organizations – or in other states. For example, a child protective services worker in Orange County, N.C., was paid \$45,677 a year two years ago, the audit found.

PROBLEMS REPORTING ABUSE PERSIST

Of the 171 new Social Services positions that lawmakers approved this fiscal

year, 52 workers are needed to help the agency carry out its plan to make it easier to report abuse and neglect, and ensure legitimate reports are investigated quickly and effectively.

A call-in system, intended to screen reports of abuse and neglect statewide, now covers only about half the state's 46 counties. The system does not yet include Charleston or Greenville counties – two of the largest in the state.

Alford halted the call-in system's roll out last year after abuse and neglect reports spiked by 25 percent, leading to 41 percent more investigations.

Social Services couldn't cope with the added abuse reports, Alford says.

"We weren't equipped,"

she told The State newspaper. "We didn't have enough staff as it was. We had case-loads that were way too high as it was."

Child-welfare advocates also have heard complaints from law enforcement and medical professionals about the difficulty of reporting cases through the new system.

Hudson, the child-welfare advocate, said the call-in system does not have enough personnel to answer its phones in a timely manner.

"I've had complaints from my pediatricians, one doctor and several law enforcement who have spent 45 minutes to an hour on the phone waiting to make a report," she said, adding the call-in system's workers also need

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more training, including knowing to prioritize calls that come in from people who are required by law to report abuse and neglect.

If the newly authorized hires come on board quickly, it will take at least a year to have the call-in system operational across the state, Alford said.

A NEW TONE

Despite that setback, child-welfare advocates and longtime Social Services workers say Alford's leadership and the new tone that she has brought to the embattled agency have improved morale.

"There have been a lot of changes in attitude, a lot of changes in procedures," said Hudson, who first raised questions about children dying while under Social Services' watch as a member of a state child-fatality review committee.

When she visited county Social Services offices, Alford asked for input from employees and community members – a level of access that longtime Social Services workers said was nonexistent in previous administrations.

Some Social Services workers told Alford they wanted to continue their educations. In response, the agency pushed lawmakers to approve \$1.5 million this year for staffers who want to go back to school.

Alford also allows Social Services workers to contact her directly by email. The results have been promising – offering a steady flow of ideas about how to improve the agency, Alford says.

"Her presence definitely made a difference," said Ken McBride, Newberry County Social Services director. "I've

heard a number of directors in the past say they're going to go out to all the counties and visit, but she's the first one that's actually done it.

"That within itself told everybody she's a woman of her word," he said. "That's the first time you've seen a director in a county office unless it was something that was going on real bad."

Jamie Self: 803-771-8658,
 @jamiemself

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 EQUIPPED. WE
 DIDN'T HAVE
 ENOUGH STAFF AS
 IT WAS. WE HAD
 CASELOADS THAT
 WERE WAY TOO
 HIGH AS IT WAS.**

– Alford, DSS director

S.C. child deaths and Social Services

The crisis at the S.C. Department of Social Services was uncovered after advocates grew alarmed at the number of children who were dying despite the fact that their cases had been called to the attention of the state agency. A look at how many children died:

DEATHS, ACCORDING TO SOCIAL SERVICES

Social Services publishes the number of child deaths each year where the agency investigated and found that abuse or neglect likely caused the child's death:

2013: 25

2014: 22

2015: 28

DEATHS, ACCORDING TO THE S.C. CHILD FATALITY REVIEW COMMITTEE

Coroners are required to report the deaths of children, 17 or younger, that are suspicious, violent, unexplained or unusual for investigation by the S.C. Child Fatality Review Committee. A look at how many of those deaths, including unsafe sleeping or crib-related fatalities, occurred after a

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child or a sibling had contact with Social Services at any point in their life, according to the fatality committee:

2009: 70, or 33 percent of 214 deaths

2010: 76, or 42 percent of 183 deaths

2011: 67, or 39 percent of 174 deaths

2012: 67, or 43 percent of 156 deaths

2013: 67, or 49 percent of 136 deaths

2014: 220, or 62 percent of 356 deaths; the spike includes 153 previously unreported deaths that were referred to the state in 2014

2015: 86, or 57 percent of 150 deaths

2016 (through June): 28, or 27 percent of 102 deaths

SOURCES: S.C. Department of Social Services, S.C. Child Fatality Review Committee

Findings: Protecting children in S.C.

After two years of scrutiny by lawmaker and child-welfare advocates, the embattled S.C. Department of Social

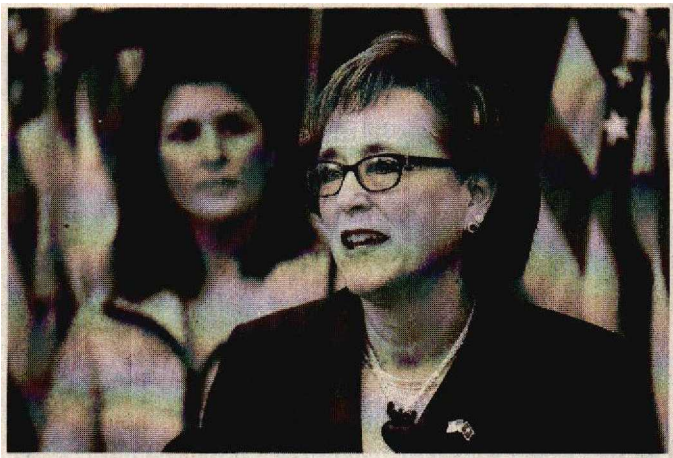
Services is mending slowly. A look at what has changed since 2014:

Caseloads are down: Horrific work loads caused many child-welfare workers to quit in the past. Now, the agency says it wants no caseworker to have to look out for more than 24 children. Still, as of June 20, 482 caseworkers had more than 24 children to look after and 77 caseworkers carried caseloads of 50+ children.

Turnover is down: Turnover among child-welfare workers, which had crippled the agency, is down. During the first three months of this year, turnover was 7.4 percent statewide, down from 39 percent in 2014.

Statewide call-in system stalled: A statewide call-in system — proposed to ensure that reports of abuse and neglect are not falling through the cracks — is stalled after its roll out produced more calls than Social Services could handle. The system covers only half the state and is inefficient, critics say.

New leadership praised: Susan Alford, who has been Social Services director for 11/2 years, has been widely praised for her efforts to rebuild the agency.



GERRY MELENDEZ gmelendez@thestate.com

Susan Alford addresses the media after being introduced by Gov. Nikki Haley as the new director at the S.C. Department of Social Services Dec. 15, 2014.

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Army Corps reviewing proposed interstate to Myrtle Beach

BY SEANNA ADCOX
 Associated Press

COLUMBIA

A decades-long proposal to build an interstate to Myrtle Beach is back before the Army Corps of Engineers, which is weighing whether to permit construction of the four-lane, nonstop path to the heart of the state's tourism industry.

Advocates contend Interstate 73 is needed to keep people coming and grow the Grand Strand's econ-

omy, while opponents argue the \$2.4 billion project is too costly, unnecessary and environmentally destructive.

Both sides are invited to send their comments to the Corps and state Department of Health and Environmental Control through Aug. 8. As of Tuesday, the Corps had already received more than

400 statements, said project manager Steve Brumagin.

There is no timeline on either agency's decision. Even if both say yes, construction depends on

funding.

But Brad Dean, president of the Myrtle Beach Area Chamber of Commerce, is hopeful I-73 "finally moves from a dotted line on a map" to reality. The latest review comes 34 years after Congress required studying a new highway to Myrtle Beach.

In 1991, Congress called a Michigan-to-Myrtle Beach route, via Interstates 73 and 74, a high priority.

But just \$116 million - including \$87 million in federal earmarks -

has been designated for South Carolina's portion, which stretches about 80 miles through rural Marion, Dillon and Marlboro counties to the North Carolina border.

While the application encompasses the entire project, proponents say their focus is on building the 42-mile southern section linking Interstate 95 to the Conway Bypass, providing that long-sought interstate access.

Gov. Nikki Haley has called I-73 key to bringing new businesses to the Grand Strand but has repeatedly said the federal government should fund it. Other advocates say they realize that's not going to happen.

DOT Commission Chairman

SEE INTERSTATE, 13A

FROM PAGE 1A

INTERSTATE

Mike Wooten, of Myrtle Beach, insists the \$1.3 billion project could be built without state taxes, primarily through tolls and local taxes if needed.

"No other community in the nation has 18 million visitors without interstate access," said Dean, who's also president of the National I-73/I-74/I-75 Corridor Association. "There's no other place more likely to succeed in building an interstate without state and federal funds."

But Dana Beach, director

of the Coastal Conservation League, calls that plan unnecessarily risky in a state where legislators can't agree on how to fund tens of billions of dollars' worth of existing highway needs.

"If the toll doesn't cover the cost, who's going to cover it?" he asked. "We don't have the money to do it. It would take a decade, and there are options that will move us along much faster for much less money."

The League proposes to instead upgrade the existing four-lane corridor of S.C. 38

and U.S. 501, estimated to cost \$150 million and have far less environmental impact.

I-73 proponents dismiss the alternative.

"501 is already a parking lot in the middle of summer. All that would accomplish is to move the traffic jam further down the road," Dean said.

According to the Corps' and DHEC's joint public notice, the construction of I-73 would fill 324 acres of water, impacting 17 streams, 139 wetlands and five ponds. It's unclear how much of that is in the southern portion.

To offset the impact, the state proposes buying Gun-

ter's Island, a 6,134-acre tract in Horry County bordered by the Little Pee Dee River, to become part of the Department of Natural Resources' Heritage Trust



Title: **Army Corps reviewing proposed interstate to Myrtle Beach**
 Author: BY SEANNA ADCOX Associated Press
 Size: 57.97 column inches
 Myrtle Beach, SC Circulation: 61238

program. Federal earmarks would cover 80 percent of the roughly \$18 million mitigation plan, according to the DOT.

EXISTING TOLL ROADS

Beach points to Interstate 185, a toll road in Greenville County, as an example of

overestimated projections.

A year after its 2001 opening, traffic counts were 60 percent less than expected, forcing the operating nonprofit to declare bankruptcy in 2010 and restructure the debt. Peter Femia, Southern Connector's general manager, said revenues are tracking revised esti-

mates, helped by an im-

proved economy and toll increases, most recently in January. The 16-mile route is slated to be paid for in 2051.

By comparison, traffic exceeded projections on South Carolina's only other

toll road, the 7.5-mile Cross Island Parkway on Hilton Head Island. Opened in 1997 with triple the expected traffic, it's on track to be paid off in 2021, according to the Department of Transportation.

Title: **State launches effort to avoid wasting food**
 Author: From release
 Size: 33.01 column inches
 Lancaster, SC Circulation: 12696



State launches effort to avoid wasting food

From release

COLUMBIA – State officials this week announced Don't Waste Food S.C., a collaborative campaign to reduce the No. 1 item thrown away in the state: wasted food.

One out of six people struggle with hunger in the United States, yet food waste is the single largest component being sent to landfills and accounted for 21 percent (35.2 million tons) of the nation's waste in 2013. South Carolina alone produced an estimated 607,000 tons of food waste in fiscal 2015.

Don't Waste Food S.C. is aimed at educating and empowering individuals, businesses and communities to take action by preventing, composting or donating surplus food. The campaign's goal is reducing food waste in the

state by 50 percent by 2030.

The S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control, Department of Commerce and Department of Agriculture are working together on the effort.

"South Carolina is positioned to be a leader in tackling the complex environmental and health challenges of food waste," said DHEC Director Catherine Heigel. "The Don't Waste Food S.C. campaign is building awareness and partnerships to help our state make a collective impact on this 607,000-ton issue. Working together, we can reduce the amount of food being added to our landfills and connect food resources with communities in need."

Gov. Nikki Haley proclaimed July 13 "Don't

Waste Food S.C. Day" as the state agencies launched the initiative and invited all South Carolinians to join the effort. The campaign has already gained momentum with early involvement from several private stakeholder partners, including Harvest Hope Food Bank, Re-Soil and Loaves & Fishes.

"Composting is not only important for South Carolina's environmental health, it also has the potential to become a significant driver of our economy," said Commerce Secretary Bobby Hitt. "As many as 1,400 new jobs can be generated for every 1 million tons of composted materials, so this is a critical issue for Team South Carolina. I urge all businesses within our state to do what they can to donate

and compost unused food."

The partners are working together to connect food surpluses to those in need, enhance infrastructure for composting and educate consumers, communities and businesses about what they can do to join the initiative.

"I see firsthand the amount of hard work, dedication and time that farmers put into growing food, and I see the needs of other South Carolinians who all too often go hungry," said Agriculture Commissioner Hugh Weathers.

"I truly believe that through this campaign, we can sustain our state's economy by eliminating wasted food and further empower our own neighbors as we feed the hungry."

Title: **State partnership launches "Don't Waste Food SC" campaign**
 Author:
 Size: 31.93 column inches
 Bennettsville, SC Circulation: 6289



State partnership launches "Don't Waste Food SC" campaign

COLUMBIA, SC - The S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control, S.C. Department of Commerce and S.C. Department of Agriculture have announced Don't Waste Food S.C., a collaborative campaign to reduce the number one item thrown away in the state: wasted food.

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Don't Waste Food S.C. is aimed at educating and empowering individuals, businesses and communities to take action by preventing, composting or donating surplus food. The campaign is working towards a goal of reducing food waste in the state by 50 percent by 2030.

"South Carolina is positioned to be a leader in tackling the complex envi-

ronmental and health challenges of food waste," said Catherine Heigel, director of DHEC. "The Don't Waste Food S.C. campaign is building awareness and partnerships to help our state make a collective impact on this 607,000-ton issue. Working together, we can reduce the amount of food being added to our landfills and connect food resources with communities in need."

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Title: **LMC-Swansea celebrates 20 years**

Author:

Size: 73.31 column inches

Lexington, SC Circulation: 5652



LMC-Swansea celebrates 20 years

Lexington Medical Center's community medical center in Swansea is celebrating its 20th anniversary. For the past two decades, Lexington Medical Center Swansea has provided convenient medical care close to home for people in the community.

Lexington Medical Center Swansea opened in 1996 with a staff of 10 employees, a lab, X-Ray machine and the ability to perform minor procedures. Clinicians saw an average of 30 patients each day. At the time, the Swansea facility filled an important gap in the community. Before it opened, some patients had no other choice than to drive from Swansea to Lexington Medical Center's Emergency department 20 minutes away in West Columbia. The community medical center was a more appropriate setting to treat the kind of problems that previously had many people traveling to the ER.

Today, Lexington Medical Center Swansea provides urgent care as well as internal medicine, OB/GYN care, X-Ray and lab services, a medical social worker and a certified diabetes educator. In addition, the hospital's mobile mammography unit travels there to offer digital mammography to patients. In 2015, Lexington Medical Center Swansea had more than 22,000 patient visits. That's about 60 patient visits each day.

"This year, Lexington Medical Center Swansea opened the Swansea Community Wellness Path and Gardens, a 400-foot track that patients and community members can use for exercise," said Brandon Spires, practice manager at Lexington Medical Center Swansea. "The track opens to a vegetable garden that the diabetes educator uses during classes. The garden is made up of six 8 by 8 raised planters with squash, zucchini, cucumbers, tomatoes and more."

Who's new

Dominique Jordan has joined the Chronicle in online and print advertising and marketing sales.



Jordan

Jordan is a new resident of Lexington. He was born and grew up in Swainsboro, Ga, the son of Leroy and Darlene Jordan.

He is a graduate of East Georgia State College and Georgia Southern University.

Jordan has worked in education, teaching in the Emanuel County School System in Swainsboro. He has written and self-published a series of books for young readers titled "The Erlonan Tales."

Sparrow & Kennedy expands

Sparrow & Kennedy, a local John Deere dealer, purchased Carolina Garden and Turf of Johns Island. The name change, effective Aug. 1, will not impact the staff, location, or products. Instead, it will bring an expansion of the services department and increase available John Deere equipment.

"We have been proud to represent the John Deere brand and provide first-rate equipment and service to our customers for many years,

LINDA SAULS
 ROXANNE MOORE
 lexingtonchronicle@gmail.com



AROUND TOWN

ROXANNE: 359-7633 | LINDA: 467-0334

and we know that Carolina Garden and Turf has been committed to offering the same," said Cameron Kennedy, General Manager of Sparrow & Kennedy.

Record earnings for First Community Bank

First Community Corporation of Lexington, the holding company for First Community Bank, reported record income for the second quarter of 2016.

The corporation reported for the second quarter:

- Record earnings of \$1.745 million, a 20.9% increase over 2015.
- Diluted EPS of \$.26 per common share, a 18.2% over 2015.
- Net loan growth of \$17.3 million, up 14.0%
- Cash dividend of \$0.08 per common share, which is the 58th consecutive quarter of cash dividends paid to common shareholders.

South State Bank earnings

South State Corporation, parent of South State Bank with branches in Irmo, Lexington and West Columbia, released quarterly financial figures last week including: net income of \$24.5 million, equal to the first quarter; net operating earnings of \$28.5 million, up \$3.5 million from the first quarter and a 13.8% increase.

State employment rate improves

The state's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate decreased in June to 5.4% from 5.6% in May, marking its lowest level since July 2001.

"Today's announcement is all the motivation we need to stay focused on things like workforce training, tax relief and investments in our students so we can keep the momentum going," Gov. Nikki Haley of Lexington said last week.

LMC officer receives J.P. Strom Award

Lexington Medical Center police officer James Michael "Mike" Brazell has received the prestigious J.P. Strom Award from the South Carolina Criminal Justice Academy. This honor is the top award in the Basic Law Enforcement Class and goes to the student who has attained the highest cumulative academic score for all tests.



Brazell

"This award shows Mr. Brazell's dedication to law enforcement and his academic excellence," said Major Matthew Braxton, interim Chief of Police/Director of Public Safety at Lexington Medical Center. "It also demonstrates the quality of officers employed within our hospital police department."

Business Tip of the Week

The Chronicle would like to share your business tips in this weekly column.

What have you or your business done recently that was successful and that might be valuable to other business people?

Email your tips and other business news to MarkBellune@yahoo.com.

Title: **.Dealers donate \$227K in 2016**
 Author: BY MICHAEL SMITH msmith@fdkenstcmdard.com
 Size: 37.51 column inches
 North Augusta, SC Circulation: 2454



STAR INVESTIGATION

Dealers donate \$227K in 2016

Donations roll in
as lawmakers pass
new closing fee law

BY MICHAEL SMITH
msmith@alikenstandard.com

South Carolina lawmakers have received more than \$227,000 in campaign contributions from automobile dealers and industry lobbyists so far in 2016, a review of ethics filing shows.

An investigation by *The North Augusta Star* also found that donations started rolling in shortly after state lawmakers introduced a bill easing restrictions the S.C. Supreme Court imposed on closing fees that auto dealers charge consumers.

Fees typically add several hundred dollars to the final sales price of an automobile.

Legislation was first filed in December 2015, weeks after the Supreme Court upheld a nearly \$2.9 million class action judgment against an Upstate dealership.

Gov. Nikki Haley signed one of the bills into law last month, according to legislative records.

E. Sims Floyd, director of the S.C. Automobile Dealers Association, or SCADA, which according to S.C. Ethics Commission records has donated to more than 50 state lawmakers this year, couldn't be reached for comment.

A SCADA representative said Tuesday that Floyd would be out of the country for the rest of the week. State legislators insist the donations didn't influence their vote, noting in most cases, contributions arrived after they had voted.

"I had contributions from all over the state from Charleston, Beaufort and Myrtle Beach," said Sen. Larry Martin, R-Pickens, who reported \$39,249.16 in auto dealer-related contributions, mostly in June.

Please see **DONORS**, Page 5A

DONORS

CONTINUED from 1A

Martin's total was second in the state behind Sen. Tom Corbin,



Title: **.Dealers donate \$227K in 2016**
 Author: BY MICHAEL SMITH msmUh@fdkenstcmdard.com
 Size: 37.51 column inches
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R-Greenville (\$43,750.39).

"For whatever reason, they felt inclined and said we'd like to contribute to his campaign, unsolicited," Martin said.

Sen. Shane Massey, R-Edgefield, whose district includes parts of Aiken County, reported \$26,800 in auto dealer-related donations, the third highest in the state.

Massey said the receipt or promise of campaign contributions had nothing to do with his support of the closing fee bill.

The reason so many lawmakers signed on to the closing fee legislation was because many lawmakers thought the Supreme Court overreached in its November 2015 decision, the Edgefield senator said.

"This was the latest example of the majority of the court knowing where they wanted to go," Massey said. "They knew what they wanted the law to be and how to get there. They were making the law. That was not the intent of the General Assembly."

*Sue Berkowitz, director of the South Carolina Appleseed Legal

Justice Center in Columbia, who testified against Senate bill 911 in committee hearings, said the timing of donations and legislative action gives the appearance that contributions influenced lawmakers' decision making.

"The most frustrating part is we're all being represented by the legislature, not just the special interests, but all of us," Berkowitz said.

Who received donations?

Seventy-nine state lawmakers and a Senate candidate reported

Please see **DONORS**, Page 13A