

SC Governor Calls on School Districts to Offer Full-Time, In-Person Learning in the Fall

Yesterday, Governor McMaster held a press conference during which he announced that he is encouraging every school district to submit reopening plans to the State Superintendent of Education, Molly Spearman, which include the option for parents to send their children to school in person five days a week and that they wait until the day after labor day, September 8th, to open. Senate President Harvey Peeler, House Speaker Jay Lucas, Senate Education Committee Chairman Greg Hembree, House Education and Public Works (EPW) Committee Chairlady Rita Allison, Senate Family and Veterans' Services Chairlady Katrina Shealy, and Representative Raye Felder, Chair of the K-12 Subcommittee of the House EPW Committee stood in support of the Governor at the press conference and many spoke in agreement.

State Superintendent of Education, Molly Spearman, was not at the press conference and issued the following statement following the Governor's remarks:

“Every South Carolina parent must be afforded the option to choose virtual learning or a face to face model for their child this school year. The pandemic has shown the vital importance of our public education system and the broad range of services beyond teaching it provides for our students every day. Our goal must be a return to five day a week in person instruction as safely and as soon as possible.

We cannot, however turn a blind eye to the health and safety of our students and staff when the spread of the virus in some of our communities is among the highest in the world. School leaders, in consultation with public health experts, are best positioned to determine how in-person operations should be carried out to fit the needs of their local communities. I remain committed to supporting them in this endeavor and will only approve those plans that offer high quality options and keep safety as their top priority.”

All districts' reopening plans are due to the State Superintendent of Education by tomorrow, July 17th.

Liability Protections a Focus of Testimony in House Committee Meeting

In testimony to the House COVID-19 Employment, Workforce and Business Recovery Committee, chaired by Representative Kirkman Finlay, the SC Manufacturers Alliance and the SC Retail Association both emphasized the need for the General Assembly to quickly pass a targeted, limited safe harbor bill that will:

- Provide limited liability protection for businesses, healthcare providers, and educational institutions in any COVID-19 related lawsuit from the start of the pandemic to the end of the pandemic.
- Ensure that employers who have taken steps to keep workplaces safe and follow public health guidelines are protected from liability.

The Committee also discussed the current business license tax structure in South Carolina and how it presents a huge challenge for economic recovery. Chairman Finlay noted that businesses need less red-tape and tax compliance burdens now more than ever. While some cities chose to extend the tax deadlines, many others did not, adding high compliance costs and penalties for failure to pay. The Business License Tax Reform Act ([H.4431](#)) is currently sitting in the Senate Finance Committee and we are hopeful that the Senate will take it up to finish the job when they return in September.

Click [here](#) to see the letter we sent to the House COVID-19 Employment, Workforce and Business Recovery Committee urging the General Assembly to pass a temporary liability safe harbor bill and the Business License Tax Reform Act and laying out all of our other legislative priorities for economic recovery.

The Committee plans to review the testimony from the last several meetings, adopt a formal set of recommendations via a virtual meeting, and conclude its work by the last week of July.

Latest Unemployment Numbers

The SC Department of Employment and Workforce (DEW) [released](#) updated weekly unemployment numbers today:

- For the week ending July 11th, the initial claims filed were 19,329.
- This is an **increase** of 3,267 initial claims from the week prior.
- The total number of initial claims received since mid-March is 671,079.
- The agency has paid more than \$3.15 billion in a combination of state unemployment insurance benefits and federal CARES Act programs.
- The Unemployment Insurance Trust Fund balance is \$606.8 million, and the amount paid from the Trust Fund since March 15th is \$699.5 million.
- ***Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC), which provides an additional \$600 per week to eligible claimants, is set to expire after Saturday, July 25, 2020.*** This expiration date was set in the CARES Act. Additional federal legislation would be needed to extend.

DEW Director Dan Ellzey explained that last week's increase may not be attributable to COVID-19 alone. He said:

“When looking at this claim week, the jump in numbers may be surprising, but it does track with an annual trend our agency sees each year around the 4th of July holiday. The week following the 4th of July has historically recorded a higher number of initial claims as it represents layoffs and closings for the holiday week. When an individual files for unemployment insurance, they are filing for layoff or lack of work for the prior week. What we see is a trend, mainly due to businesses, often in the manufacturing sector, closing operations for a week or two around this summer holiday each year.”