**A** **BILL**

TO AMEND THE CODE OF LAWS OF SOUTH CAROLINA, 1976, BY ADDING SECTION 2‑20‑65 SO AS TO PROVIDE THAT THE JOINT LEGISLATIVE SCREENING COMMITTEE FOR NONJUDICIAL CANDIDATES SHALL CREATE THREE REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCILS CONSISTING OF TEN MEMBERS EACH TO ASSIST IN THE PERFORMANCE OF ITS DUTIES REGARDING THE INVESTIGATION OF CANDIDATES FOR NONJUDICIAL OFFICES.

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of South Carolina:

SECTION 1. Chapter 20, Title 2 of the 1976 Code is amended by adding:

“Section 2‑20‑65. (A) The Joint Legislative Screening Committee shall create three regional advisory councils consisting of ten members each to assist in the performance of its duties regarding the investigation of candidates for nonjudicial offices. One advisory council shall consist of appointees from the upstate region, one advisory council shall consist of appointees from the midlands region, and one advisory council shall consist of appointees from the lower‑state region.

(B) Appointments must be based on merit regardless of race, color, creed, or gender and shall strive to assure that the membership of the advisory councils is representative of all citizens of the State of South Carolina. In addition, members must have experience in business, industry, government, or education with a diverse background of positions or responsibilities that best qualify them for appointment to the advisory councils.

(C) Each regional advisory council shall perform such duties and functions as assigned by the Joint Legislative Screening Committee. However, each regional council shall interview the candidates from its area as assigned to it by the joint committee and also interview other individuals in that region who are familiar with the candidate either personally or professionally. Based on those interviews and its own investigation, each council shall provide the joint committee with a report on their assigned candidates based on the joint committee’s evaluation criteria. The joint committee shall use these reports as part of its overall investigative process. Summaries of these reports also must be included in the joint committee’s report for review.

(D) The regional advisory council’s functions, in regard to the analysis and investigation of candidates assigned to it by the Joint Legislative Screening Committee, must be performed as part of the investigation of candidates for particular offices by the joint committee, and its report to the joint committee, in regard to a candidate, must be received by the joint committee before the public hearing required by Section 2‑20‑30 may be conducted.

(E) Each advisory council shall elect a chairman and such other officers as it considers necessary.

(F) The Joint Legislative Screening Committee shall provide clerical and technical support to each advisory council and serve as the council’s staff.

(G) The advisory councils shall meet at least once a quarter and may hold additional meetings at the call of the chairman or by a majority vote of the members.

(H) The members of the advisory councils shall receive the usual mileage, subsistence, and per diem in the performance of their duties as is provided by law for members of state boards, commissions, and committees to be paid equally from the approved accounts of both houses.

(I) Where for a particular office to be filled a candidate is unopposed, the joint committee may waive the involvement of the advisory council from that region in the review and investigation of the unopposed candidate; provided, that, all candidates for positions on the board of trustees of public institutions of higher learning, as defined in Section 59‑103‑5, including unopposed candidates, must be reviewed at least by the appropriate regional advisory council.”

SECTION 2. This act takes effect upon approval by the Governor.

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