**A** **BILL**

TO AMEND THE CODE OF LAWS OF SOUTH CAROLINA, 1976, BY ADDING SECTION 59‑63‑63 SO AS TO PROVIDE THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION SHALL ESTABLISH AND ENFORCE A STATEWIDE MANDATORY DRESS CODE PROGRAM REQUIRING SCHOOL UNIFORMS BE WORN BY PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS BEGINNING WITH THE 2017‑2018 SCHOOL YEAR, TO PROVIDE EXCEPTIONS DURING PHYSICAL EDUCATION CLASSES AND CERTAIN EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES, TO PROVIDE REQUIREMENTS FOR THESE UNIFORMS AND FLEXIBILITY FOR INDIVIDUAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS, AND TO PROVIDE ASSISTANCE FOR STUDENTS ELIGIBLE FOR FREE OR REDUCED SCHOOL LUNCHES IN OBTAINING AT LEAST FIVE SETS OF SCHOOL UNIFORMS FOR EACH SEASON, CONTINGENT ON FUNDING.

Whereas, the education of our State’s students should occur in an atmosphere free from as many distractions as possible; and

Whereas, among such distractions can be a student’s clothing itself; and

Whereas, peer pressure causes students to ask their parents to spend large sums of money to ensure that they can wear designer clothes to school on a regular basis; and

Whereas, students have, regrettably, used particular articles of clothing on occasion to identify themselves as members of certain gangs, to the detriment of discipline and safety at their schools; and

Whereas, the State’s schools have experienced other disruptions as a result of the types of clothing worn by students; and

Whereas, uniformity and orderliness of dress can contribute to an orderly, disciplined school environment and conceal income disparities among students; and

Whereas, local boards of education are in the best position to determine the appropriateness of adopting school dress codes and authorizing schools to require students to a wear uniforms; and

Whereas, the General Assembly believes it desirable to provide local school boards with clear legal authority to adopt dress code and school uniform policies. Now, therefore,

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

SECTION 1. Article 1, Chapter 63, Title 59 of the 1976 Code is amended by adding:

“Section 59‑63‑63. (A) The State Department of Education shall establish and enforce a statewide mandatory dress code program requiring school uniforms be worn by all public school students while on campus or on field trips. A school uniform is not required when participating in:

(1) physical education classes, in which case other appropriate attire instead may be used; and

(2) extracurricular activities, or related practices, in which another uniform is worn, such as an athletic team or marching band.

(B) The department shall promulgate rules and regulations governing the establishment and enforcement of its dress code program that:

(1) provides a standard, statewide color scheme and variety of seasonal clothing options, but that with respect to color schemes permits flexibility in the discretion of the school principal for individual schools that prefer to have uniforms based on school colors;

(2) ensures that any uniform required is available at an affordable price for the average family; and

(3) includes a provision to assist students eligible for free or reduced school lunches in obtaining at least five sets of school uniforms for each season. The provisions of this item depend on the availability of funding.”

SECTION 2. The provisions of this act take effect upon approval by the Governor and are applicable beginning with the 2017‑2018 School Year.

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