OVERVIEW OF THE 2020 SC GENERAL ASSEMBLY AS RELATED TO THE SC TUITION GRANTS PROGRAM

The South Carolina Higher Education Tuition Grants Commission submitted its 2020-2021 State Budget Request last September, requesting an increase of $1,128,792 necessary to increase the Tuition Grant by $100 per student for the new award year. In addition, a request for $200,000 in one-time funds and $270,000 in recurring funds was presented to allow the Commission to begin the competitive bid process to replace the agency’s aging student information database.

The Governor’s Office held a Budget Hearing with the South Carolina Higher Education Tuition Grants Commission on October 2, 2019. Governor Henry McMaster released his 2020-2021 Executive Budget in January. For the first time in recent memory, the Executive Budget recommended the full request put forth by the Tuition Grants Commission, including the increased funding for Tuition Grants, administrative/personnel requests, an increase in Authority to Spend existing funds received through State Interest Earnings, and approval for funds requested for the agency to begin the bid and procurement process for a new computer system.

On January 28, 2020, the Commission appeared before the House Ways and Means Higher Education Subcommittee to present its Budget Request. The Commission thanked the legislature for the funding provided in previous years and expressed support for the Commission on Higher Education’s request for increased funding for the State Need-Based Grant Program supporting needy students attending the state’s public institutions of higher education. In its budgetary deliberations, the House Ways and Means Committee recommended and approved the requested $1.1 million increase in Tuition Grants funding but did not approve the Commission’s request for Information Technology funding to replace its computer system.

On March 12, 2020, the Commission presented its Budget Request to the Senate Finance Higher Education Subcommittee, placing emphasis on the importance of the Information Technology funding. Shortly after the Senate Subcommittee hearing, the COVID-19 emergency cut short the legislative session, disrupting the Senate’s ability to deliberate budget requests.

To avoid a state government shutdown, the General Assembly reconvened in May to pass a Continuing Resolution, permitting FY21 funding to continue at the current year’s funding levels. In anticipation of the Continuing Resolution, the Tuition Grants Commission held a special meeting on April 17, 2020, to discuss funding impacts on the Program for the upcoming academic year. At that time, the Commission reduced the maximum Tuition Grant award from $3,750 to $3,600 for 2020-2021. Despite the reduction, this is still an increase over the 2019-2020 award amount of $3,500.

The General Assembly is expected to reconvene in September 2020 to continue budget deliberations and pass the FY21 state budget. No new funding is expected at this time.