

House upholds veto on schools

Override vote gives Star Academy in Aiken another chance

By **Kirsten Singleton** | *Morris News Service*

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COLUMBIA - Opponents of a public school, open-enrollment plan scored a last-minute victory Thursday, when the House sustained Gov. Mark Sanford's veto of the legislation on a 60-52 vote - 15 votes shy of the 75 needed to override the governor.

South Carolinians for Responsible Government, which has pushed for a school-choice plan that includes public funding for private schools, cheered the vote.

"We look forward to working with the Legislature over the summer and fall to draft a new school choice bill that works for all South Carolina families and truly reforms education in our state," SCRG President Randy Page said in a prepared statement.

The measure, pushed by state Superintendent of Education Jim Rex, proposes a program that would have culminated three years from now by allowing pupils to attend the public school of their choice, regardless of attendance boundaries.

"Why is it OK for you (House members) to push your vision, but it's not OK for the man who got more votes than anyone in this room, the man who spent 30 years working on this?" Rep. Gilda Cobb-Hunter asked.

Lawmakers spent most of the afternoon voting on whether to override or sustain Mr. Sanford's 243 budget vetoes.

But at 7:30 p.m., the House had only gotten to No. 92 and planned to quit for the day at the halfway point.

The House did sustain a veto of a provision to end Sunday blue laws for a year.

Blue laws prohibit most counties from selling many nongrocery items before 1:30 p.m.

Values-centered groups, such as the Palmetto Family Council, had pushed to kill the proposal.

Supporters of the provision say whether to stay open Sunday mornings should be up to individual business owners.

But House members sustained the veto 38-63, ensuring that the Sunday sales exemptions will remain.

Among bills the governor vetoed that were overridden:

- A \$22 million expansion of the Children's Health Insurance Program to ensure health-care coverage for families who earn up to 200 percent of the poverty level. The vote to override preserves the program.
- \$1.2 million for the Star Academy Dropout Prevention Program in Aiken, which is contingent upon receiving private funding.
- Funding for defense for indigents accused of driving under the influence and criminal domestic violence crimes, \$2.3 million.
- Security at the H.S. Hunley site at a cost of \$257,317.
- Security detail for the lieutenant governor and other services for the office, \$112,000.
- \$2.2 million to pay for the 2008 presidential primaries.

Mr. Sanford's veto for the Star Academy was disappointing, said Diana Mangiante, the executive director of Public Education Partners, a nonprofit group that aims to help public education in Aiken.

"On the other hand, it did cause people to rally around us today," she said.

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WHAT'S NEXT:

Lawmakers likely will return to the Statehouse today to finish their work on the vetoes.