



# FACT SHEET

South Carolina Policy Council

1323 Pendleton St., Columbia, SC 29201 • 803-779-5022 • [scpolicycouncil.com](http://scpolicycouncil.com)

## Which Counties Spend the Most of Your Tax Dollars?

### A Review of Per Capita County Spending in South Carolina

As part of our ongoing review of [local spending](#) and [taxation](#) trends in South Carolina, this Fact Sheet looks at per capita county spending. Like total state spending, local spending in South Carolina is on the rise. Total state spending has increased every year since FY93-1994 (the latest year available in the current Budget & Control Board historical analysis report). During the same period, local spending has also increased every year, excepting from FY01-2002 to FY02-2003.

Likewise, while private sector employment has fallen, [government hiring has increased](#). In fact, South Carolina is well above the national and Southeast average [for local/state government](#) share of nonfarm employment. Essentially, public sector hiring is [crowding out private sector employment](#) in South Carolina.

According to data released by the [S.C. Office of Research and Statistics](#) on local revenue and expenditures, total spending by local governments for FY07-2008 was \$13.4 billion. Correlating the spending data with U.S. Census population estimates for 2008, we derived total per capita government spending for all 46 counties in South Carolina. Such spending includes all revenue sources: federal, state and local. (Click [here](#) for per capita federal expenditures by county.) As such, it is derived from a variety of revenue sources, such as federal income tax payments, state income and sales tax payment, and local property tax and local option sales tax payments.

The most effective way to view this data is visually – through the maps and tables that appear below. The actual spending figures fluctuate because of changing variables (bond payments, federal disbursements, etc.), but for each year the methodology is the same, providing an apples-to-apples comparison.

The color swings on the maps tell the story of how local government spending is changing in South Carolina. In particular, we should point out that while per capita spending is an important measure in and of itself, it is most useful as a means of comparison: regarding spending in other counties, as well as spending over time.

For FY2008, the three counties with the highest rate of per capita spending were:

- Jasper County: \$4,155
- Horry County: \$3,724
- Charleston County: \$3,705

Yet, for FY2002, the three highest spending counties (adjusted for inflation to 2008 dollars) were:

- Horry County: \$3,482
- Lexington County: \$3,328
- Georgetown County: \$3,246

During the same period, average per capita spending for all S.C. counties was:

- \$2,860 (FY2008)
- \$2,521 (FY2002)

Analyzing these results would naturally lead us to ask what trends are driving persistently high per capita spending in Horry County. Or, what has led to the slight decrease in per capita spending in Lexington? Answering these questions would require additional research, but the data at least enables us to begin to look deeper into county spending trends.

Perhaps most useful is to compare spending in counties with similar population levels. Consider per capita spending for the following three counties, all of which have a population between 37,000 and 42,000:

- Chesterfield (population: 42,882): \$2,475
- Colleton (population: 39,019): \$3,069
- Newberry (population: 37,823): \$3,480

We also analyzed the data to see which counties had the greatest growth in per capita spending between FY2002 and FY2008 (again, as indexed for 2008 dollars). The results:

- Newberry County: \$1,312 increase in per capita spending
- Jasper County: \$1,170 increase
- Calhoun County: \$1,121 increase

The three counties that reduced per capita spending the most are:

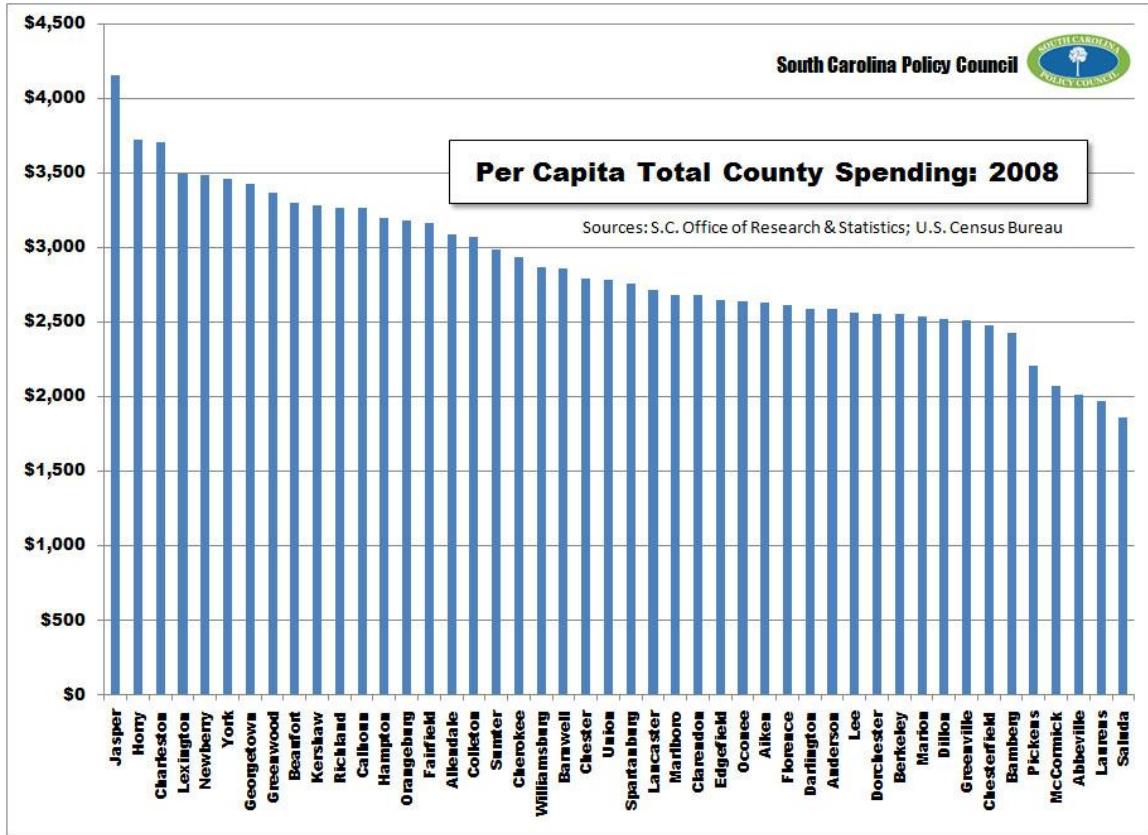
- Chesterfield County: \$277 decrease in per capita spending
- Abbeville County: \$264 decrease
- Spartanburg County: \$233 decrease

Why is spending higher in some counties than others? Is it due to fiscal mismanagement? Or are legitimate factors driving high per capita spending in counties that otherwise might be similar?

While additional analysis is necessary to begin to answer these questions, looking at those counties that have managed to reduce spending might provide clues as to how other counties, not to mention the state as a whole, can reduce the growth of government.

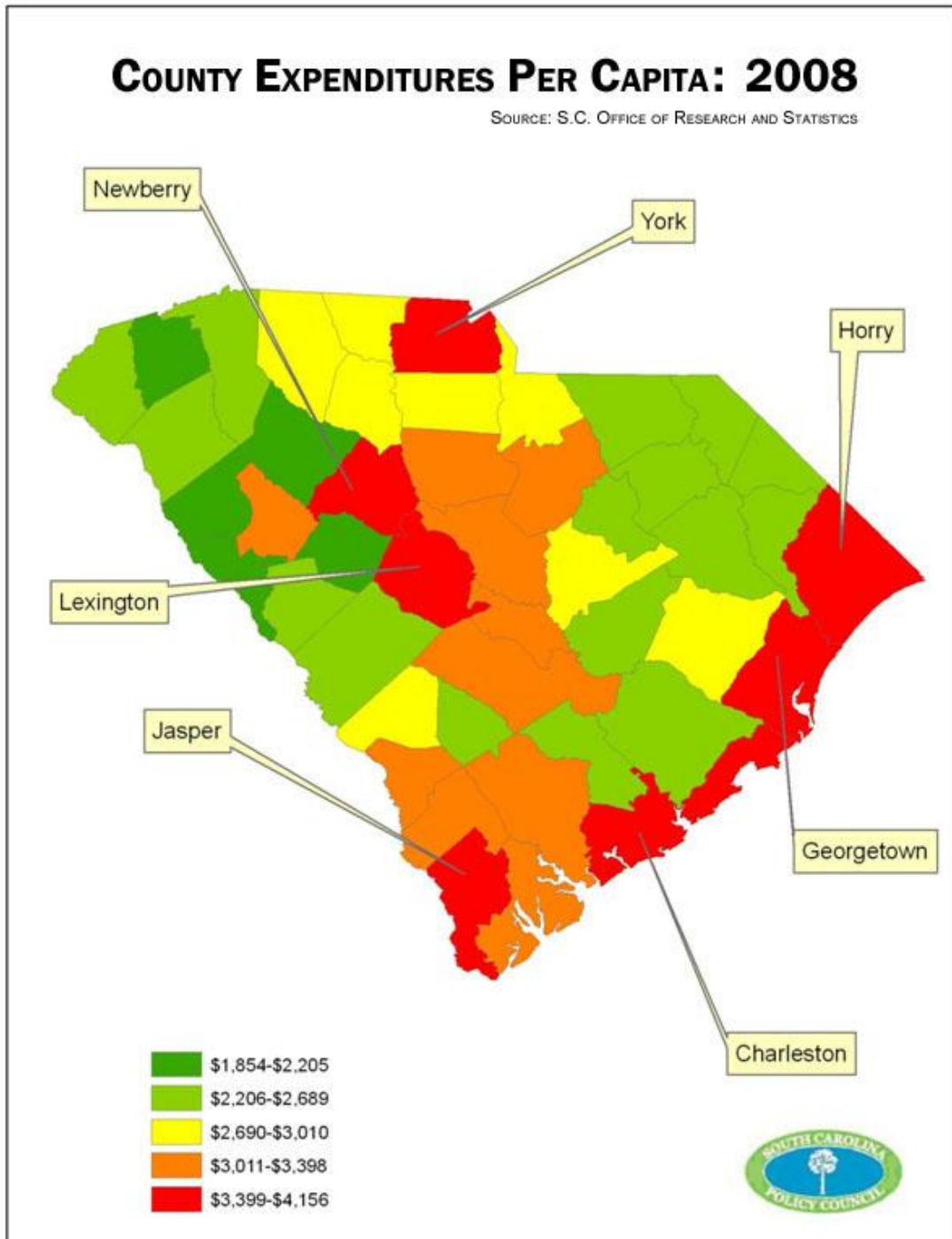
**FACT SHEET:****Per Capita County Spending**

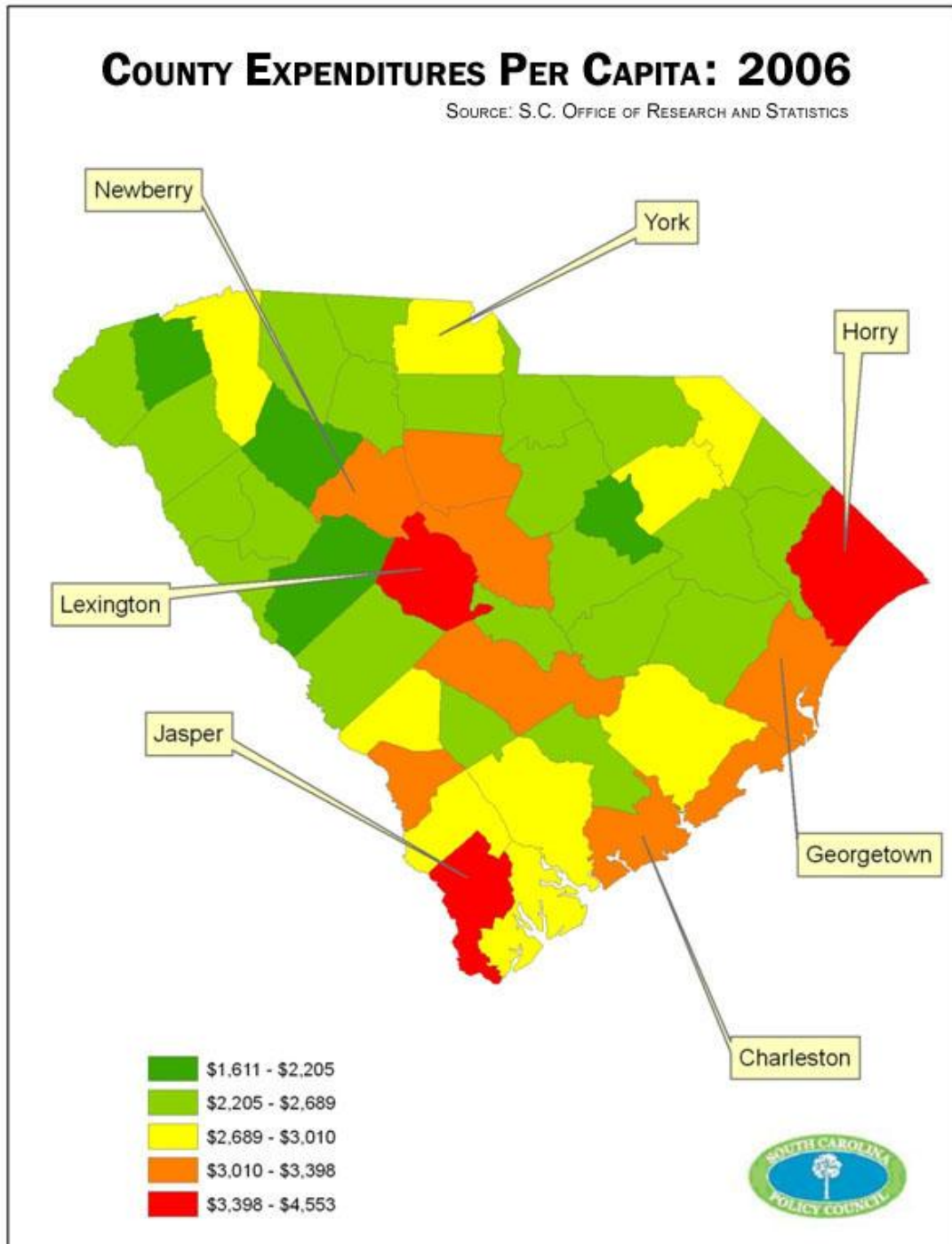
|              | Per Capita Spending 2002 | Per Capita Spending 2006 | Per Capita Spending 2008 |
|--------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Abbeville    | \$2,272                  | \$2,210                  | \$2,007                  |
| Aiken        | \$2,512                  | \$2,584                  | \$2,631                  |
| Allendale    | \$2,664                  | \$3,216                  | \$3,082                  |
| Anderson     | \$2,498                  | \$2,418                  | \$2,585                  |
| Bamberg      | \$2,508                  | \$2,570                  | \$2,422                  |
| Barnwell     | \$2,706                  | \$2,897                  | \$2,857                  |
| Beaufort     | \$3,067                  | \$2,987                  | \$3,296                  |
| Berkeley     | \$2,655                  | \$2,964                  | \$2,549                  |
| Calhoun      | \$2,138                  | \$2,268                  | \$3,260                  |
| Charleston   | \$3,150                  | \$3,315                  | \$3,705                  |
| Cherokee     | \$2,117                  | \$2,452                  | \$2,932                  |
| Chester      | \$2,685                  | \$2,453                  | \$2,787                  |
| Chesterfield | \$2,753                  | \$2,443                  | \$2,476                  |
| Clarendon    | \$2,411                  | \$2,384                  | \$2,676                  |
| Colleton     | \$2,454                  | \$2,866                  | \$3,069                  |
| Darlington   | \$2,252                  | \$2,879                  | \$2,587                  |
| Dillon       | \$2,449                  | \$2,399                  | \$2,522                  |
| Dorchester   | \$2,260                  | \$2,283                  | \$2,555                  |
| Edgefield    | \$2,168                  | \$2,108                  | \$2,647                  |
| Fairfield    | \$2,630                  | \$3,266                  | \$3,166                  |
| Florence     | \$2,383                  | \$2,532                  | \$2,614                  |
| Georgetown   | \$3,246                  | \$3,063                  | \$3,422                  |
| Greenville   | \$2,720                  | \$2,992                  | \$2,513                  |
| Greenwood    | \$2,259                  | \$2,396                  | \$3,363                  |
| Hampton      | \$2,641                  | \$2,776                  | \$3,197                  |
| Horry        | \$3,482                  | \$3,521                  | \$3,725                  |
| Jasper       | \$2,986                  | \$4,541                  | \$4,156                  |
| Kershaw      | \$2,624                  | \$2,314                  | \$3,278                  |
| Lancaster    | \$2,485                  | \$2,395                  | \$2,717                  |
| Laurens      | \$1,912                  | \$1,881                  | \$1,967                  |
| Lee          | \$2,159                  | \$2,125                  | \$2,558                  |
| Lexington    | \$3,329                  | \$3,423                  | \$3,494                  |
| Marion       | \$2,533                  | \$2,535                  | \$2,537                  |
| Marlboro     | \$2,361                  | \$2,696                  | \$2,683                  |
| McCormick    | \$2,008                  | \$2,232                  | \$2,071                  |
| Newberry     | \$2,167                  | \$3,138                  | \$3,480                  |
| Oconee       | \$2,212                  | \$2,619                  | \$2,634                  |
| Orangeburg   | \$2,705                  | \$3,125                  | \$3,182                  |
| Pickens      | \$1,852                  | \$1,986                  | \$2,205                  |
| Richland     | \$2,930                  | \$3,263                  | \$3,261                  |
| Saluda       | \$1,896                  | \$1,612                  | \$1,854                  |
| Spartanburg  | \$2,985                  | \$2,453                  | \$2,752                  |
| Sumter       | \$2,326                  | \$2,504                  | \$2,987                  |
| Union        | \$2,311                  | \$2,361                  | \$2,778                  |
| Williamsburg | \$2,274                  | \$2,304                  | \$2,863                  |
| York         | \$2,825                  | \$2,877                  | \$3,458                  |

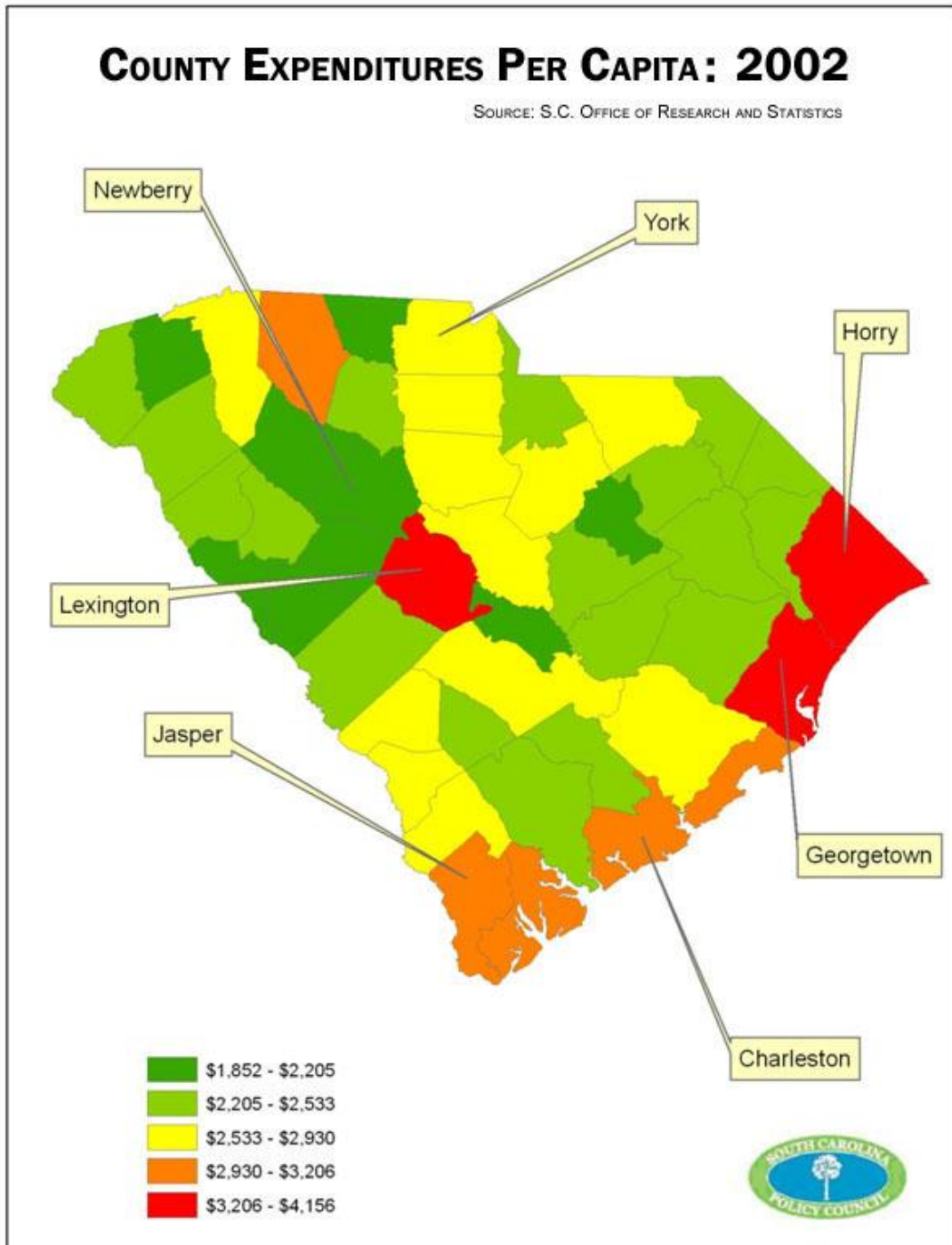


## COUNTY EXPENDITURES PER CAPITA: 2008

SOURCE: S.C. OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND STATISTICS







*Nothing in the foregoing should be construed as an attempt to aid or hinder passage of any legislation.  
Copyright © 2010 South Carolina Policy Council.*



**South Carolina Policy Council**

1323 Pendleton St., Columbia, SC 29201 • 803-779-5022 • [scpolycouncil.com](http://scpolycouncil.com)