

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA  
STATE ETHICS COMMISSION

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STATE ETHICS  
COMMISSION

FOR COMMISSION USE ONLY:  
CASE NUMBER  
C2020-062

COMPLAINT FORM

COMPLAINANT: State Ethics Commission  
ADDRESS: 201 Executive Center Drive  
Suite 150  
Columbia, SC 29210  
TELEPHONE NUMBER: (803) 253-4192

RESPONDENT: Derrick L. Echols  
ADDRESS: [REDACTED]  
TELEPHONE NUMBER: [REDACTED]  
TITLE: Former Trustee – Florence County School  
District Four

Section 8-13-1140, SC Code Ann., 1976, as amended, requires the filing of an updated Statement of Economic Interests for the previous calendar year annually thereafter prior to March 30. Records in the State Ethics Commission indicate that the Respondent was required to file the 2017, 2018, and 2019 Statement of Economic Interests.

Section 8-13-1120, SC Code Ann., 1976, as amended, required full and complete information concerning income from both government and private sources received by the filer or a member of the filer's immediate family during the reporting period.

Respondent was reminded of the filing requirement by a letter dated February 20, 2020 as described in the attached. In addition, an email reminder was sent thirty days prior to the deadlines. To date, no properly completed 2017, 2018, or 2019 Statement of Economic Interests have been received. All in violation of Section 8-13-1140 and Section 8-13-1120, SC Code Ann., 1976, as amended.

All investigations, inquiries, hearings, and accompanying documents must remain confidential unless respondent waives the right to confidentiality. If there is a finding of probable cause, the following documents become public record: the complaint, the response (if any) by respondent, and the notice of hearing. If a hearing is to be held, the final order and all exhibits become public record. If no hearing is held following a finding of probable cause, the final disposition of the matter becomes public record. The willful release of confidential information is a misdemeanor, and any person releasing such confidential information, upon conviction, must be fined not more than one thousand dollars (\$1,000) or imprisoned not more than one year. Section 8-13-320(10)(g).

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA  
COUNTY OF Richland

Personally appeared before me Meghan L. Walker who, first being duly sworn, says that she has read and knows the contents of the above complaint and that the allegations contained therein, are true and correct to the best of her own knowledge, except for those matters therein based upon information and belief, and as to those she believes them to be true.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this  
11th day of September 2020

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Meghan L. Walker, Executive Director

Notary Public for South Carolina  
My Commission expires 8-11-2025

SEC-7 (Revised 8/2019)

REPLY TO: 201 Executive Center Drive, Suite 150, Columbia, South Carolina 29210 (803)253-4192  
FAXED COPIES WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED

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STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA )  
COUNTY OF RICHLAND )  
)  
)  
IN THE MATTER OF: )  
)  
Complaint C2020-062 )  
)  
Derrick L Echols )  
Respondent. )  
)  
State Ethics Commission )  
Complainant. )  
\_\_\_\_\_ )

BEFORE THE STATE ETHICS COMMISSION

**NOTICE OF HEARING**

The State Ethics Commission has determined that there is probable cause pursuant to Section 8-13-320(10)(i), Code of Laws, South Carolina, 1976, as amended, to support the allegations made in the above-captioned complaint. The State Ethics Commission will, therefore, convene a formal hearing into the matter, in accordance with Section 8-13-320(10)(i) & (j), Code of Laws, South Carolina, 1976, as amended, and State Ethics Commission Regulations, S.C. Code Ann. Regs. 52-707 (1997 Cum. Supp.) on Thursday, April 15, 2021 at 9:30 a.m. at the State Ethics Commission Hearing Room located at: 201 Executive Center Drive, Suite 150, Columbia, South Carolina 29210.

The following allegations will be heard:

**COUNT ONE**  
**FAILURE TO FILE A STATEMENT OF ECONOMIC INTERESTS**  
**SECTION 8-13-1140, S.C. CODE ANN., 1976, AS AMENDED**

That Derrick L. Echols, Florence County School District Four Trustee, did in Richland County, fail to file a 2017 Statement of Economic Interests, in violation of Section 8-13-1140.

**COUNT TWO**  
**FAILURE TO FILE A STATEMENT OF ECONOMIC INTERESTS**  
**SECTION 8-13-1140, S.C. CODE ANN., 1976, AS AMENDED**

That Derrick L. Echols, Florence County School District Four Trustee, did in Richland

County, fail to file a 2018 Statement of Economic Interests, in violation of Section 8-13-1140.

**COUNT THREE**  
**FAILURE TO FILE A STATEMENT OF ECONOMIC INTERESTS**  
**SECTION 8-13-1140, S.C. CODE ANN., 1976, AS AMENDED**

That Derrick L. Echols, Florence County School District Four Trustee, did in Richland County, fail to file a 2019 Statement of Economic Interests, in violation of Section 8-13-1140.

You have the right to be represented by counsel, the right to call and examine witnesses, the right to introduce exhibits, and the right to cross-examine opposing witnesses. This hearing will be open to the public as required by Section 8-13-320(10)(j), Code of Laws, South Carolina, 1976, as amended. The procedures to be followed are set forth in the Administrative Procedures Act, Section 1-23-10, et seq., Code of Laws, South Carolina, 1976 as amended the State Ethics Act, Section 8-13-100, et seq., Code of Laws, South Carolina, 1976, as amended, and State Ethics Commission Regulations S.C. Code Ann. Regs. 52-707 (1997 Cum. Supp.).

A pre-hearing conference may be scheduled prior to the hearing to allow exchange of witness lists and evidence, marking of exhibits, and disposition of motions or pleadings. In the event you fail to appear, judgment by default will be rendered against you. If there are any questions concerning the above notice or hearing times, please contact the State Ethics Commission.



Meghan D. Walker, Executive Director  
State Ethics Commission

Dated this 31 day,  
of January 2021.

*Certificate of Service by Certified Mail*

I hereby certify that a copy of this **NOTICE OF HEARING** was duly served on the RESPONDENT Derrick L. Echols, 106 West Market St, Timmonsville, SC 29161 by depositing said **NOTICE OF HEARING** in the United States mail, Columbia, South Carolina on this 5th day of February 2021, by CERTIFIED MAIL, E-RETURN RECEIPT REQUESTED, appropriate postage affixed, and a return address clearly indicated on said envelope.



Columbia, South Carolina

**Richard A. Provencher, Administrative Assistant**  
State Ethics Commission

(803) 253-4192

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA )  
COUNTY OF RICHLAND )  
IN THE MATTER OF: )  
COMPLAINT C2020-062 )  
State Ethics Commission, )  
Complainant. )  
Derrick L. Echols, )  
Respondent. )  
\_\_\_\_\_ )

BEFORE THE STATE ETHICS COMMISSION

**DECISION AND ORDER**

This matter comes before the State Ethics Commission (Commission) by way of a complaint filed on September 11, 2020. Pursuant to Section 8-13-320(10)(i) of the South Carolina Ethics, Government Accountability, and Campaign Reform Act of 1991 (Ethics Act), the Commission reviewed the above-captioned complaint against Derrick L. Echols (Respondent) with violations of the Ethics Act and probable cause was found to warrant an evidentiary hearing. Present at the hearing on April 15, 2021, were Commissioners Don Jackson, AJ Holloway, and Donald Gist, Hearing Chair. Respondent appeared *pro se*. Complainant was represented by Courtney M. Laster. The following charges were considered:

**COUNT ONE**  
**FAILURE TO FILE A STATEMENT OF ECONOMIC INTERESTS**  
**SECTION 8-13-1140, S.C. CODE ANN., 1976, AS AMENDED**

That Derrick L. Echols, Florence County School District Four Trustee, did in Richland County, fail to file a 2017 Statement of Economic Interests, in violation of Section 8-13-1140.

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**FAILURE TO FILE A STATEMENT OF ECONOMIC INTERESTS**  
**SECTION 8-13-1140, S.C. CODE ANN., 1976, AS AMENDED**

That Derrick L. Echols, Florence County School District Four Trustee, did in Richland County, fail to file a 2019 Statement of Economic Interests, in violation of Section 8-13-1140.

**FINDINGS OF FACT**

Having carefully reviewed the evidence presented, the Commission finds as fact:

1. At all times relevant, Respondent served on the Florence County School District Four (District) Board of Trustees.
2. Respondent failed to file an annual Statement of Economic Interests (SEI) on or before March 30, 2017 and on or before March 30, 2018.
3. On May 9, 2018, the South Carolina Department of Education (Department) declared a state of emergency for the District, relieving Respondent of his duties and suspending his compensation as a Board member.
4. Respondent failed to file an annual SEI on or before March 30, 2019.
5. The Commission notified Respondent of his failures to file SEIs from 2017-2019 in a certified letter dated February 20, 2020. According to the U.S. Postal Service, the letter was delivered to Respondent's address of record on February 24, 2020 at 12:19 p.m.
6. Penalties began to accrue at \$30.00 per day (\$10.00 per SEI) on March 5, 2020.
7. Penalties began to accrue at \$300.00 per day (\$100.00 per SEI) on March 15, 2020.
8. Respondent came into compliance by filing his 2017, 2018, and 2019 SEIs on January 21, 2021, having accrued the maximum late-filing penalty of \$5,000.00 per SEI.
9. During the hearing, Respondent testified that talks of a District takeover began a year or two after his was initially elected. Respondent asserted that he was under the impression that he

was no longer part of the District Board once the Department declared a state of emergency.

### **CONCLUSIONS OF LAW**

Based upon the Findings of Fact, the Commission concludes, as a matter of law:

1. At all times relevant, Respondent was a public official pursuant to Section 8-13-100(27) of the Ethics Act. Therefore, the Commission has personal and subject matter jurisdiction.

2. Section 8-13-1140 of the Ethics Act provides, in part:

A person required to file a [SEI] under this chapter annually shall file, pursuant to Section 8-13-365, an updated statement for the previous calendar year, no later than noon on March thirtieth of each calendar year . . .

3. Section 8-13-1510(A) provides, in part:

. . . a person required to file a report or statement under this chapter who files a late statement or report or fails to file a required statement or report must be assessed a civil penalty as follows: (1) a fine of one hundred dollars if the statement or report is not filed within five days after the established deadline provided by law in this chapter; and (2) after notice has been given by certified or registered mail that a required statement or report has not been filed, a fine of ten dollars per calendar day for the first ten days after notice has been given, and one hundred dollars for each calendar day in which the required statement or report is not filed, not exceeding five thousand dollars.

6. Section 8-13-130 of the Ethics Act allows the Commission to levy an administrative fee on any person who is found in violation of the Ethics Act.

### **DECISION**

NOW, THEREFORE, based on the foregoing Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law, the Panel has determined, based on a preponderance of evidence, that Respondent Derrick L. Echols is in violation of three (3) counts of Section 8-13-1140 for failure to timely file a 2017 SEI, a 2018 SEI, and a 2019 SEI.

THEREFORE, Respondent is hereby assessed an administrative fee of \$600.00. The Commission declines to assess any late-filing penalties for Respondent's failure to timely file a

2017 SEI, 2018 SEI, or 2019 SEI.

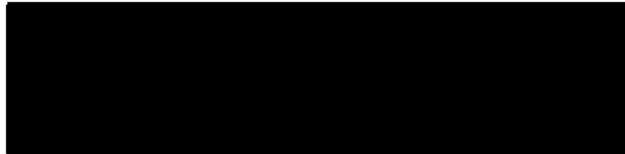
IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that the administrative fee of \$600.00 shall be paid to the Commission within nine (9) months from Respondent's receipt of this Order,

AND, pursuant to Section 8-13-320 of the Ethics Act, if the \$600.00 is not paid within nine (9) months from Respondent's receipt of this Order, a judgment in the amount of \$600.00 shall be entered against Respondent. In the event of a failure to pay, upon the Commission's filing of said Judgment with the Florence County Clerk of Court's Office, the Clerk of Court shall enter this Order in the amount of \$600.00 in its Judgment Rolls, without cost to the Commission.

FINALLY, Respondent Derrick L. Echols, has ten (10) days from receipt of this Order to appeal this Decision and Order to the full Commission.

AND IT IS SO ORDERED THIS 26 DAY OF April 2021.

STATE ETHICS COMMISSION



DONALD GIST  
HEARING CHAIR

Columbia, South Carolina