A Resolution to Protect the Health, Safety and Well-Being of the University of South Carolina Community

WHEREAS the UofSC Staff Senate recognizes the concerns for the health, safety, and well-being of all staff, faculty, and students particularly as it relates to COVID-19 and the various mutations against the relative rate of vaccinations needed to stem the spread within our community, and

WHEREAS the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has killed more than 610,000 Americans and millions more abroad, and

WHEREAS less than 50% of both South Carolina and Richland County residents are fully vaccinated, and

WHEREAS The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control (SCDHEC), and public health experts (including Dr. Harris Pastides) agree that the best way to prevent serious disease and death from COVID-19 and the Delta variant is to get vaccinated, and

WHEREAS the CDC recommends, even for individuals who have been fully vaccinated: “To reduce the risk of being infected with the Delta variant and possibly spreading it to others, wear a mask indoors if you are in an area of substantial or high transmission,” and

WHEREAS the SCDHEC currently supports the conclusions and guidelines of the CDC, and

WHEREAS Richland County, South Carolina, which is home to the University of South Carolina’s Columbia campus, has been deemed an area of high community transmission of the COVID-19 virus by the CDC, and

WHEREAS many staff and faculty serve as primary caregivers for children who cannot yet be vaccinated, elderly relatives, and others who are immunocompromised, and

WHEREAS many staff serve as frontline workers in facilities, adjunct teaching, custodial services, and food services; interact with students and others on a regular basis; or host programs and events for students and others, and are concerned about the inability of the University to implement recognized CDC recommended mask mandates on campus due to legislative action and the opinion of the SC Attorney General, and

WHEREAS university action regarding COVID-19 prevention and mitigation measures – including but not limited to vaccinations, testing, and mask requirements – should continue to be focused on protecting the health and well-being of staff, faculty, and students at the institution and in the Columbia community, and

WHEREAS a number of staff have expressed displeasure with the speed with which the university reversed course on the mask mandate as announced on July 30, 2021, and

WHEREAS university leadership is aiming for in-person learning/work in the absence of a permanent and equitable telecommuting policy, and
WHEREAS many staff, faculty, and students have willingly done their part to participate in wearing masks, submit to testing, accept reductions in compensation, modify their work/life balance, and be among the first to get vaccinated in an effort to prevent the spread of COVID-19, and

BE IT RESOLVED THAT THE STAFF SENATE

1. Encourages the Governor of South Carolina, South Carolina General Assembly, South Carolina local governments and municipalities (including the City of Columbia and Lexington & Richland counties), and the University of South Carolina leadership to consider and implement all measures proven effective toward increasing vaccination levels within our campus and surrounding communities. Specifically, the Staff Senate endorses the following:
   i. Rescinding any laws, regulations, and/or temporary provisos that prevent entities like UofSC from making local decisions regarding how best to increase vaccination levels within our campus community.
   ii. Implementing and expanding incentive programs like #GarnetAndVaxxed that reward people for getting vaccinated.
   iii. Implementing and expanding testing programs during periods of substantial or high transmission that monitor COVID-19 spread among members of our community with the goal of further focusing advocacy efforts for vaccine adoption.
   iv. Encouraging university leadership to mandate COVID-19 vaccines for staff, faculty, and students on campus when the FDA fully authorizes one or more of the COVID-19 vaccines.

2. Encourages university leadership to reinstitute the requirements of the original mask mandate released on July 30, 2021, requiring staff, faculty, and students to wear masks inside campus buildings.

3. Encourages the administration to make clear the requirements for implementing and revoking any future mask mandates with the minimal requirement being that mask mandates be based on SCDHEC guidance. Any mask mandates should also include unambiguous rules and protocols, leaving no room for individual interpretation.

4. Requests open access to improved and updated information regarding current cases and staff, faculty, and student vaccination rates.

5. Encourages that any policy instituted related to campus safety during the COVID-19 pandemic be updated in accordance with guidance from the SCDHEC.

BE IT FURTHER RECOMMENDED that upon passage copies of this resolution be sent to the Board of Trustees, Dr. Harris Pastides, Interim University President, Dr. Stephen Cutler, Interim Provost, Dr. Jason Stacy, Interim VP of Health and Well-Being and CHO, Terry Parham, General Counsel, Ed Walton, Executive VP and CFO, Caroline Agardy, VP of Human Resources, Jeff Stensland, AVP of Media and External Engagement, Dr. Audrey Korsgaard, Chair of the Faculty Senate, Alex Harrell, Student Body President, the Daily Gamecock, The State Newspaper, WIS, WLTX, WOLO, and WACH.