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City of Lancaster, Oconee County Boost Local Government Spending Transparency Movement

Columbia, S.C. – The City of Lancaster and Oconee County are the latest additions to a growing list of local governments across South Carolina that provide access to their check registers online.

Lancaster is at least the 19th municipality in the state to join the spending transparency movement.

Oconee increases the number of participating counties to at least 16 – more than one-third of South Carolina's 46 counties. These 16 represent nearly all of the state's most densely populated counties and contain nearly two-thirds of the state's total population.

James Absher, finance director for Lancaster, says his department wanted to post the city government's check registers and other financial reports online to show residents how the city's resources are being used. So he presented the concept to the City Council. "And they thought it was a good idea for citizens to have access to information," he says.

Ladale Price is finance director for Oconee County. "We have our check registers out there," Price says. "We've also got all of our financial statements, our CAFRs [Comprehensive Annual Financial Reports]."

Oconee uploads its annual budgets and contract and procurement information as well, she says. "And it's just really a simple task [to post the information online]."

The City of Lancaster transparency portal is available at: http://www.lancastercitysc.com/check-register.aspx. Oconee County's is at: http://www.oconeesc.com/Departments/AJ/Finance/FinancialTransparency.aspx.

State Controller Richard Eckstrom, who pioneered government spending transparency in the Palmetto State, praises Oconee County and Lancaster for joining this good-government initiative.

In 2008, Eckstrom established the S.C. Fiscal Transparency Website (http://www.cg.sc.gov/fiscaltransparency/Pages/default.aspx), which was among the first of its kind in the nation.

The site initially featured online checkbooks that he created for each agency of state government. Since then Eckstrom has expanded the site to include all school districts and state-supported colleges and universities in South Carolina; reports showing annual amounts paid to state vendors; and other information useful to the public such as each agency's monthly charge card (purchasing card) transactions.

The S.C. Fiscal Transparency Website also provides convenient links to the transparency websites of many local governments.

The 19 municipal links included on state government's website are: Aiken, Cayce, Charleston, Chesnee, Columbia, Forest Acres, Georgetown, Greenville, Greenwood, Greer, Irmo, Lancaster, Myrtle Beach, North Charleston, North Myrtle Beach, Rock Hill, Simpsonville, Surfside Beach and Traveler's Rest.

The 16 county links included on state government's website are: Aiken, Anderson, Beaufort, Berkeley, Charleston, Clarendon, Dorchester, Edgefield, Fairfield, Greenville, Horry, Kershaw, Oconee, Pickens, Richland and Spartanburg.

For more information please contact Eric Ward, public information director, at 803-734-2538; 803-206-6293 or eward@cg.sc.gov.

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