



Two WSHS basketball players to participate in tournament

Sports 1B

Index Journal

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SERVING OUR COMMUNITY SINCE 1919

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DAILY \$2



SCREENSHOT | INDEX-JOURNAL

An officer examines a pill bottle inside a vehicle during the traffic stop involving Bryan Getchius, according to body camera footage from the scene. The medication was later confirmed through laboratory testing to match a lawful prescription.



SIRCHIE'S WEBSITE

A Nark II field test kit field testing kit used by law enforcement to presumptively identify suspected narcotics. Such tests are designed to provide preliminary results but typically require confirmation through laboratory analysis.



RENEE ORTIZ | INDEX-JOURNAL

Bryan Getchius speaks to reporters during a press conference in downtown Greenwood on March 11 about his arrest and the months he spent waiting for laboratory testing results that later showed the medication found in his vehicle was legally prescribed.

D52 eyeballs pay increase for teachers

By Mya Atten
matten@indexjournal.com

NINETY SIX — Teachers across South Carolina could see a pay raise next year as lawmakers debate the state's upcoming budget.

Trustees in Greenwood County School District 52 learned about the proposal during Tuesday's board meeting.

Jennifer Fleming, the district's executive director of business, told trustees the South Carolina House and Senate are considering a proposal that would add \$2,000 to each cell of the teacher salary scale, with state funding attached to support the increase.

Fleming said the district does not yet have projections on how the proposal would affect local salaries because the state budget has not been finalized.

For the 2025-26 school year, the state mandated a \$1,500 salary increase for teachers, which District 52 extended to all employees regardless of classification.

Mac Boudreau, the district's director of safety, also updated trustees on the School Safe Facilities Grant, which provides funding for safety improvements in schools across the state.

The state Department of Education unanimously approved \$19,427,833 in funding state-wide, with District 52 receiving the full \$289,477 it requested to upgrade public address systems.

Boudreau said the district received its funding allocation letter from the department and plans to install the new systems this summer to avoid disrupting instruction and testing.

The state grant will pay for upgrades at the middle and high schools, while elementary and primary schools will receive new PA systems through bonds previously approved by trustees, totaling \$572,791.55.

Once installation is complete, all schools in the district will operate on the same PA system.

In other business

Trustees approved the hiring of Chad Ellis, a social studies teacher, head baseball coach and assistant football coach, as the district's high school athletic director following the resignation of Chase Duncan. **See more about this announcement in Sports, page 1B**

Contact staff writer Mya Atten at 864-943-5644 or email: matten@indexjournal.com.

FREEDOM

**test results pending*

Lawsuit: GCSO deputies mistook IBS meds for narcotics

By Renee Ortiz
ortiz@indexjournal.com

A Florida man has filed a federal civil rights lawsuit against Greenwood County, the Greenwood County Sheriff's Office (GCSO), Sheriff Dennis Kelly and three deputies, alleging he was wrongly arrested and jailed after roadside drug tests misidentified prescription medication as illegal narcotics.

Documents show Bryan Joseph Getchius

Body cam footage

Watch video from the arrest and search of Bryan Getchius' car online:
[youtube.com/ijindexjournal](https://www.youtube.com/ijindexjournal)

was pulled over for swerving on May 15, 2024 by Greenwood County deputies.

According to arrest warrants, deputies discovered pills in his vehicle which field tested presumptive for fentanyl and cocaine, leading

to Getchius' arrest and multiple drug trafficking charges. In body camera footage from the incident shared with the Index-Journal by Getchius' representatives, Getchius can be heard telling officers the pills were prescription medication for irritable bowel syndrome (IBS).

Nearly 17 months later, a forensic analysis by the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division (SLED) determined the

See **FREEDOM**, page 7A

Shining a light on conversations: LAMP helps students share their voices

By Mya Atten
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In some classrooms in Greenwood County School District 50, a student's first sentence may come from an Augmentative and Alternative Communication Device (AAC) rather than spoken words.

To support students who are mostly non-verbal, speech language therapists across the district use communication systems designed to help them share their thoughts, needs and ideas.

The effort centers on a communication system called Language

Acquisition through Motor Planning, or LAMP. The system uses specialized software on iPads or iPhones that helps students build phrases and communicate.

Dru Robinson, a speech language therapist for the district, said the district has been using LAMP for about eight years and that it is an application available to children and adults in the district.

"Many other applications are available in the district as well," Robinson said. "Depending on the child's needs, the child's IEP team works together to determine the best fit."

Brian Perrin, principal at Merrywood Elementary School, said the goal of LAMP is to help students develop independent communication.

"It builds vocabulary, fosters independence, improves socialization and encourages spontaneous communication," Perrin said. "... This is a means for them to join in on the conversation with mom and dad, brother and sister."

For many families, the technology can open new opportunities for connection.

See **LAMP**, page 10A



MYA ATTEN | INDEX-JOURNAL

Dru Robinson, a speech language therapist for Greenwood County School District 50, leads a Language Acquisition through Motor Planning (LAMP) training session for families and district staff. Robinson is wearing a special apron that includes the same symbols students see on their LAMP devices.

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FREEDOM

From page 1A

pills were in fact Dicyclomine, a prescription medication used to treat gastrointestinal conditions like IBS.

Getchius and his attorney, Tyler Bailey of Bailey Law Firm, announced the lawsuit during a press conference Wednesday morning outside the Arts Center of Greenwood, the former historic federal courthouse.

The suit alleges unlawful and malicious prosecution, false arrest, false imprisonment and constitutional violations tied to the use of roadside drug field tests.

During Wednesday's press conference, Getchius told the media that, prior to his arrest, he had spent years rebuilding his life after roughly two decades of addiction. At the time of his arrest, he was working at a treatment center in Florida helping others find recovery. He had moved his mother to Greenwood after his father died to be near family.

"As I'm pulling out, literally, to go back to Florida, I see lights behind me. It's Greenwood County Sheriffs," Getchius told the media.

It was this traffic stop that set off the chain of events that led to his arrest and the now-filed federal civil rights lawsuit.

Body cam footage

Video recordings from a patrol vehicle dash camera and body cameras worn by deputies, David Keener III, Wesley McClinton, Brayden Stevens and Brandon Burnett, involved in the stop were provided to the Index-Journal by Bailey Law Firm.

The newspaper reviewed the footage but did not alter the audio or videos.

Stevens' video begins with Getchius stopped at a red light. After driving a block or two, blue lights activate and he pulls over. The arrest report reads that Getchius was "swerving between the #1 and #2 lanes; at one point, straddling the center line" leading to the traffic stop.

It does not appear from provided reports and videos that a breathalyzer test was performed on Getchius.

"I begged them to. I said please take my urine, anything, my blood," Getchius said at the news conference.

Deputy McClinton's video begins with the traffic stop near the intersection of Bypass 25 NE and Commerce Circle West, near Emily's Amish Oven. Getchius can be heard telling deputies his Florida driver's license was suspended.

As Getchius is questioned, McClinton's body cam shows him searching Getchius vehicle and belongings.

While searching, McClinton finds multiple pill containers and opens one of them to examine. The container was blue with a prescription label.

"What's the blue pills buddy?" McClinton asks.

"It's for my stomach, you are making me nervous," Getchius responds.

"Most pills don't look like that,



SCREENSHOT | BAILEY LAW FIRM

Greenwood County deputies conduct a traffic stop involving Bryan Getchius in body camera footage recorded the night of his arrest. Medication discovered during the search of the vehicle was initially suspected to be illegal drugs before laboratory testing later determined the pills were from a valid prescription.

so we are going to test them. Because these look very worn and honestly not real and they are in the wrong pill bottle," McClinton replies.

After searching for several minutes, McClinton begins testing the pills using multiple roadside drug field test packets on the back of a patrol vehicle, without gloves.

Josh Hood with the Greenwood County Sheriff's Office confirmed in an email that the tests used at the time were NARK II field test kits.

According to product information published by the manufacturer, Sirchie, the kits are designed as presumptive field tests, to indicate the possible presence of narcotics.

"The results of NARK® test pouches are presumptive. NARK® only tests for the possible presence of certain chemical compounds. Reactions may occur with, and such compounds can be found in, both legal and illegal products," the website reads.

The tests work by placing a small sample into a plastic pouch containing chemical reagents. When internal ampoules are crushed, the chemicals mix with the sample and produce a color change that officers compare to a reference chart.

During the traffic stop, camera footage shows multiple deputies discussing the changing color of the chemical reaction as they conducted multiple tests.

At one point during the testing, an officer says the chemical reaction appears yellow, stating "yellow says it's oxycodone, bruh." Another officer adds that "yellow is not an indicator"

The videos show deputies debating whether the reaction appeared yellow, brown or orange before continuing testing.

The Index-Journal contacted the manufacturer seeking clarification on how the NARK II kits interpret color reactions and what a "yellow" result indicates. A company representative declined to explain the process stating: "Because you are not law enforcement, we cannot give you that information."

During the exchange, Stevens body camera shows Getchius repeatedly told deputies the pills were medication and urged them to examine the imprint markings on the tablets.

After multiple tests were run and confusion over the results continued, McClinton and another officer searched the pill imprint markings.

"It's supposed to be these, LAN 1282, dicyclomine hydrochloride

for stomach sht. These are fake pressed," McClinton can be heard saying.

After conducting multiple field tests on the pills and powder, deputies informed Getchius he would be placed under arrest and taken into custody for possession of a Schedule II controlled substance.

Getchius could be heard pleading with officers not to arrest him on multiple videos.

Arrest reports

According to arrest warrants filed in Greenwood County, deputies believed the pills were counterfeit narcotics.

The warrant affidavit indicated Getchius was found with approximately 65 blue pills marked "LAN 1282" and a blue powdery substance that field tested presumptive for fentanyl during the traffic stop.

McClinton wrote in the affidavit that the pills appeared "poorly made" and broke apart easily when handled, which he said was consistent with clandestinely manufactured fentanyl pills as well as cocaine.

"Due to deputies having prior knowledge of pills consistent with these being clandestinely made and containing Fentanyl, deputies conducted multiple field tests with not only the pills themselves, but also the loose powder. All of which, indicated a positive reaction for the presence of Fentanyl," the report reads. Those findings formed the basis for multiple drug charges, including trafficking fentanyl and possession of narcotics, according to the warrants.

Court records show Getchius later appeared before circuit court Judge Frank Addy for a bond hearing on May 28, 2024.

The court set bond at \$25,000 and ordered that he remain under house arrest at his mother's residence in Greenwood with electronic monitoring while the case proceeded.

"The Court may consider only two factors, risk of flight and danger to the community," the order reads.

The order notes that while Getchius had out of state ties, he had family in the area and no prior criminal record.

"With my mom, sister and uncle sitting in the background, the judge said, 'Mr. Getchius, you're a flight risk and a danger to the community. I felt like the biggest piece of garbage ever,'" Getchius said during the conference.

The wait on SLED

Evidence was later submitted to SLED for laboratory analysis

and forensic testing determined the pills and powder contained Dicyclomine, a prescription medication commonly used to treat gastrointestinal conditions.

"Visual Examination determined that physical characteristics of this item are consistent with a pharmaceutical preparation. No further tests are warranted at this time," the report reads.

All three of the pill bottles and contents found in Getchius's vehicle were tested by SLED, each returned the result "Dicyclomine (Rx) indicated in the sample tested." The report is dated Oct. 1, 2025, roughly 17 months after the May 2024 traffic stop.

During the press conference, Bailey said the delay illustrates what he described as a significant 'backlog' in forensic testing.

"At the time this evidence was submitted, SLED had roughly 18,000 cases waiting for testing," Bailey said.

Bailey said that delay meant Getchius remained charged and under court supervision for months before the lab results were returned.

"SLED has a huge backlog, and really it's a civil rights issue, because people's freedom is waiting on that test," Bailey said.

The Index-Journal contacted the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division for comment regarding the reported testing backlog, a response was received but not in time for deadline. See Sunday's edition for details on response.

Case dismissed

After the SLED laboratory report determined the pills were prescription medication, the criminal case against Getchius was eventually dismissed.

During the press conference, Bailey said prosecutors initially offered Getchius a plea agreement to a lesser charge.

"The state is offering a plea to possession for the time that you served," Bailey said. "It absolves them from this accountability if you plead guilty to something.

Brian could have never come before y'all today and said I was innocent, that was IBS medication."

Bailey said Getchius refused the offer, maintaining that the pills were medication and that he had committed no crime.

"I'm innocent. I had to pay lawyers," Getchius said. "I'm grateful for that, but they treated me like I was the biggest piece of trash on earth from the second they pulled up."

Bailey said the charges were eventually dismissed after the SLED laboratory findings confirmed the pills were Dicyclomine.

In a statement provided to the Index-Journal, the office of Solicitor David Stumbo said prosecutors dismissed the charges once they learned the pills were lawfully prescribed.

"It is clear from our records that the assigned prosecutor immediately dismissed the criminal charges against Mr. Getchius after the SLED lab results were returned and our prosecutor was made aware that Mr. Getchius had a lawful prescription for the controlled substance in his possession on the night of his arrest," the statement reads.

Stumbo refuted Bailey's statement that the state had offered a plea deal to Getchius saying, "Any assertion that our office tried to pursue a plea resolution to somehow try to prevent potential civil litigation later is false."

The Index-Journal reached out to Bailey Law Firm requesting documentation related to the dismissal of the charges and the alleged plea offer but had not received a response by press time.

Responses to the lawsuit

The Index-Journal reached out to GCSO and Kelly for comment regarding the lawsuit.

Hood directed the IJ to the county for comment: "I am unable to comment on any potential or ongoing litigation. I would refer you to the Greenwood County Attorney for any information related to this request."

The county confirmed the GCSO and anyone working in capacity with the sheriff's office will be represented by Greenwood County's legal counsel, the South Carolina Association of Counties.

"We were informed today (3-11-26) that a civil lawsuit may be filed against Greenwood County and the Greenwood County Sheriff's Office. At this time, we have not received or reviewed the lawsuit and are unable to comment on the specific allegations. We will review the filing once it is received and respond through the appropriate legal process," said PIO Abby Banks.

Bailey and Getchius told media the lawsuit seeks damages and policy changes. The two hope to address the backlog at SLED and changes related to the use of roadside drug field tests, arguing that presumptive tests lead to arrests before laboratory confirmation is available.

"We want to see change," Bailey said. "We want to see more reliable testing methods so people aren't losing their freedom waiting for lab results."

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I-J honors wrestlers after successful season

Sports 1B



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DAILY \$2

SLED backlog sheds light on timeline in Getchius case

By Renee Ortiz
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Newly released information from the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division (SLED) provides additional context about the timespan for forensic testing on pills found during a Greenwood County traffic stop.

Testing confirmed that pills were a legal prescription medication rather than illegal narcotics.

According to SLED, evidence connected to the arrest of Bryan Joseph Getchius was received by the agency's laboratory roughly three weeks after his arrest by deputies with the Greenwood County Sheriff's Office on May

15, 2024.

In an email, SLED confirmed the case remained in the testing backlog for months. "In this particular case, the submission was received by the SLED Laboratory on 6/5/2024" the email reads.

Then, an investigator with the Eighth Circuit Solicitor's Office requested the analysis be expedited for court purposes.

"SLED received a call from an investigator with the Greenwood County Solicitor's Office on 8/14/2025 asking us to please expedite the testing for court purposes. The case was added to the laboratory priority list. It was assigned to

a SLED analyst on 8/18/2025. Lab analysis started on 09/5/2025. The report was finalized 10/1/2025," the email reads.

The report's findings note the pills seized during the May 2024 traffic stop contained Dicyclomine, a prescription medication used to treat gastrointestinal conditions.

The results contradicted field drug tests conducted during the stop indicating the possible presence of fentanyl and cocaine.

Backlog of cases

SLED said the timeline reflects

See **BACKLOG**, page 6A



SCREENSHOT | INDEX-JOURNAL

Body camera footage from a May 15, 2024 traffic stop in Greenwood County shows deputies examining pills found in a prescription bottle during a vehicle search. Roadside drug field tests later indicated the possible presence of narcotics, but laboratory analysis by the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division determined the pills were Dicyclomine, a legal prescription medication.



MYA ATTEN | INDEX-JOURNAL

Nashari Williams smiles beside South Carolina State Superintendent of Education Ellen Weaver during the classroom announcement naming her a South Carolina Teacher of the Year state finalist.

'Someone's got to be their champion'

Hodges teacher named state finalist

By Mya Atten
matten@indexjournal.com

HODGES — Encouraging students to believe in themselves is part of Nashari Williams' daily mission at Hodges Greenwood School of Inquiry.

Now, the second-grade teacher is receiving statewide recognition after learning

Friday she was named a finalist for South Carolina Teacher of the Year.

The recognition comes with a \$10,000 award and moves Williams to the next stage of the statewide competition, which includes an interview with a panel of judges. The

See **CHAMPION**, page 7A



Students Nora and Mason clap as second-grade teacher Nashari Williams learns she has been named a South Carolina Teacher of the Year state finalist.

Election board rules Tillman ineligible for special election

By Renee Ortiz
rortiz@indexjournal.com

The race to fill a vacant seat on the Calhoun Falls Town Council has narrowed to two candidates.

Election officials determined a third candidate did not meet constitutional eligibility requirements to appear on the ballot.

The Abbeville County Board of Voter Registration and Elections announced that Charlie Eugene Paul Tillman has been ruled ineligible to run in the March 31 special election.

As a result, voters will choose between Micheal Brandt and Linda Lee Richey. Attempts by the Index-Journal to reach Tillman and the other candidates for comment were unsuccessful.

The special election is scheduled to fill the town council seat vacated when Viggo Lassen was elected mayor in November.

Why the candidate was ruled ineligible

In a written statement, the elections board said it made the determination following a review of candidate qualifications and consultation with the South Carolina State Election Commission.

The board cited provisions of the South Carolina Constitution and state law governing eligibility for public office.

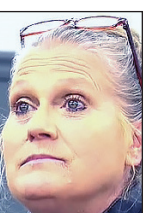
According to the statement, Article VI, Section 1 of the South Carolina Constitution disqualifies a person convicted of a felony from holding public office, unless that person has received a pardon or



CHARLIE EUGENE TILLMAN



MICHEAL BRANDT



LINDA RICHEY

See **INELIGIBLE**, page 6A

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BACKLOG

From page 1A

broader challenges faced by the agency's drug analysis department, which currently has a backlog of thousands of cases awaiting testing.

As of March 1, 2026, the SLED drug analysis department had 19,137 pending cases, according to information provided to the Index-Journal.

That figure represents an increase from 16,056 cases reported July 1, 2025.

During their most recent fiscal year, SLED reported completing analysis on 50,023 items, representing 18,784 cases and nearly 20,000 laboratory reports.

SLED clarified that when the department is fully staffed with 12 analysts, it typically completes about 1,300 cases per month.

SLED also noted that testing turnaround times were significantly shorter in 2018.

Bryan Getchius case timeline

- May 15, 2024: Traffic stop and arrest in Greenwood County
- June 5, 2024: Evidence received by SLED lab by GSCO
- Aug. 14, 2025: Case expedited for testing by Greenwood County Solicitor's Office
- Oct. 1, 2025: SLED lab confirms pills were prescription medication
- Oct. 13, 2025: Charges dismissed
- Oct. 27, 2025: Court orders arrest record expunged by Solicitor's Office

"Drug Analysis Department processing time was under 45 days prior to the passage of the 2018 Hemp legislation," the email reads.

Prioritizing cases

According to SLED, cases can be moved forward in the testing queue when agencies or prosecutors request priority analysis.

"It is important to note that the department prioritizes cases per agency requests in order to keep investigations moving and for court

purposes. However, there are new cases currently being analyzed by the lab," the email reads.

The agency said prioritized cases are typically completed within three to four weeks once testing begins. In the Getchius case, the laboratory said the evidence was expedited, following a request from an investigator with the solicitor's office in August 2025.

The sample had been with SLED since June of 2024.

Questions about the timeline

The Index-Journal contacted the Greenwood County Sheriff's Office asking about the timeline for submitting evidence to SLED and what the typical process is for sending drug samples for laboratory testing.

The newspaper also contacted the Eighth Circuit Solicitor's Office seeking clarification about how cases are prioritized for testing and why the evidence in this case remained in the backlog for more than a year before the expedited request was made.

Eighth Circuit Solicitor David Stumbo provided the following response: The prosecutor with the Solicitor's Office received the SLED results back in October of 2025. The report revealed the seized pills were another controlled substance and were not fentanyl.

"Because the prosecutor did not realize at the time that Mr. Getchius had a prescription for that controlled substance, he initially emailed a plea offer to the defense attorney regarding the misdemeanor possession of a controlled substance. The defense attorney brought it to the prosecutor's attention that his client did actually have a lawful prescription for that specific controlled substance in his possession," the Solicitor's office email reads.

It was the lawful prescription that led to the full dismissal of the charges.

"Our prosecutor immediately responded that he would be sign off/dismiss the charges, closing the case. The email thread shows this exchange all transpired within a few hours on the same day," according to the Solicitor's

Office email.

Lawsuit filed

Getchius has since filed a federal civil rights lawsuit against Greenwood County, the Greenwood County Sheriff's Office, Greenwood County Sheriff Dennis Kelly and several deputies.

The suit contends Getchius was wrongfully arrested and prosecuted, after roadside drug tests misidentified prescription medication as illegal narcotics. Court records show Getchius was arrested in May 2024 and charged with multiple drug offenses, including trafficking fentanyl.

After SLED laboratory testing confirmed the pills were a legal prescription medication, nearly 17 months later, the charges were later dismissed.

Court records show the charges against Getchius were dismissed in October 2025.

Stumbo later signed an order expunging the arrest record and directing agencies to destroy records related to the case.

INELIGIBLE

From page 1A

completed their sentence at least 15 years prior to filing for office.

The clock does not start at conviction, rather it starts when the person has fully completed their sentence, including:

- jail or prison time
- probation
- parole

Only after the entire sentence is completed does the 15-year waiting period begin.

State law reinforces those requirements.

Under S.C. Code Ann. § 7-5-120(B), a person convicted of a felony or offense against election laws is disqualified from registering to vote, or holding office, unless that disqualification has been removed through a pardon or other legal restoration of rights. S.C. Code Ann. § 7-11-15 further requires that candidates meet all constitutional and statutory qualifications for office at the time they file to run.

At a meeting on March 2, the board voted to determine that Tillman did not meet those eligibility require-

ments and ruled his name would not appear on the ballot.

Questions about eligibility

Questions about Tillman's eligibility surfaced shortly after candidate filings for the special election were posted on SC Votes.

On Feb. 25, the Index-Journal contacted the Abbeville County Board of Voter Registration and Elections seeking clarification about whether Tillman met constitutional requirements to hold public office.

While an on-the-record interview was declined, Elections Director Jatavius Coleman confirmed the county office does not conduct background vetting of municipal candidates and referred questions about eligibility to the State Election Commission.

The same day, the Index-Journal contacted the State Election Commission seeking clarification on how Article VI of the South Carolina Constitution applies to candidates with felony convictions involving moral turpitude.

After follow-up inquiries on March 9, the commission responded March 10 through spokesman TJ Lundeen.

"The State Election Commission does not have any authority in this matter," Lundeen said in an email. "This

would have been decided by Abbeville County's Voter Registration and Elections office and/or its board."

The Index-Journal also submitted a Freedom of Information Act request Feb. 25 to the South Carolina Department of Probation, Parole and Pardon Services seeking records of any pardon or restoration of civil rights granted to Tillman.

In a Feb. 26 response, agency spokesman Scott Hawkins said the department was unable to locate any records associated with Tillman.

"SCDPPPS is not in possession of any documents related to Charlie Eugene Paul Tillman," Hawkins wrote. "Both our Records division and our Parole and Pardon section have performed searches for records under this name."

Hawkins suggested that if a pardon existed, it could potentially be held by federal officials or the South Carolina Department of Archives and History if it predated the agency's available records.

Prior removal from office

Tillman previously served on the Calhoun Falls Town Council in 2012 before being removed from office in 2014 following a felony conviction involving

threats against a public official.

Tillman was arrested in April 2012 by a Calhoun Falls police officer and charged with five offenses, including threatening a public official.

In June 2014, then-Gov. Nikki Haley issued an executive order declaring Tillman's council seat vacant after the conviction was determined to involve moral turpitude under South Carolina law.

Under the South Carolina Constitution, individuals convicted of a felony involving moral turpitude are disqualified from holding public office unless they have received a pardon or otherwise met the legal requirements to have their civil rights restored.

That constitutional provision was among the factors cited by the Abbeville County Board of Voter Registration and Elections in determining Tillman was not eligible to run in the March 31 special election.

Election details

Early voting for the Calhoun Falls special election is scheduled to begin later this month, with the election set for March 31.

Voters will now choose between Brandt and Richey to fill the remaining council term.

Timeline: Tillman eligibility review

Feb. 25

The Index-Journal began asking questions about candidate eligibility after learning that Charlie Eugene Paul Tillman had filed for the Calhoun Falls special election.

Requests for clarification were sent to the Abbeville County Board of Voter Registration and Elections and the South Carolina State Election Commission.

A Freedom of Information Act request was also filed with the South Carolina Department of Probation, Parole and Pardon Services (SCDPPPS) seeking records of any pardon or restoration of civil rights.

Feb. 26

SCDPPPS agency spokesman Scott Hawkins responded that the department was not in possession of any records related to Tillman.

March 2

The Abbeville County Board of Voter Registration and Elections voted at a meeting to determine Tillman did not meet eligibility requirements to run for office.

March 10

The State Election Commission responded to questions from the Index-Journal. Spokesman TJ Lundeen said the commission does not have authority over the decision and that the matter would be determined by the county elections office or its board.

March 12

The Abbeville County Board of Voter Registration and Elections confirmed to the IJ that Tillman had been ruled ineligible and that his name would not appear on the March 31 ballot.

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Find out inside who readers chose best in the Lakelands

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2 SECTIONS, 16 PAGES

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 29, 2026

DAILY \$2

'Scar tissue in our souls'

Greenwood confronts surge in juvenile shootings; leaders seek solutions

A crowd gathers Monday at the Starz24 Teen Center as community leaders host a meeting to address youth gun violence in Greenwood.

SUBMITTED | JACK LOGAN



By Mya Atten
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A teenager with a gun. An argument that spirals. Another late-night call that could have been prevented. These are the moments Greenwood Police Chief TJ

Chaudoin said officers are working to stop.

During a community meeting on youth gun violence Monday at Starz24 Teen Center, the Greenwood Police Department brought together city leaders, law enforcement personnel,

pastors and community organizations to confront recent incidents involving young people and discuss solutions.

"Greenwood is a strong community," Chaudoin said.

See **SCAR**, page 8A

Calhoun Falls postpones rate vote amid confusion

By Renee Ortiz
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CALHOUN FALLS — A proposed water rate increase was tabled without discussion Tuesday, as the Calhoun Falls Town Council acknowledged issues with the ordinance and offered little public explanation during a meeting marked by confusion and unanswered questions.

The meeting also raised questions about public notice. The only agenda posted at Town Hall prior to the meeting appeared to be an outdated document dated September 2025. Copies distributed to attendees showed the same document with the date manually altered by hand.

The main item of the night, listed as "water rates first reading" under unfinished business, was tabled after town attorney Juankell Shingles told council there had been a problem with the ordinance paperwork and that it would need to be revised.

"We're postponing that then," Mayor Viggo Lassen said. "We were going to do the first reading tonight... we found out there was a problem with the town's ordinance"

No timeline was provided for when the ordinance would be brought back, and neither council members nor residents discussed any proposed rate increases during the meeting.

The lack of discussion comes after council previously outlined plans to raise water, sewer and sanitation rates as the town works to stabilize its struggling utility system during an April 14 meeting.

Tuesday's meeting followed the cancellation of a previously scheduled April 23 special called meeting, where the ordinance raising utility rates had been expected to receive its initial reading. Officials cited a "lack of paperwork" for the cancellation of the April 23 meeting.

Financial updates presented during the town's regular council meeting on Monday were limited, with newly appointed Clerk-Treasurer Marcia Lomax telling council she is still reviewing records and working to organize the town's finances.

"I am diligently working on

See **CONFUSION**, page 8A



PHOTOS BY ROBERT JORDAN | INDEX-JOURNAL

Rose Qualls gestures while describing the work that has gone into a 90-year-old building in Abbeville as she and her husband, Kurtis, prepare it for being the home of Trinity Fitness.

Fit for service

Abbeville couple bringing former armory back to life

By Robert Jordan
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ABBEVILLE — A building may be dark and broken, but its future can be bright and hopeful.

Since February, Lake Secession residents Kurtis and Rose Qualls have been breathing new life into a 90-year-old structure just off Marshall Street. Soon to be home to Trinity Fitness, the building has a storied past, serving formerly as a National Guard Armory and known locally as "the old Adams Building."

To put it simply, it's a fixer upper. When Kurtis and Rose first toured the building, several windows had been broken, the interior was bare and dirty, and the roof leaked from several spots, damaging the walls and the floor.

Despite the condition of the building, Kurtis said, "I felt right at home when I walked in here. What would turn most people away ... this is a lot to take on," he said. "It's an old building with a lot of



Kurtis and Rose Qualls are the owners of what will be Trinity Fitness. They are rehabilitating a nearly 90-year-old building that formerly housed a department store and a National Guard Armory.

problems. It's unique. For 20 years, I was in

See **FIT**, page 4A

Colo. law raises questions about SC drug testing arrests

By Renee Ortiz
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A newly passed law in Colorado restricting arrests based solely on roadside drug tests is raising questions about how similar cases are handled in South Carolina.

In South Carolina, law enforcement can make arrests based on field test results while prosecutors can wait months for lab confirmation from the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division (SLED).

This issue is at the center of a federal civil rights lawsuit filed by a former Florida man who alleges he was wrongly arrested and jailed in Greenwood County after his prescription medications were misidentified as illegal narcotics.

Bryan Joseph Getchius filed suit against Greenwood County, the Greenwood County Sheriff's Office, Sheriff Dennis Kelly and three deputies, alleging false arrest, false imprisonment and malicious prosecution tied to the use of roadside drug field tests.

Getchius was pulled over in May 2024 by GCSO deputies while leaving Greenwood County.

According to arrest warrants and body camera video, deputies found prescription pill bottles and powder in Getchius' vehicle. Getchius can be heard on video telling officers that the pills were prescriptions for stomach issues. However, field testing kits on those substances yielded a presumptive positive for fentanyl and cocaine, leading to multiple drug charges.

Nearly 17 months later, laboratory analysis by SLED determined the substances were dicyclomine, a prescription medication

See **TESTING**, page 7A



DAVID STUMBO



INDEX-JOURNAL FILE

Attorney Tyler Bailey, right, speaks to reporters during a press conference in downtown Greenwood on March 11 while Bryan Getchius stands beside him. The pair discussed Getchius' arrest following a traffic stop and the months-long wait for laboratory testing that later confirmed the pills were from a valid prescription.

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TESTING

From page 1A

used to treat gastrointestinal conditions, as Getchius had told the officers searching his vehicle.

Uncertainty with testing kits

Body camera footage provided by Bailey Law Firm shows deputies conducting multiple presumptive drug tests the night of Getchius arrest.

Josh Hood with the Greenwood County Sheriff's Office confirmed in an email that the tests used at the time were NARK II field test kits.

According to product information published by the manufacturer, Sirchie, the kits are designed as presumptive field tests, to indicate the possible presence of narcotics.

"The results of NARK" test pouches are presumptive. NARK" only tests for the possible presence of certain chemical compounds. Reactions may occur with, and such compounds can be found in, both legal and illegal products," the website reads.

The kits rely on chemical reactions that produce color changes when mixed with a substance.

The manufacturer states that only forensic laboratory testing can definitively identify a substance.

"Presumptive identification is generally recognized within our legal system as a component of probable cause. There is no drug identification system presently in use which completely eliminates the occurrence of false positives and false negatives," the website reads.

During the stop, GCSO deputies can be heard on the video debating the results of the test as the color changes.

At one point, an officer notes the substance is "turning yellow." Another adds that "yellow is not an indicator," while a third later associates a brown color with oxycodone.

The footage shows continued discussion over whether the reaction appeared yellow, brown or orange as testing continued. Despite the uncertainty shown on camera, deputies proceeded with the arrest.

The Index-Journal contacted the field test manufacturer seeking clarification on how the kits interpret color changes and what a yellow result indicates. A representative declined to provide any information, stating it is only available to law enforcement customers.

Arrests vs. confirmation

Eighth Circuit Solicitor David Stumbo said law enforcement officers in South Carolina may make arrests based on a combination of field test results, training and observation.

"It's a combination of their observation and the field tests, that have enough for probable cause for arrest," Stumbo said.

However, Stumbo indicated

that prosecutors do not move forward with formal charges without laboratory confirmation.

"We don't proceed to indictment generally until we get the results back," Stumbo said.

Arrests based on preliminary testing can create a gap lasting months — in Getchius' case, nearly a year and a half — while final confirmation results are gathered. Some larger counties such as Greenville, Charleston, Richland and Lexington have their own drug labs.

But, Stumbo says the counties in his Eighth Circuit do not have a dedicated lab, which means all substances collected in the field by law enforcement have to be sent SLED's main lab in Columbia.

"We don't have a county that has the resources to fund their own forensics lab here in Greenwood," Stumbo said.

Stumbo acknowledged that field test kits have limitations.

"The field test kits are not perfect... we've seen that," Stumbo said.

Stumbo also acknowledged that false positives carry legal consequences, noting that if someone spends time in jail based on a bad field test, "they have legal rights in the civil system" to pursue a remedy.

At the same time, Stumbo pointed to the challenges officers face during roadside encounters, particularly with counterfeit or pressed pills.

"The way these pills are pressed, there may be multiple kinds of drugs in a pill that's labeled as something completely different," Stumbo said. "It may be labeled as like an ecstasy pill and but it's really a mixture of meth and fentanyl!"

If a field test or officer initially labels a substance incorrectly, Stumbo said they file what's called a direct or "straight" indictment on the corrected charge and arraign the defendant on that new count.

"If it's a different kind of drug, we charge what it is. If it's not drugs at all, we dismiss it," Stumbo said.

SLED: Field tests are screening tools

The South Carolina Law Enforcement Division, which conducts forensic drug analysis for agencies across the state, drew a clear distinction between field testing and laboratory analysis.

In a statement to the Index-Journal, SLED described field test kits as screening tools designed to indicate what may be present and noted they can produce both false positives and false negatives.

By contrast, laboratory testing performed by SLED is considered confirmatory, using scientific instrumentation to identify specific substances.

The agency reported an average turnaround time of about 221 days for the drug analysis cases completed thus far in 2026, with cases still being processed from as far back as 2021 because of backlog.

Data provided by SLED shows

the drug analysis backlog peaked at more than 23,000 assignments in 2023 before dropping to about 16,400 in 2025, with recent increases tied in part to staffing shortages.

"The laboratory is constantly working to address the backlog. In 2025, the laboratory had reduced the Drug Analysis backlog from a peak of 23,105 assignments in April 2023 to 16,455 assignments in July of 2025, which was a 29% reduction," the email from SLED reads.

SLED indicated it does not track how often field test results are later contradicted by laboratory findings and does not evaluate the reliability of field test kits used by law enforcement agencies.

"The laboratory does not track data on field testing kits. The types of kits used from agency to agency in South Carolina would likely have wide variability," the email reads.

Colorado law takes different approach

In March, Colorado lawmakers passed House Bill 26-1020, which limits the use of presumptive field drug tests in arrest decisions.

The law defines such tests as preliminary chemical screenings and prohibits officers from making an arrest when the sole basis is a field test result. The law applies to low-level misdemeanor drug possession cases and does not prohibit arrests in felony drug cases.

The restriction applies when a field test is the sole basis for the arrest.

Instead, officers must issue a summons for low-level drug possession cases.

Stumbo says the Colorado law could be problematic for the South Carolina.

"If they [law enforcement] had to wait for a lab result, that same person could get those same pills, go out and distribute them. They could kill somebody," Stumbo said.

The Colorado legislation also requires courts to advise defendants that field tests are subject to false positives, have known error rates and are not considered definitive evidence.

Stumbo indicated that implementing a similar law in South Carolina would present challenges, particularly for smaller jurisdictions that rely on SLED for laboratory testing.

"It would put law enforcement in a rough position," Stumbo said, noting that many counties lack the resources to operate their own forensic labs.

A broader question

The Getchius case highlights a broader issue at the intersection of law enforcement, forensic science and court procedure: how decisions are made when initial test results are uncertain but immediate action is required.

Tyler Bailey, the attorney representing Getchius, pointed to that gap between roadside testing and laboratory confirmation as central to the case, arguing that arrests based on presumptive testing can carry lasting consequences when later proven wrong.

Bailey tied the conducted field tests as the deciding factor in the arrest. "Strip the field tests out of this case, and there is no arrest, no 15 days in jail, no seven months

on house arrest, and no felony charges," Bailey said.

Bailey added deputies had access to information at the scene identifying the pills as a prescription medication but proceeded with the arrest after the various positive field test results.

"These tests were never designed to provide conclusive evidence and have known false positive rates," Bailey said, pointing to national research and reporting on similar cases across the county.

While most cases ultimately rely on laboratory confirmation for charges and sentencing, arrests can occur based on preliminary results of these field test kits.

Bailey said their case reflects broader concerns about how field test results are used in arrest decisions and pointed to recent legislative action in Colorado.

"Colorado's new law is the direction every state should move. The principle that an unreliable field test should never, by itself, be the basis to take away someone's liberty is exactly what was violated in Bryan's case," Bailey said.

Bailey also argued that similar concerns extend beyond low-level offenses.

"If a field test is too unreliable to support a misdemeanor arrest, it is too unreliable to support felony charges that carry up to fifteen years in prison," Bailey said.

In Getchius' case, the laboratory findings later determined the substances in his possession were not illegal drugs. The federal lawsuit now seeks to determine what accountability, if any, follows.

"In our state, a clean field test is treated as proof of innocence and a faulty one as proof of guilt. That is not how the presumption of innocence is supposed to work. Until the law changes, cases like this one will be the only mechanism of accountability," Bailey said.

The Index-Journal reached out to GCSO for comment regarding field test arrests, false positive tracking, deputy training and safeguards around test use. GCSO did not respond by press time.

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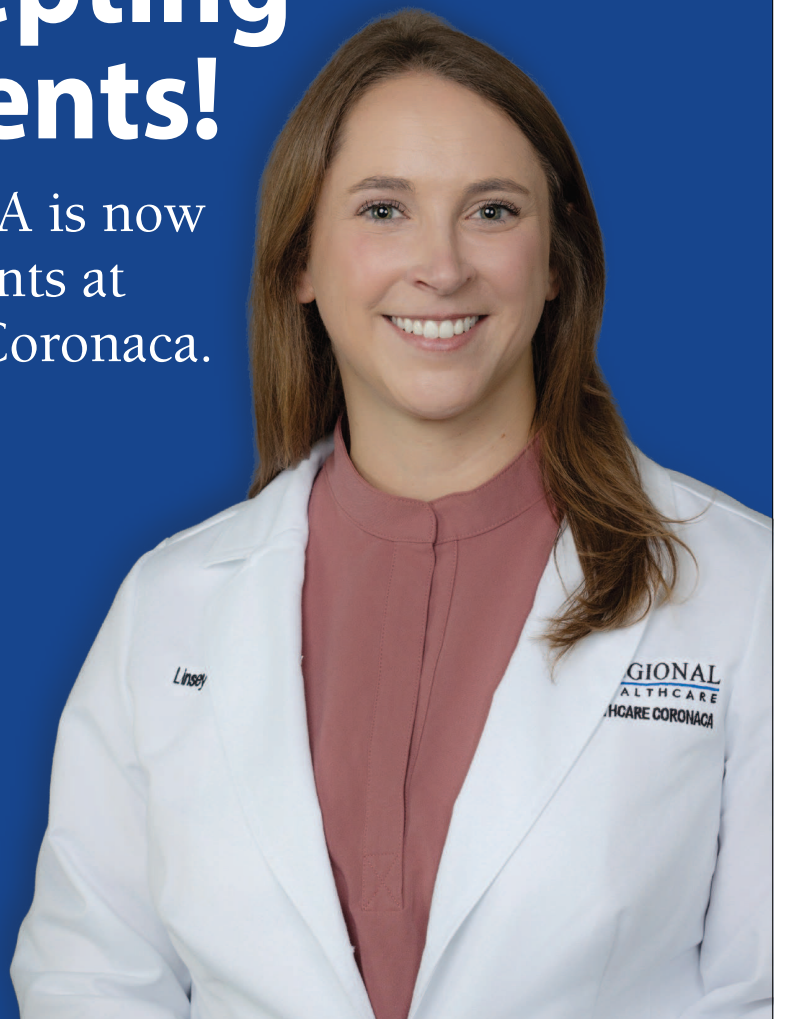


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