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The State of South Carolina  
OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

CHARLES MOLONY CONDON  
ATTORNEY GENERAL

August 27, 1997

Jeffrey B. Moore, Executive Director  
South Carolina Sheriffs' Association  
P.O. Box 21428  
Columbia, South Carolina 29221-1428

Dear Mr. Moore:

Attorney General Condon has forwarded your opinion request to me for reply. You ask whether "section 8-15-65 of the Code, require[s] a 'corresponding reduction' in the county's appropriations by the state, pursuant to Chapter 27 of Title 6, State Aid to Subdivisions, if a reduction is made in the operational budgets of the specified elected officials by a county council?"

Section 8-15-65 of the Code provides in pertinent part as follows:

(A) The General Assembly shall appropriate annually salary supplements for the following county officers:

- (1) clerks of court;
- (2) probate judges;
- (3) sheriffs;
- (4) registers of mesne conveyances;
- (5) auditors;
- (6) treasurers.

(B) The amounts appropriated for salary supplements pursuant to subsection (A) must include both salary and related employer contributions and are in addition to amounts provided as compensation for these officials by counties. To the extent that compensation for these officers is reduced

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by a county or there is any other reduction of expenditures in the operations of their offices, a corresponding reduction must be made in the distribution otherwise due the county pursuant to Chapter 27 of Title 6, the State Aid to Subdivisions Act. (emphasis added).

....

If a statute's language is plain and unambiguous, and conveys a clear and definite meaning, there is no occasion for employing rules of statutory interpretation and a court has no right to look for or impose another meaning. Paschal v. State Election Commission, 317 S.C. 434, 454 S.E.2d 890 (1995). Where the terms of the statute are clear, the court must apply those terms according to their literal meaning. Id. A court cannot construe a statute without regard to its plain and ordinary meaning, and may not resort to subtle or forced construction in an attempt to limit or expand a statute's scope. Id. As a general rule, the word "any" is a word of comprehensive meaning and is frequently used in the sense of "all" or "every." Pursley v. Inman, 215 S.C. 243, 54 S.E.2d 800 (1949).

The relevant portion of Section 8-15-65(B) reads as follows: "[T]o the extent that compensation for these officers is reduced by a county or there is any other reductions of expenditures in the operations of their offices, a corresponding reduction must be made in the distribution otherwise due the county pursuant to Chapter 27 of Title 6, the State Aid to Subdivisions Act." (emphasis added). The terms of the statute are clear and unambiguous and must be applied according to their literal meaning. The literal meaning of the statute is that if there is any reduction whatsoever of expenditures in the operations of the offices listed in subsection (A), there must also be a corresponding reduction in the distribution due the county pursuant to the State Aid to Subdivisions Act. The use of the comprehensive word "any" demonstrates that the corresponding reduction in the money distributed to the county pursuant to the State Aid to Subdivisions Act is to occur in response to "all" or "every" reduction of expenditures in the operations of the listed offices. If the General Assembly had intended a meaning other than what is expressly stated in the statute, it should have done so.

Only the General Assembly, through the legislative process, can change the statute as written to provide a meaning other than what is plainly stated here. An opinion of this Office cannot ascribe or grasp for a different meaning to the statute beyond the present literal language of the law. We must presume, however, that where a statute is so clearly worded, the General Assembly intended a result consistent with the words it used.

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Accordingly, it is this Office's opinion that if there is any reduction whatsoever in the funding of the offices listed in Section 8-15-65(A), there must be a corresponding reduction in the distribution due the county pursuant to the State Aid to Subdivisions Act.

Very truly yours,



Robert D. Cook  
Assistant Deputy Attorney General

REVIEWED AND APPROVED BY:

  
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Jeb C. Williams, III  
Deputy Attorney General