South Carolina’s Index ranking could be improved significantly with one simple and uncontroversial change: indexing the state’s modest contribution limits to inflation. Contribution limits that are not tied to inflation have an insidious effect on free speech and association over time; as the price of communicating rises, the amount a contributor can give stays constant. This is precisely why a majority of states (counting those without limits on individual giving) periodically adjust their limits upward based on inflation to account for this reality.

South Carolina’s score also suffers from extremely low limits on the amount political parties can give to their legislative candidates. If not for a 2010 court case that ruled the state’s definition of “political committee” overly broad and unconstitutional, the Palmetto State would perform even worse in the Index, as PACs were previously restricted to giving just $3,500 to political parties. As it stands, the state is credited for having no limits on giving to parties by individuals and political committees.