

April 21, 1999

TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES:

GOVERNOR'S VETO MESSAGE FOR HOUSE BILL 973

I am returning House Bill 973, "AN ACT TO AUTHORIZE THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION TO IMPLEMENT A PILOT PROGRAM TO ASSIST IN THE ESTABLISHMENT OF FAMILY SUPPORT CENTERS AND PARENT EDUCATION PROGRAMS; TO PROVIDE THAT THE GOAL OF FAMILY SUPPORT CENTERS AND PARENT EDUCATION PROGRAMS SHALL BE TO CREATE A BETTER LIFE FOR MISSISSIPPI FAMILIES AND CHILDREN; TO SPECIFY CERTAIN PROGRAMS TO BE MADE AVAILABLE THROUGH FAMILY SUPPORT CENTERS; TO REQUIRE THE DEPARTMENT TO ESTABLISH AN APPLICATION PROCESS FOR PARTICIPATION IN THE PILOT PROGRAM; TO REQUIRE APPLICANTS TO HAVE IN PLACE AN ADVISORY BOARD FOR THE FAMILY SUPPORT CENTER; TO AUTHORIZE THE DEPARTMENT TO USE AVAILABLE FUNDING FOR GRANTS TO PARTICIPATING FAMILY SUPPORT CENTERS; TO REQUIRE THE DEPARTMENT TO APPOINT AN ADVISORY COMMITTEE TO ASSIST THE DEPARTMENT IN PROMULGATING REGULATIONS FOR THE PILOT PROGRAM; TO REQUIRE THE DEPARTMENT TO RECOMMEND TO THE LEGISLATURE WHETHER OR NOT THE PROGRAM SHOULD BE PERMANENTLY ESTABLISHED; TO REQUIRE THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION TO DEVELOP A REPORTING PROCESS ON EXISTING EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS IN THE STATE; TO CODIFY SECTION 37-57-102, MISSISSIPPI CODE OF 1972, TO CLARIFY THE DEFINITION OF "PROPERTY" FOR SCHOOL AD VALOREM TAX PURPOSES; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES," without my approval and respectfully present the following reasons for my veto:

The goal of this bill is ambitious, indeed "to create a better life for families and children in Mississippi, with emphasis being placed on the emotional, physical, social and mental needs of the whole family." The means for accomplishing such a grand vision is the creation of a new state governmental unit under the control of the State Department of Education called "family support centers".

Simply stated, government parenting centers are a bad idea. H.B. 973 establishes a network of government organizations including public schools, the Department of Human Services, and the Department of Mental Health to oversee the raising of children. We are only now beginning to disentangle ourselves from the disaster of the welfare state. This bill seeks a return to those bad old days.

Supporters of this bill have pointed to a model for this program in Tupelo. However, they want to invite the "clumsy elephant of government" (in the words of Donald Wildmon, President of the American Family Association in Tupelo) to duplicate what that community created with private sector encouragement and local parental leadership. State government is a poor substitute. The potential for such centers in other communities of our state already exists.

The State Department of Education already faces the daunting task of raising our educational standards and saving the public school system of our state. They should be free to focus on that primary mission. To also saddle them with the broad mission of saving the Mississippi family is a waste of money and too much to ask.

Respectfully submitted,

KIRK FORDICE  
GOVERNOR