

By: McCoy

To: Education;
Appropriations

HOUSE BILL NO. 294

1 AN ACT TO AMEND SECTION 37-159-9, MISSISSIPPI CODE OF 1972,
2 TO CLARIFY THAT LICENSED TEACHERS ALREADY SERVING IN GEOGRAPHICAL
3 CRITICAL TEACHER SHORTAGE AREAS ARE ELIGIBLE FOR SCHOLARSHIPS
4 TOWARD MASTERS OR SPECIALIST DEGREES UNDER THE UNIVERSITY ASSISTED
5 TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION GRANT PROGRAM; AND FOR RELATED
6 PURPOSES.

7 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI:

8 SECTION 1. Section 37-159-9, Mississippi Code of 1972, is
9 amended as follows:

10 37-159-9. (1) There is established the University Assisted
11 Teacher Recruitment and Retention Grant Program within the State
12 Department of Education. The purposes of the program shall be to
13 attract additional qualified teachers to those geographical areas
14 of the state where there exists a critical shortage of teachers
15 and to retain the qualified teachers already serving as licensed
16 teachers in geographical critical teacher shortage areas by making
17 available scholarships to persons working towards a Master of
18 Education degree or an Educational Specialist degree at an
19 institution of higher learning whose teacher education program is
20 approved by the State Board of Education.

21 (2) Any institution of higher learning in the State of
22 Mississippi which offers a Master of Education degree or an
23 Educational Specialist degree may apply to the department for

24 participation in the program. As part of the program,
25 participating institutions shall collaborate with the Mississippi
26 Teacher Center to identify, recruit and place teacher education
27 graduates, from both within the state and out-of-state, in school
28 districts situated within those areas of the state where there
29 exists a critical shortage of teachers, as designated by the State
30 Board of Education.

31 (3) The State Department of Education shall provide funds to
32 participating institutions of higher learning for the purpose of
33 awarding scholarships to qualified persons pursuing a Master of
34 Education degree or an Educational Specialist degree at such
35 institutions while rendering service to the state as a licensed
36 teacher in a school district in a geographical area of the state
37 where there exists a critical shortage of teachers, as approved by
38 the State Board of Education. The financial scholarship shall be
39 applied to the total cost for tuition, books, materials and fees
40 at the institution in which the student is enrolled, not to exceed
41 an amount equal to the highest total cost of tuition, books,
42 materials and fees assessed by a state institution of higher
43 learning during that school year. Teachers who relocate within
44 Mississippi from out-of-state in order to participate in the
45 program shall be classified as residents of the state for tuition
46 purposes.

47 (4) Students awarded financial scholarships under the
48 University Assisted Teacher Recruitment and Retention Grant
49 Program may receive such awards for a maximum of four (4) school
50 years; however, the maximum number of awards which may be made
51 shall not exceed the length of time required to complete the
52 number of academic hours necessary to obtain a Master of Education
53 degree or an Educational Specialist degree. Financial
54 scholarships under the program shall not be based upon an

55 applicant's eligibility for financial aid.

56 (5) Persons relocating to a geographical area of the state
57 where there exists a critical shortage of teachers, as approved by
58 the State Board of Education, to participate in the University
59 Assisted Teacher Recruitment and Retention Grant Program shall be
60 eligible for reimbursement for their moving expenses to the
61 critical teacher shortage area from the State Board of Education.

62 The State Board of Education shall promulgate rules and
63 regulations necessary for the administration of the relocation
64 expense reimbursement component of the University Assisted Teacher
65 Recruitment and Retention Grant Program.

66 (6) Subject to the availability of funds, the State Board of
67 Education may provide for professional development and support
68 services as may be necessary for the retention of teachers
69 participating in the program in those geographical areas of the
70 state where there exists a critical shortage of teachers.

71 (7) Any person participating in the program who fails to
72 complete a program of study that will enable that person to obtain
73 a Master of Education degree or Educational Specialist degree
74 shall become liable immediately to the State Board of Education
75 for the sum of all awards made to that person under the program,
76 plus interest accruing at the current Stafford Loan rate at the
77 time the person abrogates his participation in the program.

78 (8) As a condition for participation in the program, a
79 teacher shall agree to employment as a licensed teacher in a
80 school district located in a geographical area of the state where
81 there exists a critical shortage of teachers, as designated by the
82 State Board of Education, for a period of not less than three (3)

83 years, which shall include those years of service rendered while
84 obtaining the Master of Education degree or Educational Specialist
85 degree. However, for any person who obtained a baccalaureate
86 degree in education with a financial scholarship under the
87 Critical Needs Teacher Scholarship Program and who entered the
88 University Assisted Teacher Recruitment and Retention Grant
89 Program before rendering service as a teacher, the period of
90 employment for the purposes of this subsection shall be two (2)
91 years, in addition to the employment commitment required under the
92 Critical Needs Teacher Scholarship Program. Service rendered by a
93 participant as a licensed teacher in a school district in a
94 geographical critical teacher shortage area before that teacher
95 becomes a participant in the program may not be considered to
96 fulfill the employment commitment required under this subsection.
97 Any person failing to comply with this employment commitment in
98 any required school year shall immediately be in breach of
99 contract and become liable immediately to the State Department of
100 Education for the sum of all scholarships awarded and relocation
101 expenses granted to that person, less one-third (1/3) of the
102 amount of that sum for each year that service was rendered, or for
103 those persons whose required period of employment is two (2)
104 years, less one-half (1/2) of the amount of that sum for each year
105 that service was rendered, plus interest accruing at the current
106 Stafford Loan rate at the time the breach occurs, except in the
107 case of a deferral for cause by the State Board of Education when
108 there is no employment position immediately available upon the
109 teacher's obtaining of the Master of Education degree or
110 Educational Specialist degree. After the period of such deferral,

111 the person shall begin or resume the required teaching duties or
112 shall become liable to the board under this subsection. If a
113 claim for repayment under this subsection is placed in the hands
114 of an attorney for collection after default, then the obligor
115 shall be liable for an additional amount equal to a reasonable
116 attorney's fee.

117 (9) All funds received by the State Department of Education
118 from the repayment of scholarship awards and relocation expenses
119 by program participants shall be deposited in the Mississippi
120 Critical Teacher Shortage Fund.

121 (10) The State Board of Education shall promulgate rules and
122 regulations necessary for the proper administration of the
123 University Assisted Teacher Recruitment and Retention Grant
124 Program.

125 SECTION 2. This act shall take effect and be in force from
126 and after July 1, 2000.