

By: Roberson

To: Public Health and
Welfare

HOUSE BILL NO. 977

1 AN ACT TO REQUIRE THE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES TO
2 ESTABLISH A VOUCHER PROGRAM FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION CENTERS;
3 TO DEFINE CERTAIN TERMS RELATING TO THE PROGRAM; TO PROVIDE THAT
4 PARENTS MEETING CERTAIN INCOME REQUIREMENTS SHALL BE ELIGIBLE TO
5 RECEIVE VOUCHERS FROM THE DEPARTMENT WHICH MAY BE USED FOR THE
6 EXPENSES OF THEIR CHILDREN ATTENDING PARTICIPATING APPROVED EARLY
7 CHILDHOOD EDUCATION CENTERS; TO PROVIDE THAT THE VALUE OF A
8 VOUCHER SHALL NOT EXCEED \$50.00 PER WEEK; TO ESTABLISH A PROCESS
9 FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION CENTERS TO BE CERTIFIED FOR
10 PARTICIPATION IN THE PROGRAM; TO ESTABLISH A PROCEDURE FOR THE
11 DEPARTMENT TO REDEEM VOUCHERS SUBMITTED BY PARTICIPATING EARLY
12 CHILDHOOD EDUCATION CENTERS; TO REQUIRE CERTAIN INFORMATION TO BE
13 REPORTED TO THE DEPARTMENT BY PARTICIPATING EARLY CHILDHOOD
14 EDUCATION CENTERS; TO AUTHORIZE THE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
15 TO ADOPT RULES AND REGULATIONS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE
16 PROGRAM; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES.

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

18 SECTION 1. (1) The following words and phrases, as used in
19 this section, shall have the meanings ascribed in this subsection
20 unless the context clearly indicates otherwise:

21 (a) "Approved early childhood education center" means
22 child care facility, as defined in Section 43-20-5, which is
23 licensed by the Mississippi State Department of Health and which
24 operates a program or programs for children from birth through
25 four (4) years of age.

26 (b) "Department" means the Department of Human
27 Services.

28 (c) "Eligible parent, guardian or custodian" means a
29 person who is head of a household whose family's total income for
30 the prior year is below the federal poverty level.

31 (d) "Voucher" means a document issued by the Department
32 of Human Services to an eligible parent, guardian or custodian of
33 a preschool child which may be exchanged by an approved early

34 childhood education center with the department for money for the
35 expenses associated with the preschool child attending that early
36 childhood education center.

37 (2) The Department of Human Services shall establish and
38 implement a program in which an eligible parent, guardian or
39 custodian, upon request, may receive from the department a voucher
40 that may be used for helping defray the cost of his or her child,
41 age birth through four (4) years, attending an approved early
42 childhood education center selected by the child's parent,
43 guardian or custodian. In order to receive vouchers, at least one
44 (1) parent, guardian or custodian of the child must be gainfully
45 employed. Upon the child's admittance to the early childhood
46 education center, the parent, guardian or custodian shall present
47 the voucher to the center. The value of each voucher shall be
48 Fifty dollars (\$50.00). Each voucher shall be for a one-week
49 period, regardless of whether the tuition is assessed on a weekly
50 or monthly basis. The cost of attendance at the approved early
51 childhood education center which is not covered by a voucher shall
52 be the responsibility of the child's parent, guardian or
53 custodian. A participating approved early childhood education
54 center may not charge additional tuition to any child enrolled in
55 the center under the voucher program.

56 (3) If an approved early childhood education center desires
57 to participate in the voucher program, the center shall apply to
58 the department for certification as a participating approved early
59 childhood education center. The department shall prepare and make
60 available to approved early childhood education centers a form for
61 the application process. The department shall conduct such
62 investigation and inquiries as it deems necessary to determine the
63 qualifications of the approved early childhood education center to
64 be certified for participation in the voucher program.
65 Certification as a participating approved early childhood
66 education center shall be valid for each succeeding academic year
67 (August-July) unless revoked by the department or upon the request
68 of the center.

69 (4) On behalf of each eligible parent, guardian or custodian
70 to whom vouchers are issued, the department shall pay to a

71 participating approved early childhood education center a sum
72 equal to the total value of all vouchers submitted by the center
73 to the department for redemption. The payment to which the early
74 childhood education center is entitled shall be made on a monthly
75 basis.

76 (5) The department shall require each approved early
77 childhood education center in which children are admitted under
78 the voucher program to provide to the department a record of the
79 children's enrollment and periodic reports of the children's
80 continued enrollment in and attendance at the early childhood
81 education center. The department also shall require assurance
82 from each participating approved early childhood education center
83 that the center does not discriminate in the admission of children
84 on the basis of race, sex, disability, color or economic status.

85 (6) The Department of Human Services shall adopt such rules
86 and regulations that may be necessary in the implementation of
87 this section, including an application process and deadline for
88 accepting requests for vouchers from parents, guardians and
89 custodians.

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