

By: Harden

To: Education;
Appropriations

SENATE BILL NO. 2489

1 AN ACT TO AMEND SECTION 37-159-9, MISSISSIPPI CODE OF 1972,
2 TO INCLUDE TEACHERS CURRENTLY EMPLOYED IN CRITICAL SHORTAGE AREAS
3 OF THE STATE IN THE UNIVERSITY ASSISTED TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND
4 RETENTION GRANT PROGRAM; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES.

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

6 SECTION 1. Section 37-159-9, Mississippi Code of 1972, is
7 amended as follows:[RDD1]

8 37-159-9. (1) There is established the University Assisted
9 Teacher Recruitment and Retention Grant Program within the State
10 Department of Education. The purposes of the program shall be to
11 attract additional qualified teachers to those geographical areas
12 of the state where there exists a critical shortage of teachers
13 and to retain the qualified teachers already serving as licensed
14 teachers in geographical critical teacher shortage areas by making
15 available scholarships to persons working towards a Master of
16 Education degree or an Educational Specialist degree at an
17 institution of higher learning whose teacher education program is
18 approved by the State Board of Education.

19 (2) Any institution of higher learning in the State of
20 Mississippi which offers a Master of Education degree or an
21 Educational Specialist degree may apply to the department for
22 participation in the program. Under the program, participating

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

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

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

54 degree or an Educational Specialist degree. Financial
55 scholarships under the program shall not be based upon an
56 applicant's eligibility for financial aid.

57 (5) Persons relocating to a geographical area of the state
58 where there exists a critical shortage of teachers, as approved by
59 the State Board of Education, to participate in the University
60 Assisted Teacher Recruitment and Retention Grant Program shall be
61 eligible for reimbursement for their moving expenses to the
62 critical teacher shortage from the State Board of Education. The
63 State Board of Education shall promulgate rules and regulations
64 necessary for the administration of the relocation expense
65 reimbursement component of the University Assisted Teacher
66 Recruitment and Retention Grant Program.

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

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

79 (8) As a condition for participation in the program, a
80 teacher shall agree to employment or continued employment as a
81 licensed teacher in a school district located in a geographical

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

110 employment position immediately available upon the teacher's
111 obtaining of the Master of Education degree or Educational
112 Specialist degree. After the period of such deferral, the person
113 shall begin or resume the required teaching duties or shall become
114 liable to the board under this subsection. If a claim for
115 repayment under this subsection is placed in the hands of an
116 attorney for collection after default, then the obligor shall be
117 liable for an additional amount equal to a reasonable attorney's
118 fee.

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

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

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