

By: Representatives Scott (17th), Clarke, Evans, Bailey, Bowles, Broomfield, Cameron, Chism, Clark, Coleman (29th), Coleman (65th), Davis, Dickson, Eads, Eakes, Fillingane, Flaggs, Ford, Franks, Fredericks, Frierson, Gadd, Green, Harrison, Holland, Hudson, Jennings, Markham, Mayo, McCoy, Miles, Mitchell, Montgomery (15th), Moody, Peranich, Pierce, Roberson, Rushing, Scott (80th), Stevens, Stringer, Thomas, Ward, Warren, Wells-Smith, Whittington, Zuber, Brown

To: Public Health and Welfare; Appropriations

HOUSE BILL NO. 797

1 AN ACT TO CREATE THE MISSISSIPPI COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF
2 WOMEN; TO PRESCRIBE THE POWERS AND DUTIES OF THE COMMISSION; TO
3 ESTABLISH AN INTERAGENCY COUNCIL TO ADDRESS ISSUES AFFECTING THE
4 STATUS OF WOMEN IN MISSISSIPPI; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES.

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

6 SECTION 1. (1) There is created the Mississippi Commission
7 on the Status of Women. The commission shall be nonpartisan and
8 composed of thirteen (13) members appointed as follows:

9 (a) Four (4) members shall be appointed by the
10 Governor, including a current or former food stamps recipient and
11 a single parent;

12 (b) Three (3) members shall be appointed by the
13 Lieutenant Governor, including a current or former college
14 educator with expertise in women's issues;

15 (c) Three (3) members shall be appointed by the Speaker
16 of the House of Representatives, including a health care
17 professional knowledgeable in women's health issues; and

18 (d) Three (3) members shall be appointed by the
19 Attorney General, including a law professor or practicing attorney
20 with expertise in women's issues.

21 (2) The members of the commission must be persons of
22 recognized ability and achievement who are representative of the
23 ethnic, geographic, socioeconomic and cultural diversity of the
24 population of this state and who have a proven record of efforts
25 to improve the status of women. The initial term of office of one
26 (1) member appointed by the Governor shall expire on June 30,
27 2002. The initial terms of office of the remaining members shall

28 be fixed by the appointing authorities so that the term of office
29 of one (1) member appointed by each appointing authority expires
30 on June 30, 2003, the term of office of one (1) member appointed
31 by each expires on June 30, 2004, and the terms of office of the
32 remaining three (3) members expires on June 30, 2005. After the
33 expiration of the initial terms, the terms of office of all
34 members shall be four (4) years each. A member may not serve for
35 more than two (2) consecutive terms. All vacancies must be filled
36 by the appointing authority for the unexpired term.

37 (3) The commission shall organize by electing a chair, vice
38 chair and secretary from among its members for terms of two (2)
39 years each. Any member is eligible for successive elections to
40 office.

41 (4) A majority of the members of the commission shall
42 constitute a quorum for transacting business.

43 (5) Members of the commission shall be reimbursed for
44 expenses as authorized under Section 25-3-41 and shall receive per
45 diem in the amount established under Section 25-3-69.

46 (6) The Lieutenant Governor, Speaker of the House and
47 Attorney General shall notify the Governor after they have made
48 their appointments. The Governor then shall designate a place and
49 time for the initial organizational meeting of the commission,
50 which meeting must be before October 1, 2001.

51 SECTION 2. The commission shall have the powers and
52 authority necessary to carry out the duties imposed by this act,
53 including, but not limited to, the following:

54 (a) To conduct research and to study issues affecting
55 the status of women in Mississippi;

56 (b) To advise and consult with the executive and
57 legislative branches on policies affecting the status of women in
58 Mississippi;

59 (c) To publish periodic reports documenting the legal,
60 economic, social and political status and related concerns of
61 women in Mississippi;

62 (d) To assess programs and practices in all state
63 agencies as those programs and practices affect women;

64 (e) To maintain an office and to acquire on a
65 contractual or other basis any legal, technical and research
66 expertise and support services as is required for the discharge of
67 the commission's duties;

68 (f) To hold hearings, meetings, conferences and
69 workshops, to make and sign any agreements and to do or perform
70 any acts that are necessary, desirable or proper to carry out the
71 purposes of this act;

72 (g) To appoint advisers or advisory committees if the
73 commission determines that the experience or expertise of the
74 advisors or advisory committees is needed for projects of the
75 commission;

76 (h) To apply for and accept funds, grants, gifts and
77 services from the state, federal government or its agencies or any
78 other public or private source for the purpose of defraying
79 clerical, administrative and other costs in carrying out the
80 commission's duties under this act;

81 (i) To establish nonprofit entities for the purpose of
82 defraying costs incurred in the performance of the commission's
83 duties; and

84 (j) To utilize voluntary and uncompensated services of
85 private individuals, agencies and organizations which may be
86 offered and needed.

87 SECTION 3. (1) The commission shall study issues affecting
88 the status of women in Mississippi, including, but not limited to,
89 the following areas:

90 (a) Women's educational and employment problems, needs
91 and opportunities;

92 (b) The socioeconomic factors that influence the status
93 of women and the development of individual potential;

94 (c) Current or proposed state laws, practices or
95 conditions in regard to the civil, economic and political rights
96 of women, including pensions, tax requirements, property rights,
97 marriage and dissolution of marriage provisions, domestic violence
98 and other matters affecting the status of women; and

99 (d) Any other conditions or practices affecting women
100 which impose special limitations or burdens upon them or which
101 tend to limit opportunities available to women.

102 (2) The commission shall act as an information center on the
103 status of women and women's educational, employment and other
104 related needs and on current and proposed legislation affecting
105 women. The commission shall serve as a liaison and clearinghouse
106 between government, private interest groups and the general public
107 concerned with services for women, and in this regard, the
108 commission may publish a periodic newsletter and maintain a
109 website to provide information to these constituencies.

110 (3) The commission shall educate business, education, state
111 and local governments and the general public about the nature and
112 scope of sex discrimination and other matters affecting the status
113 of women in Mississippi.

114 (4) The commission shall recommend policies and make
115 recommendations to public and private groups and persons concerned
116 with any issue related to improving the status of women. The
117 commission may develop, prepare and coordinate materials, projects
118 or other activities and give technical and consultative advice.
119 The commission may encourage women's organizations and other
120 groups to institute local self-help activities designed to meet
121 women's educational, employment and other needs.

122 (5) The commission shall promote consideration of qualified
123 women for all levels of government positions.

124 (6) Before February 15 of each year, the commission shall
125 report to the Governor and the Legislature on the commission's
126 activities. The report must include the results of the
127 commission's findings of the preceding year, with recommendations
128 for the removal of such injustices as the commission finds to
129 exist.

130 SECTION 4. There is established an interagency council
131 comprised of representatives of state agencies including, but not
132 limited to, the State Department of Health, Department of Human
133 Services, State Department of Education, Department of Public
134 Safety, Mississippi Development Authority (MDA), Board of Trustees
135 of State Institutions of Higher Learning, State Board for
136 Community and Junior Colleges, State Department of Mental Health,
137 Attorney General's Office and Mississippi Department of
138 Corrections. Each of these agencies shall report to the
139 commission annually through its representative, addressing the
140 current health, employment, educational and overall status of
141 women and the agency's actions to improve women's status. The
142 commission, in its discretion, may call a meeting of the full
143 council; however, full council meetings may not be called more
144 frequently than once during a fiscal year.

145 SECTION 5. This act shall take effect and be in force from
146 and after July 1, 2001.