

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  
(As Passed the House)

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 may be reimbursed for expenses  
44 as authorized under Section 25-3-41 if sufficient funds are  
45 available to the commission for that purpose. However, no state  
46 general funds may be used to pay any expenses authorized to be  
47 paid under this subsection.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

92 (a) Women's educational and employment problems, needs  
93 and opportunities;

94                   (b) Women's health issues;

95                   (c) The socioeconomic factors that influence the status  
96 of women and the development of individual potential;

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

102                   (e) Any other conditions or practices affecting women  
103 which impose special limitations or burdens upon them or which  
104 tend to limit opportunities available to women.

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

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

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

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

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

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

148           SECTION 5. The commission shall not be an agency of the  
149 State of Mississippi, and the commission and its members and  
150 employees shall not be subject to the laws and regulations  
151 pertaining to the state budget, the state personnel system, the  
152 Public Employees' Retirement System and the State and School  
153 Employees Health Insurance Plan.

154           SECTION 6. This act shall take effect and be in force from  
155 and after July 1, 2001.