HOUSE BILL NO. 815

AN ACT TO AMEND SECTION 37-106-31, MISSISSIPPI CODE OF 1972, TO DECREASE THE MINIMUM ACT SCORE REQUIRED FOR STUDENTS TO BE ELIGIBLE FOR A SCHOLARSHIP UNDER THE MISSISSIPPI EMINENT SCHOLARS PROGRAM; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES.

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

SECTION 1. Section 37-106-31, Mississippi Code of 1972, is amended as follows:

37-106-31. (1) There is created a Mississippi Eminent Scholars Fund, to be administered by the Mississippi Postsecondary Education Financial Assistance Board established under Section 37-106-9. The board shall set the date that will serve as the deadline for applying for an award under this section and award scholarships to each Mississippi student who:

(a) (i) Is recognized by the merit or achievement programs of the National Merit Scholarship Corporation or the National Achievement Scholarship as a semifinalist or finalist, and has obtained a minimum cumulative grade point average of 3.5 calculated on a 4.0 scale in high school subjects acceptable for credit toward a diploma, after seven (7) semesters certified by the high school counselor or other authorized school official on the application, and graduation from high school verified by the institution before disbursement of award; or

(ii) Has scored twenty-six (26) on the American College Testing Program or its equivalent and has obtained a minimum cumulative grade point average of 3.5 calculated on a 4.0 scale after seven (7) semesters certified by the high school counselor or other authorized school official on the application and graduation from high school verified by the institution before disbursement of award; or

(ii) Has scored twenty-six (26) on the American College Testing Program or its equivalent and has obtained a minimum cumulative grade point average of 3.5 calculated on a 4.0 scale after seven (7) semesters certified by the high school counselor or other authorized school official on the application and graduation from high school verified by the institution before disbursement of award; or
disbursement of award, or the equivalent in high school subjects acceptable for credit toward a diploma; or

(iii) Has attended a home education program during grade levels 9 through 12 and has scored twenty-six (26) on the American College Testing Program or its equivalent; and

(iv) Has been certified by the college or university to the Mississippi Postsecondary Education Financial Assistance Board as a Mississippi Eminent Scholar.

(b) Meets the general requirements for student eligibility, except as otherwise provided in this section.

(c) Dependents of Mississippi residents who are on military or public service assignments away from Mississippi when such dependents live with such Mississippi residents and receive high school diplomas from non-Mississippi schools shall be exempted from certain requirements by the board.

(d) Files an application for an award during his last year in high school within established time limits.

(e) Attends, on a full-time basis, any state institution of higher learning or public community or junior college, or any regionally accredited, state-approved, nonprofit four- or two-year college or university located in the State of Mississippi as listed in subsection (4)(d) of Section 37-106-29.

(f) Enrolls as a first-time-in-college student. Any student who earns postsecondary academic credit prior to or during the summer immediately subsequent to receiving a high school diploma, who is dually enrolled in secondary and postsecondary educational institutions, or who is enrolled in the early admission program of a postsecondary institution shall be exempt from this requirement.

(g) Is a resident of the State of Mississippi.

Residency status for purposes of receiving grants under this section shall be determined in the same manner as resident status.
for tuition purposes as set forth in Sections 37-103-1 through 37-103-29, with the exception of Section 37-103-17.

(2) (a) Students who apply for awards no later than the date set by the Mississippi Postsecondary Education Financial Assistance Board as the deadline for applying for an award during their last year in high school may later reapply to receive awards during subsequent application periods when they do not accept their initial awards. Similarly, students who receive initial awards and who later do not accept renewal awards may reapply to receive awards during subsequent application periods. Students who apply under this paragraph must submit reinstatement applications within three (3) years of filing their initial applications. The institution shall accept reinstatement applications according to dates set by the Mississippi Postsecondary Education Financial Assistance Board and shall determine the eligibility of such applicants in the same manner as first-time applicants, except that students who apply pursuant to this paragraph shall be required to have maintained the equivalent of a 3.5 cumulative grade point average on a 4.0 scale for all college work attempted. The board shall not make awards to reinstatement applicants who submit applications that are received after the deadline set by the Mississippi Postsecondary Education Financial Assistance Board.

(b) The board shall create a renewal application for each student who received the award for one or more terms during the immediately preceding academic year.

(3) (a) The annual award to a student shall be up to Two Thousand Five Hundred Dollars ($2,500.00) for tuition and fees. Payment of the Mississippi Eminent Scholars Grant shall be made payable to the recipient and the educational institution and mailed directly to the institution, to be applied first to tuition.
(b) Within six (6) weeks of the end of regular registration, inclusive of a drop-add period, institutions shall certify to the board the eligibility status of each awarded student. The eligibility status of each student to receive a disbursement shall be determined by each institution as of this date. Institutions shall not be required to reevaluate a student's eligibility status after this date for purposes of amending eligibility determinations previously made. However, an institution shall be requested to make refunds for students who receive award disbursements and terminate enrollment for any reason during the academic term when an institution's refund policies permit a student to receive a refund under the circumstances.

(c) Institutions shall certify to the board the amount of funds disbursed to each student and shall remit to the board any undisbursed advances within sixty (60) days of the end of regular registration.

(4) A recipient shall maintain the equivalent of a 3.5 cumulative grade point average on a 4.0 scale, or shall maintain an approved equivalent student progress evaluation plan, on at least twelve (12) hours per quarter, trimester or semester in order to be eligible for a continuation of the award. No student may receive a Mississippi Eminent Scholars' Fund award for more than the equivalent semesters or quarters required to complete one (1) degree or certificate program per institution. The award may be renewed annually upon certification of eligibility by the eligible institutions that the recipient meets the necessary qualifications. If any recipient transfers from one university, community college or junior college to another, his award will be transferable, provided he is otherwise eligible for the award. If a student fails to maintain continuous enrollment, and is not granted an exception for cause by the administering agency, the student is ineligible to receive the Mississippi Eminent Scholars
Grant during the following semester or trimester or term of the regular academic year.

(5) The board may conduct its own annual audits of any institution participating in the Mississippi Eminent Scholars Grant Program. The board may suspend or revoke an institution's eligibility to receive future monies under the program if it finds that the institution has not complied with the provisions of this section.

(6) For purposes of this section, certificated shall mean, but not be limited to, all postsecondary vocational programs in eligible institutions as identified in subsection (4)(d) of Section 37-106-29.

SECTION 2. This act shall take effect and be in force from and after July 1, 2001.