HOUSE BILL NO. 966

AN ACT TO AMEND SECTION 7-7-211, MISSISSIPPI CODE OF 1972, TO REQUIRE NOTICE TO BE GIVEN TO THE STATE AUDITOR WHENEVER A PRIVATE AUDITOR WITH WHICH A GOVERNMENTAL ENTITY HAS CONTRACTED FINDS EVIDENCE OF FRAUD OR ILLEGAL ACTS; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES.

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

SECTION 1. Section 7-7-211, Mississippi Code of 1972, is amended as follows:

7-7-211. The department shall have the power and it shall be its duty:

(a) To identify and define for all public offices of the state and its subdivisions generally accepted accounting principles as promulgated by nationally recognized professional organizations and to consult with the State Fiscal Officer in the prescription and implementation of accounting rules and regulations;

(b) To prescribe, for all public offices of regional and local subdivisions of the state, systems of accounting, budgeting and reporting financial facts relating to said offices in conformity with legal requirements and with generally accepted professional organizations; to assist such subdivisions in need of assistance in the installation of such systems; to revise such systems when deemed necessary, and to report to the Legislature at periodic times the extent to which each office is maintaining such systems, along with such recommendations to the Legislature for improvement as seem desirable;

(c) To study and analyze existing managerial policies, methods, procedures, duties and services of the various state...
departments and institutions upon written request of the Governor, the Legislature or any committee or other body empowered by the Legislature to make such request to determine whether and where operations can be eliminated, combined, simplified and improved;

(d) To postaudit each year and, when deemed necessary, preaudit and investigate the financial affairs of the departments, institutions, boards, commissions or other agencies of state government, as part of the publication of a comprehensive annual financial report for the State of Mississippi. In complying with the requirements of this subsection, the department shall have the authority to conduct all necessary audit procedures on an interim and year-end basis;

(e) To postaudit and, when deemed necessary, preaudit and investigate separately the financial affairs of (i) the offices, boards and commissions of county governments and any departments and institutions thereof and therein; (ii) public school districts, departments of education and junior college districts; and (iii) any other local offices or agencies which share revenues derived from taxes or fees imposed by the Legislature or receive grants from revenues collected by governmental divisions of the state; the cost of such audits, investigations or other services to be paid as follows: Such part shall be paid by the state from appropriations made by the Legislature for the operation of the State Department of Audit as may exceed the sum of One Hundred Dollars ($100.00) per day for the services of each staff person engaged in performing the audit or other service, which sum shall be paid by the county, district, department, institution or other agency audited out of its general fund or any other available funds from which such payment is not prohibited by law;

(f) To postaudit and, when deemed necessary, preaudit and investigate the financial affairs of the levee boards; agencies created by the Legislature or by executive order of the
Governor; profit or nonprofit business entities administering programs financed by funds flowing through the State Treasury or through any of the agencies of the state, or its subdivisions; and all other public bodies supported by funds derived in part or wholly from public funds, except municipalities which annually submit an audit prepared by a qualified certified public accountant using methods and procedures prescribed by the department;

(g) To make written demand, when necessary, for the recovery of any amounts representing public funds improperly withheld, misappropriated and/or otherwise illegally expended by an officer, employee or administrative body of any state, county or other public office, and/or for the recovery of the value of any public property disposed of in an unlawful manner by a public officer, employee or administrative body, such demands to be made (i) upon the person or persons liable for such amounts and upon the surety on official bond thereof, and/or (ii) upon any individual, partnership, corporation or association to whom the illegal expenditure was made or with whom the unlawful disposition of public property was made, if such individual, partnership, corporation or association knew or had reason to know through the exercising of reasonable diligence that the expenditure was illegal or the disposition unlawful. Such demand shall be premised on competent evidence, which shall include at least one (1) of the following: (i) sworn statements, (ii) written documentation, (iii) physical evidence, or (iv) reports and findings of government or other law enforcement agencies. Other provisions notwithstanding, a demand letter issued pursuant to this subsection shall remain confidential by the State Auditor until the individual against whom the demand letter is being filed has been served with a copy of such demand letter. If, however, such individual cannot be notified within fifteen (15) days using reasonable means and due diligence, such notification shall be
made to the individual's bonding company, if he or she is bonded. Each such demand shall be paid into the proper treasury of the state, county or other public body through the office of the department in the amount demanded within thirty (30) days from the date thereof, together with interest thereon in the sum of one percent (1%) per month from the date such amount or amounts were improperly withheld, misappropriated and/or otherwise illegally expended. In the event, however, such person or persons shall refuse, neglect or otherwise fail to pay the amount demanded and the interest due thereon within the allotted thirty (30) days, the State Auditor shall have the authority and it shall be his duty to institute suit, and the Attorney General shall prosecute the same in any court of the state to the end that there shall be recovered the total of such amounts from the person or persons and surety on official bond named therein; and the amounts so recovered shall be paid into the proper treasury of the state, county or other public body through the State Auditor;

(h) To investigate any alleged or suspected violation of the laws of the state by any officer or employee of the state, county or other public office in the purchase, sale or the use of any supplies, services, equipment or other property belonging thereto; and in such investigation to do any and all things necessary to procure evidence sufficient either to prove or disprove the existence of such alleged or suspected violations. The Department of Investigation of the State Department of Audit may investigate, for the purpose of prosecution, any suspected criminal violation of the provisions of this chapter. For the purpose of administration and enforcement of this chapter, the enforcement employees of the Department of Investigation of the State Department of Audit have the powers of a peace officer of this state only over those persons under indictment or at the direction of another duly authorized law enforcement agency having jurisdiction over the case. All enforcement employees of the
Department of Investigation of the State Department of Audit hired on or after July 1, 1993, shall be required to complete the Law Enforcement Officers Training Program and shall meet the standards of the program:

(i) To issue subpoenas, with the approval of, and returnable to, a judge of a chancery or circuit court, in termtime or in vacation, to examine the records, documents or other evidence of persons, firms, corporations or any other entities insofar as such records, documents or other evidence relate to dealings with any state, county or other public entity. The circuit or chancery judge must serve the county in which the records, documents or other evidence is located; or where all or part of the transaction or transactions occurred which are the subject of the subpoena;

(j) In any instances in which the State Auditor is or shall be authorized or required to examine or audit, whether preaudit or postaudit, any books, ledgers, accounts or other records of the affairs of any public hospital owned or owned and operated by one or more political subdivisions or parts thereof or any combination thereof, or any school district, including activity funds thereof, it shall be sufficient compliance therewith, in the discretion of the State Auditor, that such examination or audit be made from the report of any audit or other examination certified by a certified public accountant and prepared by or under the supervision of such certified public accountant. Such audits shall be made in accordance with generally accepted standards of auditing, with the use of an audit program prepared by the State Auditor, and final reports of such audits shall conform to the format prescribed by the State Auditor. All files, working papers, notes, correspondence and all other data compiled during the course of the audit shall be available, without cost, to the State Auditor for examination and abstracting during the normal business hours of any business day.
The expense of such certified reports shall be borne by the respective hospital, or any available school district funds other than minimum program funds, subject to examination or audit. The State Auditor shall not be bound by such certified reports and may, in his or their discretion, conduct such examination or audit from the books, ledgers, accounts or other records involved as may be appropriate and authorized by law.

(k) The State Auditor shall have the authority to contract with qualified public accounting firms to perform selected audits required in subsections (d), (e) and (f) of this section, if funds are made available for such contracts by the Legislature, or if funds are available from the governmental entity covered by subsections (d), (e) and (f). Such audits shall be made in accordance with generally accepted standards of auditing, with the use of an audit program prepared by the State Auditor, and final reports of such audits shall conform to the format prescribed by the State Auditor. All files, working papers, notes, correspondence and all other data compiled during the course of the audit shall be available, without cost, to the State Auditor for examination and abstracting during the normal business hours of any business day.

(l) Whenever a governmental entity contracts with a private auditor and such auditor finds reasonable assurance of evidence of fraud or illegal acts during the audit, such contracted auditor immediately shall give notice of such evidence to the governing authority or chief executive officer of the governmental entity. The governing authority or chief executive officer of the governmental entity then immediately shall provide notice of such suspected fraud or illegal acts to the State Auditor. If the evidence of fraud or illegal act concerns a member of the governmental authority, or, if the there is no governing authority and the evidence of fraud or illegal act concerns the chief executive officer of the governmental entity,
then the contracted auditor immediately shall provide notice of such suspected fraud or illegal act to the State Auditor. A contracted auditor shall cooperate with the State Auditor in any resulting investigation;

(m) The State Auditor shall have the authority to establish training courses and programs for the personnel of the various state and local governmental entities under the jurisdiction of the Office of the State Auditor. The training courses and programs shall include, but not be limited to, topics on internal control of funds, property and equipment control and inventory, governmental accounting and financial reporting, and internal auditing. The State Auditor is authorized to charge a fee from the participants of these courses and programs, which fee shall be deposited into the Department of Audit Special Fund.

State and local governmental entities are authorized to pay such fee and any travel expenses out of their general funds or any other available funds from which such payment is not prohibited by law;

(n) Upon written request by the Governor or any member of the State Legislature, the State Auditor may audit any state funds and/or state and federal funds received by any nonprofit corporation incorporated under the laws of this state;

(o) To conduct performance audits of personal or professional service contracts by state agencies on a random sampling basis, or upon request of the State Personal Service Contract Review Board under Section 25-9-120(3).

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