AN ACT TO ESTABLISH A MISSISSIPPI CHILDREN'S CABINET AND PROVIDE FOR ITS MEMBERSHIP; TO EMPOWER THE CHILDREN'S CABINET TO SERVE AS THE INTERDEPARTMENTAL COORDINATING ENTITY FOR ALL STATE AGENCIES SERVING CHILDREN AND FAMILIES, TO COORDINATE BUDGETS, MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS AND RECEIVE REPORTS; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES.

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

SECTION 1. (1) As used in this act, "children" means any child age 0-18 who has not had his or her minority status removed by court order.

(2) To ensure that children's needs are met within the context of relationships at the family and community level and in order to maximize the potential for children to succeed in school, the Legislature hereby finds and declares that:

(a) Parents have the primary duty to care for and educate their young preschool children;

(b) Any assistance provided families should consider a family's preference for care-giving situations reflecting the family’s religious, cultural and community values;

(c) The State of Mississippi has numerous state agencies which collaboratively support families and communities, keeping family and children at the heart of all decisions.

(3) The Mississippi Children's Cabinet is hereby created to ensure coordination among the various agencies and programs serving children, families and communities to facilitate interdepartmental communication, cooperation and maximum use of resources and to promote high standards for all programs serving children and their families in Mississippi.
(4) The membership of the Mississippi Children's Cabinet shall be as follows:

(a) The State Superintendent of Education, or his designee;

(b) The Executive Director of the Department of Health, or his designee;

(c) The Executive Director of the Department of Human Services, or his designee;

(d) The Executive Director of the Mississippi Department of Mental Health, or his designee;

(e) The Attorney General, or his designee;

(f) A representative from the Office of the Governor.

(5) The cabinet shall meet upon call of the Governor not later that August 1, 2001, and shall organize for business by selecting a chairman who shall serve for a one-year term and may be selected for subsequent terms. The cabinet shall adopt internal organizational procedures necessary for efficient operation of the cabinet. Cabinet procedures shall include duties of officers, a process for selecting officers, quorum requirements for conducting business and policies for any cabinet staff. Each member of the cabinet shall designate necessary staff of their departments to assist the cabinet in performing its duties and responsibilities. The cabinet shall meet and conduct business at least quarterly. Meetings of the cabinet shall be open to the public and opportunity for public comment shall be made available at each such meeting. The chairman of the cabinet shall notify all persons who request such notice as to the date, time and place of each meeting.

(6) Members of the cabinet shall receive no compensation for their services, but shall be reimbursed for travel and other expenses actually incurred in the performance of their official duties. Such reimbursement shall be paid in accordance with the
provisions of Section 25-3-41, Mississippi Code of 1972, and shall be approved by the chairman of the cabinet.

(7) The Mississippi Children's Cabinet shall perform each of the following duties:

(a) Serve as interagency coordinating council for the various agencies, public and private programs serving children and their families in the State of Mississippi;

(b) Collect, compile and distribute data relating to all programs and services for children and families, including, but not limited to, an inventory of the programs and services available in each county of the state; and identify and make recommendations with regard to program areas for which an unfulfilled need exists within the state for accurate and accessible information;

(c) Review and analyze spending priorities for each state agency which utilizes state or federal funds to administer or provide programs and services for children and families and make recommendations thereon to the Legislative Budget Committee and the Governor;

(d) Publish annually, on or before November 1, a comprehensive report on the status of all programs and services for children and families in Mississippi and distribute the report to the Governor, the Legislature, local school districts and make the report available to the general public, using the following criteria:

(i) Program name and location;

(ii) Dates of operation;

(iii) Service provided;

(iv) Target population and number served;

(v) Eligibility requirement;

(vi) Funding source;

(vii) Amount of funding per unit;

(viii) Annual cost;
(ix) Evaluation type and results; and

(x) The state agency administering the program.

(e) Receive and consider recommendations of the (i) Juvenile Health Recovery Board established under Section 43-27-303 et seq.; (ii) The Children’s Advisory Council established and empowered under Section 43-14-1 et seq.; (iii) the Interagency Advisory Committee for Early Childhood Services; and (iv) the report of any other council task force or committee charged by law or executive order to develop recommendations regarding children and family services.

(f) Apply for, receive and administer funds for research, planning and evaluation of all programs serving children and their families.

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