SENATE BILL NO. 2216

AN ACT TO AMEND SECTIONS 25-15-3 AND 25-15-15, MISSISSIPPI CODE OF 1972; TO PROVIDE THAT STATE FUNDS SHALL BE USED TO PAY THE COST OF HEALTH INSURANCE BENEFITS FOR SCHOOL DISTRICT FOOD SERVICE EMPLOYEES UNDER THE STATE HEALTH PLAN; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES.

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

SECTION 1. Section 25-15-3, Mississippi Code of 1972, is amended as follows:

25-15-3. For the purposes of this article, the words and phrases used herein shall have the following meanings:

(a) "Employee" means a person who works full time for the State of Mississippi and receives his compensation in a direct payment from a department, agency or institution of the state government and any person who works full time for any school district, community/junior college, public library or university-based program authorized under Section 37-23-31 for deaf, aphasic and emotionally disturbed children or any regular nonstudent bus driver or school district food service employee. This shall include legislators, employees of the legislative branch and the judicial branch of the state and "employees" shall include full-time salaried judges and full-time district attorneys and their staff and full-time compulsory school attendance officers. For the purposes of this article, any "employee" making contributions to the State of Mississippi retirement plan shall be considered a full-time employee.

(b) "Department" means the Department of Finance and Administration.

(c) "Plan" means the State and School Employees Life and Health Insurance Plan created under this article.
(d) "Fund" means the State and School Employees Insurance Fund set up under this article.

(e) "Retiree" means any employee retired under the Mississippi retirement plan.

(f) "Board" means the State and School Employees Health Insurance Management Board created under Section 25-15-303.

SECTION 2. Section 25-15-15, Mississippi Code of 1972, is amended as follows:

25-15-15. (1) The board is authorized to determine the manner in which premiums and contributions by the state agencies, local school districts, colleges, universities, community/junior colleges and public libraries shall be collected to provide the self-insured health insurance program for employees as provided under this article. The state shall provide fifty percent (50%) of the cost of the above life insurance plan and one hundred percent (100%) of the cost of the above health insurance plan for all active full-time employees, and the employees shall be given the opportunity to purchase coverage for their eligible dependents with the premiums for such dependent coverage as well as the employee's fifty percent (50%) share for his life insurance coverage to be deductible from the employee's salary by the agency, department or institution head, which deductions, together with the fifty percent (50%) share of such life insurance premiums of such employing agency, department or institution head from funds appropriated to or authorized to be expended by such employing agency, department or institution head, shall be deposited directly into a depository bank or special fund in the State Treasury, as determined by the board. These funds and interest earned on these funds may be used for the disbursement of claims and shall be exempt from the appropriation process.

(2) The state shall provide annually, by line item in the Mississippi Library Commission appropriation bill, such funds to pay one hundred percent (100%) of the cost of health insurance.
under the State and School Employees Health Insurance Plan for all
full-time library staff members in each public library in
Mississippi. The commission shall allot to each public library a
sufficient amount of those funds appropriated to pay the costs of
insurance for eligible employees. Any funds so appropriated by
line item which are not expended during the fiscal year for which
such funds were appropriated shall be carried forward for the same
purposes during the next succeeding fiscal year. If any premiums
for the health insurance and/or late charges and interest
penalties are not paid by a public library in a timely manner, as
defined by the board, the Mississippi Library Commission, upon
notice by the board, shall immediately withhold all subsequent
disbursements of funds to that public library.

(3) The state shall annually provide one hundred percent
(100%) of the cost of the health insurance plan for all public
school district employees who work no less than twenty (20) hours
during each week and regular nonstudent school bus drivers and
regular school district food service employees. Where federal
funding is allowable to defray, in full or in part, the cost of
participation in the program by district employees who work no
less than twenty (20) hours during the week and regular nonstudent
bus drivers and school district food service employees, whose
salaries are paid, in full or in part, by federal funds, the
allowance under this section shall be reduced to the extent of
such federal funding. Where the use of federal funds is allowable
but not available, it is the intent of the Legislature that school
districts contribute the cost of participation for such employees
from local funds, except that parent fees for child nutrition
programs shall not be increased to cover such cost.

(4) The state shall provide annually, by line item in the
community/junior college appropriation bill, such funds to pay one
hundred percent (100%) of the cost of the health insurance plan
for all community/junior college district employees who work no
less than twenty (20) hours during each week.

(5) When the use of federal funding is allowable to defray,
in full or in part, the cost of participation in the insurance
plan by community/junior college district employees who work no
less than twenty (20) hours during each week, whose salaries are
paid, in full or in part, by federal funds, the allowance under
this section shall be reduced to the extent of the federal
funding. Where the use of federal funds is allowable but not
available, it is the intent of the Legislature that
community/junior college districts contribute the cost of
participation for such employees from local funds.

(6) Any community/junior college district may contribute to
the cost of coverage for any district employee from local
community/junior college district funds, and any public school
district may contribute to the cost of coverage for any district
employee from nonminimum program funds. Any part of the cost of
such coverage for participating employees of public school
districts and public community/junior college districts that is
not paid by the state shall be paid by the participating
employees, which shall be deducted from the salaries of the
employees in a manner determined by the board.

(7) Any funds appropriated for the cost of insurance by line
item in the community/junior colleges appropriation bill which are
not expended during the fiscal year for which such funds were
appropriated shall be carried forward for the same purposes during
the next succeeding fiscal year.

(8) The board may establish and enforce late charges and
interest penalties or other penalties for the purpose of requiring
the prompt payment of all premiums for life and health insurance
permitted under Chapter 15 of Title 25. All funds in excess of
the amount needed for disbursement of claims shall be deposited in
a special fund in the State Treasury to be known as the State and
School Employees Insurance Fund. The State Treasurer shall invest all funds in the State and School Employees Insurance Fund and all interest earned shall be credited to the State and School Employees Insurance Fund. Such funds shall be placed with one or more depositories of the state and invested on the first day such funds are available for investment in certificates of deposit, repurchase agreements or in United States Treasury bills or as otherwise authorized by law for the investment of Public Employees' Retirement System funds, as long as such investment is made from competitive offering and at the highest and best market rate obtainable consistent with any available investment alternatives; however, such investments shall not be made in shares of stock, common or preferred, or in any other investments which would mature more than one (1) year from the date of investment. The board shall have the authority to draw from this fund periodically such funds as are necessary to operate the self-insurance plan or to pay to the insurance carrier the cost of operation of this plan, it being the purpose to limit the amount of participation by the state to fifty percent (50%) of the cost of the life insurance program and not to limit the contracting for additional benefits where the cost will be paid in full by the employee. The state shall not share in the cost of coverage for retired employees.

(9) The board shall also provide for the creation of an Insurance Reserve Fund and funds therein shall be invested by the State Treasurer with all interest earned credited to the State and School Employees Insurance Fund.

(10) Any retired employee electing to purchase retired life and health insurance will have the full cost of such insurance deducted monthly from his State of Mississippi retirement plan check or direct billed for the cost of the premium if the retirement check is insufficient to pay for the premium. If the board determines actuarially that the premium paid by the
participating retirees adversely affects the overall cost of the plan to the state, then the department may impose a premium surcharge, not to exceed fifteen percent (15%), upon such participating retired employees who are under the age for Medicare eligibility.

SECTION 3. This act shall take effect and be in force from and after July 1, 2001.