

By: Senator(s) Williamson, Blackmon,
Carlton, Dawkins, Harden, Hyde-Smith

To: Rules

SENATE BILL NO. 2757

1 AN ACT TO CREATE AND EMPOWER THE MISSISSIPPI COMMISSION ON
2 THE STATUS OF WOMEN; TO ESTABLISH AN INTERAGENCY COUNCIL ON THE
3 STATUS OF WOMEN; TO CREATE A FUND IN THE STATE TREASURY TO RECEIVE
4 ANY PUBLIC OR PRIVATE FUNDS MADE AVAILABLE FOR THE OPERATION OF
5 THE COMMISSION; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES.

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

7 SECTION 1. It is declared to be the public policy of this
8 state to encourage, promote and foster the success and well-being
9 of its citizens and to offer unobstructed access to such
10 opportunities as exist in order that all Mississippians may
11 realize the quality of life for their families to which they
12 aspire. It is a higher public purpose of state government to
13 ensure that no individual is denied the opportunity to succeed and
14 make positive contributions to Mississippi's quality of life
15 because of gender. It is the intent and purpose of this chapter
16 to create a Commission on the Status of Women.

17 SECTION 2. (1) (a) There is hereby created the Mississippi
18 Commission on the Status of Women. The commission shall be
19 nonpartisan, composed of thirteen (13) members to be appointed as
20 follows:

21 (i) Four (4) members shall be appointed by the
22 Governor, including a current or former food stamps recipient and
23 a single parent;

24 (ii) Three (3) members shall be appointed by the
25 Lieutenant Governor, including a health care professional
26 knowledgeable in women's health issues;

27 (iii) Three (3) members shall be appointed by the
28 Speaker of the House, including a current or former college
29 educator with expertise in women's issues;

30 (iv) Three (3) members shall be appointed by the
31 Attorney General, including a law professor or lawyer with
32 expertise in women's issues.

33 (b) The member of the commission shall be women and men
34 of recognized ability and achievement who are representative of
35 the ethnic, geographic, socioeconomic and cultural diversity of
36 the population of this state, with a proven record of efforts to
37 improve the status of women. Members shall serve for terms of
38 office four (4) years each, staggered so that at least three (3)
39 terms shall expire June 30 of each year. No member may serve for
40 more than two (2) consecutive terms. All vacancies shall be
41 filled by the appointing authority for the unexpired term.

42 (c) The commission shall elect a chair, a vice chair
43 and secretary from among its members for terms of two (2) years
44 each, and any member is eligible for successive elections to
45 office.

46 (d) A quorum for transacting business shall be a
47 majority of the members of the commission.

48 (e) Members of the commission shall be reimbursed for
49 expenses as provided in Section 25-3-41, Mississippi Code of 1972,
50 and shall receive per diem as provided in Section 25-3-69,
51 Mississippi Code of 1972.

52 (f) The Lieutenant Governor, Speaker of the House and
53 Attorney General shall notify the Governor after they have made
54 their appointments, and the Governor shall then designate a place
55 and time for the initial, organizational meeting of the
56 commission, which shall be no later than October 1, 2001.

57 (2) The commission shall have the powers and authority
58 necessary to carry out the duties imposed upon it by this act,
59 including, but not limited to, the following:

60 (a) To conduct research and study of issues affecting
61 the status of women in Mississippi;

62 (b) To advise and consult with the executive and
63 legislative branches on policies affecting the status of women in
64 Mississippi;

65 (c) To publish periodic reports documenting the legal,
66 economic, social and political status, and other concerns of women
67 in Mississippi;

68 (d) To assess programs and practices in all state
69 agencies as they affect women;

70 (e) To maintain an office, and to acquire on a
71 contractual or other basis such legal, technical, research
72 expertise and support services as it may require for the discharge
73 of its duties;

74 (f) To hold hearings, meetings, conferences, workshops,
75 make and sign any agreements, and do or perform any acts which may
76 be necessary, desirable or proper to carry out the purposes of
77 this act;

78 (g) To appoint advisers or advisory committees, from
79 time to time, when the commission determines that the experience
80 or expertise of such advisers or advisory committees is needed for
81 projects of the commission;

82 (h) To apply for and accept funds, grants, gifts and
83 services from the government of the state or any of its agencies,
84 the government of the United States or any of its agencies, or any
85 other public or private source, for the purpose of defraying
86 clerical, administrative and other costs as may be necessary in
87 carrying out its duties under this act;

88 (i) To establish nonprofit entities for the purpose of
89 defraying costs that may be incurred in the performance of its
90 duties; and

91 (j) To utilize such voluntary and uncompensated
92 services of private individuals, agencies and organizations as
93 may, from time to time, be offered and needed.

94 (3) (a) The commission shall study issues affecting the
95 status of women in Mississippi, including, but not limited to, the
96 following areas:

97 (i) Women's educational and employment problems,
98 needs and opportunities;

99 (ii) The socioeconomic factors that influence the
100 status of women and the development of women's individual
101 potential;

102 (iii) Current or proposed state laws, practices or
103 conditions in regard to the civil, economic and political rights
104 of women, including, but not limited to, pensions, tax
105 requirements, property rights and other matters affecting the
106 status of women.

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

116 (c) The commission shall educate the business,
117 education and government communities and the general public, about
118 the nature and scope of gender discrimination, violence against
119 women, and other matters affecting the status of women in
120 Mississippi;

121 (d) The commission shall recommend policies and make
122 recommendations to public or private groups or persons concerning
123 with any issue related to improving the status of women. It may

124 develop, prepare or coordinate materials, projects or other
125 activities and give technical and consultative advice towards this
126 end. It may encourage and help women's organizations, public and
127 private offices and other groups to institute activities designed
128 to meet women's education, employment and other needs;

129 (e) The commission shall promote consideration of
130 qualified women for all levels of government positions;

131 (f) The commission shall by February 15 of each year
132 report to the Governor and the Legislature on its activities and
133 present the results of its findings of the preceding year, along
134 with recommendations for the removal of such injustices as it may
135 find to exist.

136 SECTION 3. There is hereby established an interagency
137 council comprised of representatives of state agencies including,
138 but not limited to, the Department of Health, Department of Mental
139 Health, Department of Human Services, Department of Education,
140 Department of Public Safety, Mississippi Development Authority
141 (MDA), Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL), Community and Junior
142 Colleges, Attorney General's Office, Secretary of State's Office
143 and Department of Corrections. Each of these agencies shall
144 report to the commission annually through its representative,
145 addressing the current health, employment, educational and overall
146 status of women, and agency action to improve women's status. The
147 commission may call a meeting of the full council at its
148 discretion, but not more frequently than once a year.

149 SECTION 4. There is hereby created in the State Treasury a
150 fund into which any public or private funds from any source shall
151 be deposited for the support of the activities of the commission
152 on the Status on Women.

153 SECTION 5. This act shall take effect and be in force from
154 and after July 1, 2001.