SENATE BILL NO. 2757
(As Passed the Senate)

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

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

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

SECTION 2. (1) (a) There is hereby created the Mississippi
Commission on the Status of Women. The commission shall be
nonpartisan, composed of thirteen (13) members to be appointed,
with the advice and consent of the Senate, as follows:

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

(ii) Three (3) members shall be appointed by the
Lieutenant Governor, including a health care professional
knowledgeable in women's health issues;
(iii) Three (3) members shall be appointed by the Speaker of the House, including a current or former college educator with expertise in women's issues;
(iv) Three (3) members shall be appointed by the Attorney General, including a law professor or lawyer with expertise in women's issues.

(b) The members of the commission shall be women and men of recognized ability and achievement who are representative of the ethnic, geographic, socioeconomic and cultural diversity of the population of this state, with a proven record of efforts to improve the status of women. Members shall serve for terms of office four (4) years each, staggered so that at least three (3) terms shall expire June 30 of each year. No member may serve for more than two (2) consecutive terms. All vacancies shall be filled by the appointing authority for the unexpired term.
(c) The commission shall elect a chair, a vice chair and secretary from among its members for terms of two (2) years each, and any member is eligible for successive elections to office.
(d) A quorum for transacting business shall be a majority of the members of the commission.
(e) Members of the commission shall be reimbursed for expenses as provided in Section 25-3-41, Mississippi Code of 1972, and shall receive per diem as provided in Section 25-3-69, Mississippi Code of 1972.
(f) The Lieutenant Governor, Speaker of the House and Attorney General shall notify the Governor after they have made their appointments, and the Governor shall then designate a place and time for the initial, organizational meeting of the commission, which shall be no later than October 1, 2001.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(i) To establish nonprofit entities for the purpose of defraying costs that may be incurred in the performance of its duties; and
(j) To utilize such voluntary and uncompensated services of private individuals, agencies and organizations as may, from time to time, be offered and needed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

(d) The commission shall recommend policies and make recommendations to public or private groups or persons concerning with any issue related to improving the status of women. It may
develop, prepare or coordinate materials, projects or other activities and give technical and consultative advice towards this end. It may encourage and help women's organizations, public and private offices and other groups to institute activities designed to meet women's education, employment and other needs;

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

(f) The commission shall by November 15 of each year, beginning with November 15, 2002, report to the Governor and the Legislature on its activities and present the results of its findings of the preceding year, along with recommendations for the removal of such injustices as it may find to exist.

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

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

SECTION 5. The purpose of the Commission on the Status on Women shall be advisory with respect to legislation and regulation and shall not conflict with or supplement state or federal laws or
regulations or provide a cause of action relating to any matter contained herein.

SECTION 6. This act shall take effect and be in force from and after July 1, 2001.