HOUSE BILL NO. 133

AN ACT TO AMEND SECTION 37-106-29, MISSISSIPPI CODE OF 1972, TO INCREASE THE AMOUNT OF GRANTS UNDER THE MISSISSIPPI RESIDENT TUITION ASSISTANCE GRANT (MTAG) PROGRAM; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES.

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

SECTION 1. Section 37-106-29, Mississippi Code of 1972, is amended as follows:

37-106-29. (1) There is established the Mississippi Resident Tuition Assistance Grant Program for college or university freshmen, sophomores, juniors and seniors, to be administered by the Mississippi Postsecondary Education Financial Assistance Board established under Section 37-106-9, which shall set the dates and deadlines for applying for an award under this section. The board shall establish such rules and regulations as it deems necessary and proper to carry out the purposes and intent of this section.

(2) The college or university shall approve grants to full-time freshmen, sophomore, junior and senior Mississippi residents who meet the general requirements for student eligibility as provided in subsection (4) of this section.

(3) Mississippi Resident Tuition Assistance Grants shall be for Mississippi students from any Mississippi family whose prior year adjusted gross income (AGI) exceeds the maximum allowed to qualify for full Pell Grant eligibility and campus-based federal aid. Those Mississippi students receiving less than the full Pell Grant award, as determined by the institution, shall receive a Mississippi Resident Tuition Assistance Grant in an amount not to exceed the maximum Pell Grant allowable for that individual.
student. The award shall be applied to tuition, rooms and meals, books, materials and fees not to exceed One Thousand Two Hundred Dollars ($1,200.00) for junior and senior students attending state institutions of higher learning in Mississippi or four-year regionally accredited, state-approved, nonprofit colleges and universities in Mississippi, and Six Hundred Dollars ($600.00) for freshmen and sophomores attending state institutions of higher learning or public community or junior colleges in Mississippi, or regionally accredited, state-approved, nonprofit two-year or four-year colleges in Mississippi, which will be prorated per term, semester or quarter of the academic year for costs of attendance, calculated according to the formula specified in subsection (8) of this section.

(4) The general requirements for initial eligibility of students for Mississippi Resident Tuition Assistance Grants consist of the following:

(a) Member of a Mississippi family whose prior year adjusted gross income (AGI) exceeds the maximum allowed to qualify for Pell Grant eligibility and campus-based federal aid.

(b) Acceptance for enrollment at any state institution of higher learning or public community or junior college located in Mississippi, or any regionally accredited, state-approved, nonprofit four- or two-year college or university located in Mississippi as listed in subsection (d) of this subsection: (i) a minimum grade point average of 2.5 calculated on a 4.0 scale after seven (7) semesters certified by the high school counselor or other authorized school official on the application and graduation from high school verified by the institution before disbursement of award and has scored fifteen (15) on the American College Test Program (ACT); or (ii) has attended a home education program during grade levels 9 through 12, and has scored fifteen (15) on the American College Testing Program; or (iii) satisfactory completion of the General Educational Development Test (GED) or
have successfully completed the International Baccalaureate Program and has scored fifteen (15) on the American College Testing Program; however, any student entering a vocational or technical program of study, or who has satisfactorily completed the General Education Development Test and attends a community or junior college will not be required to have a test score under the American College Testing Program except those students enrolled in courses of academic study. Any student currently enrolled in any qualified institution shall have to only meet the same requirements as students who are applying for a renewal award.

(c) Resident status for purposes of receiving grants under this act shall be determined in the same manner as resident status for tuition purposes as set forth in Sections 37-103-1 through 37-103-29, with the exception of 37-103-17.

(d) Must attend one (1) of the following institutions of higher learning: Alcorn State University, Delta State University, Jackson State University, Mississippi State University, Mississippi University for Women, Mississippi Valley State University, University of Mississippi, University of Southern Mississippi, Coahoma Community College, Copiah-Lincoln Community College, East Central Community College, East Mississippi Community College, Hinds Community College, Holmes Community College, Itawamba Community College, Jones County Junior College, Meridian Community College, Mississippi Delta Community College, Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College, Northeast Mississippi Community College, Northwest Mississippi Community College, Pearl River Community College, Southwest Mississippi Community College, Belhaven College, Blue Mountain College, Millsaps College, Mississippi College, Rust College, Tougaloo College, William Carey College, Mary Holmes College, Magnolia Bible College and Wood College.
(5) By accepting a Mississippi Resident Tuition Assistance Grant, the student is attesting to the accuracy, completeness and correctness of information provided to demonstrate the student's eligibility. Falsification of such information shall result in the denial of any pending grant and revocation of any award currently held to the extent that no further payments shall be made. Any student knowingly making false statements in order to receive a grant shall be guilty of a misdemeanor punishable, upon conviction thereof, by a fine of up to Ten Thousand Dollars ($10,000.00), a prison sentence of up to one (1) year in the county jail, or both, and shall be required to return all Mississippi Resident Tuition Assistance Grants wrongfully obtained.

(6) Eligibility for renewal of Mississippi Resident Tuition Assistance Grants shall be evaluated at the end of each semester, or term, of each academic year. As a condition for renewal, a student shall:

(a) Make steady academic progress toward a certificate or degree, as outlined in the school Satisfactory Academic Progress Standards and certified by the institution's registrar.

(b) Maintain continuous enrollment for not less than two (2) semesters or three (3) quarters in each successive academic year, unless granted an exception for cause by the administering agency; examples of cause may include student participation in a cooperative program, internship program or foreign study program. If a student fails to maintain continuous enrollment, and is not granted an exception for cause by the administering agency, the student is ineligible to receive the Mississippi Resident Tuition Assistance Grant during the following semester or trimester or term of the regular academic year.

(c) Have a cumulative grade point average of at least 2.50 calculated on a 4.0 scale at the end of each semester or trimester or term.
(7) Each student, each year, must complete a Free Application for Federal Student Aid form or a Statement of Certification as designed by the administering board to determine his/her eligibility for a Mississippi Resident Tuition Assistance Grant.

(8) (a) The amount of the Mississippi Resident Tuition Assistance Grant awarded to any one (1) student, up to the maximum amount provided in subsection (3) of this section, shall be the difference of the student's cost of attendance at his accredited college of choice and the amount of federal aid such student may receive, not to supplant but to supplement the amount of any federal aid awarded to the student. Cost of attendance is the tuition and fees of the applicable institution plus an allowance for room and meals and books and materials.

(b) Payment of the Mississippi Resident Tuition Assistance Grant shall be made payable to the recipient and the educational institution and mailed directly to the institution, to be applied first to tuition.

(9) In order for an institution to remain eligible for its students to participate in the Mississippi Resident Tuition Assistance Grant Program, the institution shall comply with the following requirements:

(a) A complete and accurate roster of the eligibility status of each awarded student shall be made to the board for each term, semester or quarter of the academic year the student receives a Mississippi Resident Tuition Assistance Grant.

(b) The institution is required to make refunds to the Mississippi Resident Tuition Assistance Grant Fund for any funds which have not been disbursed to the recipient, in the case of students who have received a grant but who terminate enrollment during the academic term, semester or quarter of the academic year if an institution's refund policies permit a student to receive a refund in such instance. The recipient shall be responsible for
the refund of any funds which have been disbursed by the
institution in such instance.

(c) If a student drops below full-time status but does
not terminate all enrollment during the term, semester or quarter
of the academic year no refund will be required for that term.
However, that student is ineligible to receive the Mississippi
Resident Tuition Assistance Grant during the following term,
semester or quarter of the regular academic year.

(d) The board may conduct its own annual audits of any
institution participating in the Mississippi Resident Tuition
Assistance Grant Program. The board may suspend or revoke an
institution's eligibility to receive future monies under the
program if it finds that the institution has not complied with the
provisions of this act. In determining a student's initial
eligibility, the number of prior semesters enrolled will not be
counted against the student.

(10) No student may receive a Mississippi Resident Tuition
Assistance Grant for more than the equivalent semesters or
quarters required to complete one (1) baccalaureate degree or one
(1) certificate or associate degree program per institution.

(11) Subject to the availability of funds specifically
appropriated therefor, it is the intent of the Legislature to
fully fund grant awards to eligible students. If funds are
insufficient to fully fund grant awards to eligible students,
grant awards shall be prorated among all eligible students. No
student shall receive any combination of student financial aid in
excess of the cost of attendance as defined in subsection (8)(a).

(12) No student receiving a Mississippi Eminent Scholars
Grant as provided in Section 37-106-31 shall be eligible to
receive the Mississippi Resident Tuition Assistance Grant pursuant
to Section 37-106-29 unless he is eligible for such award after
the Mississippi Eminent Scholars Grant has been considered by the
board when conducting an assessment of the financial resources
available to the student. In no case shall any student receive any combination of student financial aid that would exceed the cost of attendance, as defined in subsection (8)(a).

For purposes of this section, certificated shall mean but not be limited to all postsecondary vocational programs in eligible institutions as identified in subsection (4)(d) of this section.

SECTION 2. This act shall take effect and be in force from and after July 1, 2002.