HOUSE BILL NO. 1185

AN ACT TO REQUIRE THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, IN CONSULTATION WITH THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, TO IMPLEMENT A PROGRAM THROUGH WHICH WRITTEN MATERIALS DESIGNED TO ENCOURAGE PARENTS TO READ TO THEIR YOUNG CHILDREN ARE GIVEN TO THE PARENTS OF NEWBORN CHILDREN BEFORE THEIR DISCHARGE FROM THE HOSPITAL; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES.

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

SECTION 1. (1) Subject to the availability of funding specifically for such purpose, the State Department of Education, in consultation with the State Department of Health, shall establish and implement a program designed to inform parents of newborn children of the benefits of reading to their children. Under the program, the mother of each newborn child in the State of Mississippi will be provided, free of charge, a packet of written materials before being discharged from the hospital after the birth of her child, which packet must include, at a minimum, the following:

(a) Easily comprehensible information explaining the role of parents as the primary early childhood educators of their preschool child;

(b) Documentation supporting the benefits to be gained by reading to a child from age birth, including: enhanced bonding between the parent and child; enhanced language, problem-solving skills and social development; increased school readiness skills; and greater parental involvement when the child enters school;

(c) An age-appropriate book for an infant; and

(d) Any other available material deemed by the departments to further the intent of this section.
(2) The State Department of Education may cause to be published the materials required under this section or alternatively, may use any available materials published by another entity, public or private, which are intended to accomplish the goals of this section, including noteworthy articles from reputable news sources which may be reprinted. For the support of this program, the department may accept gifts or donations of materials or financial assistance from any person or entity, public or private.

(3) The State Department of Education shall make available the reading information packet required under this section to those hospitals providing labor and delivery services throughout the state.

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