

By: Representatives Watson, Whittington

To: Judiciary B

HOUSE BILL NO. 1216

1 AN ACT TO REQUIRE DISTRICT ATTORNEYS TO INITIATE FORMATION OF
 2 MULTIDISCIPLINARY REVIEW TEAMS TO EVALUATE AND INVESTIGATE REPORTS
 3 OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT; TO SPECIFY THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE
 4 TEAMS; TO REQUIRE AN ORDER OF THE YOUTH COURT AS A CONDITION
 5 PRECEDENT TO THE FORMATION THEREOF; TO SPECIFY THE TEAM
 6 PARTICIPATION OF A CHILD ADVOCACY CENTER; TO PROVIDE THAT WILLFUL
 7 NONPARTICIPATION OF A TASK FORCE MEMBER MAY BE PUNISHED AS
 8 CONTEMPT OF COURT; TO PROHIBIT THE DISCLOSURE OF ANY INFORMATION
 9 OBTAINED FROM A TASK FORCE MEETING; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES.

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

11 **SECTION 1.** (1) The district attorneys shall initiate formal
 12 cooperative agreements with the Department of Human Services, city
 13 and county law enforcement agencies, county attorneys, and other
 14 appropriate agencies and individuals to create multidisciplinary
 15 child protection teams in order to implement a coordinated
 16 multidisciplinary team approach to intervention in reports
 17 involving alleged severe or potential felony child physical or
 18 sexual abuse, exploitation, or maltreatment. The
 19 multidisciplinary team also may be known as a child abuse task
 20 force. The purpose of the team or task force shall be to assist
 21 in the evaluation and investigation of reports and to provide
 22 consultation and coordination for agencies involved in child
 23 protection cases.

24 (2) To implement the multidisciplinary child abuse team, the
 25 team or task force must be authorized by court order from the
 26 appropriate youth court. The court order will designate which
 27 agencies will participate in the cooperative multidisciplinary
 28 team.

29 (3) (a) Teams created under this section may invite other
 30 persons to serve on the team who have knowledge of and experience



31 in child abuse and neglect matters. These persons may include
32 licensed mental and physical health practitioners and physicians,
33 dentists, representatives of the district attorney's office and
34 the Attorney General's office, experts in the assessment and
35 treatment of substance abuse or sexual abuse, the victim
36 assistance coordinator of the district attorney's office and staff
37 members of a child advocacy center.

38 (b) (i) A child advocacy center means an agency that
39 advocates on behalf of children alleged to have been abused and
40 assists in the coordination of the investigation of child abuse by
41 providing a location for forensic interviews and promoting the
42 coordination of services for children alleged to have been abused.
43 A child advocacy center provides services that include, but are
44 not limited to, forensic medical examinations, mental health and
45 related support services, court advocacy, consultation, training
46 for social workers, law enforcement training, and child abuse
47 multidisciplinary teams; and staffing of multidisciplinary teams.

48 (ii) Child advocacy centers may provide a video
49 taped forensic interview of the child in a child friendly
50 environment or separate building. In the event of a prosecution,
51 this taped interview is to be made available to the defense to
52 review the interview of the child. The purpose of the video taped
53 forensic interview is to prevent further trauma to a child in the
54 investigation and prosecution of child physical and sexual abuse
55 cases. Child advocacy centers can also assist child victims by
56 providing therapeutic counseling subsequent to the interview by a
57 qualified therapist. Child advocacy centers can also assist law
58 enforcement and prosecutors by acquainting child victim witnesses
59 and their parents or guardians to the courtroom through child
60 court school programs.

61 (4) A team or task force created under this section shall
62 review records on cases referred to the team by the Department of
63 Human Services or law enforcement or the district attorney's



64 office. The team shall meet at least monthly. Any willful
65 failure to participate in the team meetings shall be reported by
66 any participating team member to the youth court judge for that
67 district or county for appropriate action to include disciplinary
68 action that may include contempt proceedings.

69 (5) No person shall disclose information obtained from a
70 meeting of the multidisciplinary team unless necessary to comply
71 with Department of Human Services' regulations or conduct and
72 proceeding in youth court or criminal court proceedings or as
73 authorized by a court of competent jurisdiction.

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

