To: Juvenile Justice; Appropriations

MISSISSIPPI LEGISLATURE
REGULAR SESSION 2002
By: Representative Scott (80th)

HOUSE BILL NO. 1457

AN ACT TO CREATE THE POSITION OF SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICER UNDER THE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES AS A FIVE-YEAR PILOT PROGRAM; TO REQUIRE THE PROGRAM TO BE IMPLEMENTED IN SCHOOL DISTRICTS CHARACTERIZED BY POOR STUDENT PERFORMANCE, HIGH CRIME RATES OR DELINQUENT ACTS; TO PROVIDE THAT THE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES SHALL ESTABLISH THE MINIMUM QUALIFICATIONS AND SALARY FOR SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS; TO AUTHORIZE SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS TO USE SCHOOL FACILITIES IN THE PERFORMANCE OF THEIR DUTIES; TO PROVIDE THAT EACH SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICER SHALL IMPLEMENT A MENTORING PROGRAM IN ORDER TO PROVIDE STUDENTS WITH POSITIVE ROLE MODELS FROM THE LOCAL COMMUNITY; TO REQUIRE EACH SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICER TO ESTABLISH A YOUTH CRIME WATCH PROGRAM TO HELP YOUTH IN THE PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE, DRUG AND ALCOHOL USE AND GANG ACTIVITY AND SMOKING CESSION; TO DESCRIBE THE ORGANIZATION AND FUNCTIONS OF THE YOUTH CRIME WATCH PROGRAM; TO PROVIDE FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION BY THE SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICER OF A CONFLICT RESOLUTION PROGRAM TO TEACH CHILDREN TO PEACEFULLY RESOLVE CONFLICTS AND TO EFFECTIVELY DEAL WITH ANGER; TO PROVIDE FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A MENTORING GROUP FOR STUDENTS BETWEEN THE AGES OF TEN AND FOURTEEN WITH ACADEMIC OR BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS; TO REQUIRE STUDENTS IN THE PROGRAM TO PARTICIPATE IN SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY PROJECTS AND A PERFORMANCE GROUP; TO REQUIRE THE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES TO EVALUATE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICER BEFORE JANUARY 1, 2007, AND TO RECOMMEND TO THE LEGISLATURE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POSITION IN ALL SCHOOL DISTRICTS OR ITS DISCONTINUATION; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES.

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

SECTION 1. (1) There is created as a pilot program within the Department of Human Services the position of school resource officer. The school resource officer shall be responsible for the administration of various interdiction programs and the coordination of local collaborative efforts for at-risk children in the school district to which the school resource officer is assigned by the department.

(2) The Department of Human Services shall implement the position of school resource officer as a pilot program in selected school districts in the state. Every school district that has been placed on probation for failure to meet accreditation standards since July 1, 1999, must be included in the program.
The department shall designate the remainder of the districts for participation in the pilot program by identifying those districts most characterized by poor student performance, high incidents of crime or delinquent acts. The pilot program shall exist until July 1, 2007, at which time, based upon the recommendations of the department, the position must be permanently established in all school districts or discontinued.

(3) The Department of Human Services shall establish the minimum qualifications and annual salary for the position of school resource officer. The school resource officer shall maintain an office in the school district to which the officer is assigned by the department. The department may authorize the employment of any clerical or support personnel that may be necessary for the administration of the office of the school resource officer.

(4) The school resource officer may use school buildings and grounds within the school district for the holding of meetings and gatherings of people in the performance of his duties.

SECTION 2. In order to provide students with an opportunity to have direct personal contact with positive role models from within the local community, the school resource officer shall develop and implement a mentoring program that demonstrates the accomplishments of local citizens. The mentoring program shall coordinate the activities of school personnel, members of the business community, civic leaders, law enforcement, churches and other organizations to present various programs to student groups and tutorial and guidance services to individual students.

SECTION 3. (1) Each school resource officer shall be responsible for establishing a Youth Crime Watch Program in the school district to which the officer is assigned to help youth in the prevention of crime and violence, alcohol and drug use and gang activity and smoking cessation. The Youth Crime Watch Program must be a school-based, peer group organization comprised
and under the leadership of students. Through the program, students shall promote student responsibility for a safe school environment through formal and informal peer groups. In addition, the program shall focus on the consequences of youth crime and what students can do to prevent it. The school resource officer shall provide guidance to the students in the formation of the program and must be available, upon the request of the students, to assist with the various activities conducted through the program.

(2) In the Youth Crime Watch Program, a core group consisting of an advisor, Youth Crime Watch representative, students selected by the principal or staff and other program participants must be formed at each school. The core group members shall serve as representatives of the program to all students, who must be encouraged to participate in the program. Activities and responsibilities of the group must include defining the school's needs and problems, promoting school spirit, developing action plans and helping sponsor activities for reducing campus crime, publicizing program successes and increasing student involvement. The school resource officer shall encourage the involvement of local businesses and law enforcement officials to secure materials and guest speakers to further the work of the Youth Crime Watch Program.

SECTION 4. The school resource officer shall develop and implement in all schools in the district a formal conflict resolution program designed to teach children to peacefully resolve conflicts and to effectively deal with their anger. As part of the program, students must be taught how to resolve disagreements nonviolently by working together to arrive at mutually acceptable solutions. Students, teachers or parent volunteers also may be trained to settle disputes among students. In addition to offering conflict resolution skills, the program shall seek to develop leadership and coping skills in students.
The program must be a part of the curriculum of students at each grade level.

SECTION 5. (1) The school resource officer shall establish in each middle or junior high school in the district a school mentoring group for students between the ages of ten (10) and fourteen (14) with academic or behavioral problems. Through this program, participants must have the opportunity to do homework for several hours after school and to take part in group sessions where the students have a safe outlet to discuss with their peers, problems involving various aspects of their lives, including the school or community, drug and alcohol use, child abuse, coping with parental and other adult authorities, finances, gang activity, emotional crises, peer pressure and health and legal issues. Students must be trained to develop solutions to their problems, including weighing what the consequences of different actions in response to a particular problem might be.

(2) The mentoring program shall require students to participate in school and community service projects. Through these projects, students shall perform beneficial services for their school or community through activities such as preparing props for a school play or doing chores for the elderly. The goals of the school and community service projects are to:

(a) Promote self-esteem, citizenship and other positive qualities in participants;

(b) Enhance students' sense of empowerment as they make a contribution to the community;

(c) Help students develop problem-solving, social and employment skills;

(d) Foster interaction among students; and

(e) Provide students with opportunities to give help and to receive help from their peers.

(3) Participants in the mentoring program also must be required to participate in a performance group. The performance
groups shall encourage students to recognize and develop their
talents and to enhance skills in self-discipline.

SECTION 6. Before January 1, 2007, the Department of Human
Services shall evaluate those school districts that have
participated in the pilot program to determine the effectiveness
of the school resource officer. The evaluation must consider the
following factors:

(a) The improvement in academic performance of students
    in the district;

(b) The degree to which youth crime and school violence
    has decreased;

(c) The participation rate of students in the various
    programs implemented and administered by the school resource
    officer; and

(d) The opinions of school administrators, teachers,
    parents and students in regard to the various programs implemented
    and administered by the school resource officer.

The Department of Human Services shall prepare a report based
upon its evaluation of the pilot program. The report must contain
a recommendation by the department to the Legislature that the
program be permanently implemented in all school districts or
discontinued.

SECTION 7. This act shall take effect and be in force from
and after July 1, 2002.