AN ACT TO AMEND SECTION 99-36-7, MISSISSIPPI CODE OF 1972, TO PROVIDE THAT VICTIM ASSISTANCE COORDINATORS SHALL BE CLASSIFIED AS STATE EMPLOYEES; TO DELETE THE PROVISION REQUIRING APPROVAL BY THE SENIOR CIRCUIT COURT JUDGE FOR THE EMPLOYMENT OF VICTIM ASSISTANCE COORDINATORS AND THE PROVISION REQUIRING VICTIM ASSISTANCE COORDINATORS TO BE PAID JOINTLY BY THE COUNTIES COMPRISING THE CIRCUIT COURT DISTRICT; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES.

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

SECTION 1. Section 99-36-7, Mississippi Code of 1972, is amended as follows:

99-36-7. (1) (a) In addition to the full-time legal assistants to the district attorney authorized by Section 25-31-5, the district attorney in each circuit court district in this state shall employ one (1) person to serve at the will and pleasure of the district attorney as a "victim assistance coordinator" who shall be classified as a state employee.

(b) The District Attorney of the First Circuit Court District may appoint one (1) additional victim assistance coordinator subject to the approval of and upon the order of the senior circuit court judge of the district for a total of two (2) victim assistance coordinators.

(2) The duty of the victim assistance coordinator is to ensure that a victim, guardian of a victim, or close relative of a deceased victim is afforded the rights granted victims, guardians and relatives by Section 99-36-5. The victim assistance coordinator shall work closely with appropriate law enforcement agencies, prosecuting attorneys, the state and the judiciary in fulfilling that duty.
(3) The salary of the victim assistance coordinator shall not exceed the salary authorized for criminal investigators in Section 25-31-10 * * *.

(4) The board of supervisors of any county, with the approval of and upon the order of the senior circuit court judge of the district wherein such county lies, may, in addition to any victim assistance coordinator provided for in subsection (1) of this section, create the position of county victim assistance coordinator. The duty of the county victim assistance coordinator shall be to cooperate with local law enforcement agencies, the county attorney and the district attorney in assuring that a victim, guardian or close relative is afforded the rights granted by Section 99-36-5. Two (2) or more counties, by action of their respective boards of supervisors, with the approval of and upon the order of the senior circuit court judge of the district wherein such counties lie, may join in establishing and maintaining the position of victim assistance coordinator to serve these counties. Any municipality, by action of its governing authority, may participate in the establishment and maintenance of a county victim assistance coordinator's office located within the municipality.

(5) Any district attorney, county board of supervisors or governing authority of a municipality which has established or is participating in the maintenance of an office of victim assistance coordinator may apply through the Governor's Office of State and Federal Programs for a grant under the federal "Victims of Crimes Act of 1984" (Public Law 98-473) to be used in the continued operation of the victim assistance program.

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