MISSISSIPPI LEGISLATURE
REGULAR SESSION 2003

By: Representatives Dedeaux, Cummings

To: Public Health and Welfare; Appropriations

HOUSE BILL NO. 758

AN ACT TO ENACT THE MISSISSIPPI CRITICAL SOCIAL WORKER SHORTAGE ACT OF 2003, THE PURPOSE OF WHICH IS TO ATTRACT QUALIFIED SOCIAL WORKERS TO THOSE GEOGRAPHICAL AREAS OF THE STATE WHERE THERE EXISTS A CRITICAL SHORTAGE OF SOCIAL WORKERS; TO PROVIDE GRANTS TO ELIGIBLE SOCIAL WORKERS FOR THE REPAYMENT OF STUDENT LOANS; TO SET FORTH THE REQUIREMENTS FOR ELIGIBILITY AND EMPLOYMENT WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES; TO PROVIDE FOR THE INDIVIDUAL SOCIAL WORKER'S LIABILITY FOR FAILURE TO COMPLETE HIS COMMITMENT TO THE PROGRAM; TO PROVIDE THAT THE GOVERNOR SHALL MAKE THE DETERMINATION OF THOSE GEOGRAPHICAL AREAS IN WHICH THERE EXISTS A CRITICAL SHORTAGE OF SOCIAL WORKERS; TO PROVIDE THAT THE PROGRAM SHALL BE FUNDED WITH ANY FUNDS AVAILABLE TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES.

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

SECTION 1. This act shall be known and may be cited as the "Mississippi Critical Social Worker Shortage Act of 2003."

SECTION 2. (1) There is established the "Social Worker Student Loan Subsidy Program," the purpose of which is to attract qualified social workers to those geographical areas of the state where there exists a critical shortage of social workers by awarding a grant toward the repayment of student loans to persons who declare an intention to serve as social workers in such geographical areas and who actually render service to the state while employed by the Department of Human Services while possessing an appropriate social work license.

(2) Any individual who has graduated after January 1, 2003, from a baccalaureate degree-granting institution of higher learning, or from an accredited, nonprofit community or junior college in the State of Mississippi, and become an employee of the Department of Human Services in the position of a state-licensed social worker, and who expresses in writing an intention to serve in the department as a social worker in a geographical area of the
state in which there exists a critical shortage of social workers, as designated by the Governor, shall be eligible for a grant to be applied toward the repayment of the individual's student loan. The annual amount of the grant shall not exceed Two Thousand Four Hundred Dollars ($2,400.00), and shall be limited to the annual amount required to be repaid under the terms of the individual's student loan debt instrument. Grants made to nonresidents of the state shall not include any amount assessed by the college or university for out-of-state tuition costs.

(3) Grants made under the Social Worker Student Loan Subsidy Program shall be paid directly by the Department of Human Services to the financial institution or entity which is the payee of the student loan debt instrument. Any person failing to pay the remainder, after the payment by the department, of any annual payments due for such student loan shall become liable immediately to the department for the amount of the annual payment made on behalf of the person during the calendar year in which the person fails to pay the remainder due on the student loan. Any person who terminates his employment status with the department shall become liable immediately to the department for the amount of the annual payment made on behalf of the person during the calendar year in which the person terminates employment.

(4) The Governor shall make the determination of those geographical areas of the state in which there exists a critical shortage of social workers, and he shall designate how many positions are necessary in each geographical area before the shortage in that area is alleviated. The Governor and the Department of Human Services shall jointly promulgate rules and regulations necessary for the proper administration of the Social Worker Student Loan Subsidy Program. The Department of Human Services shall be the administering agency of the program.

(5) The source of funding for the program shall be from any funds available to the department. If insufficient funds are
available to fully fund grant awards to all eligible social
workers, the department shall make the awards to individuals on a
first-come, first-served basis.

SECTION 3. This act shall take effect and be in force from
and after July 1, 2003.