

By: Senator(s) Smith

To: Education

SENATE BILL NO. 2122

1 AN ACT TO AMEND SECTION 37-159-9, MISSISSIPPI CODE of 1972,
2 TO AUTHORIZE PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS WHO ARE LICENSED UNDER AN
3 ALTERNATE TEACHING ROUTE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE UNIVERSITY ASSISTED
4 TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION MASTERS DEGREE PROGRAM; AND FOR
5 RELATED PURPOSE.

6 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI.

7 **SECTION 1.** Section 37-159-9, Mississippi Code of 1972, is
8 amended as follows:

9 37-159-9. (1) There is established the University Assisted
10 Teacher Recruitment and Retention Grant Program within the State
11 Department of Education. The purposes of the program shall be to
12 attract additional qualified teachers to those geographical areas
13 of the state where there exists a critical shortage of teachers
14 and to retain the qualified teachers already serving as licensed
15 teachers in geographical critical teacher shortage areas by making
16 available scholarships to persons working towards a Master of
17 Education degree or an Educational Specialist degree at an
18 institution of higher learning whose teacher education program is
19 approved by the State Board of Education.

20 (2) Any institution of higher learning in the State of
21 Mississippi which offers a Master of Education degree or an
22 Educational Specialist degree may apply to the department for
23 participation in the program. As part of the program,
24 participating institutions shall collaborate with the Mississippi
25 Teacher Center to identify, recruit and place teacher education
26 graduates, from both within the state and out-of-state, in school
27 districts situated within those areas of the state where there
28 exists a critical shortage of teachers, as designated by the State



Board of Education. Any licensed teacher employed by a public school district, including any teacher licensed under an alternative teaching route, shall be fully eligible to participate in the Master of Education degree or Educational Specialist Degree Scholarship Loan Program authorized under this section.

(3) The State Department of Education shall provide funds to participating institutions of higher learning for the purpose of awarding scholarships to qualified persons pursuing a Master of Education degree or an Educational Specialist degree at such institutions while rendering service to the state as a licensed teacher in a school district in a geographical area of the state where there exists a critical shortage of teachers, as approved by the State Board of Education. The financial scholarship shall be applied to the total cost for tuition, books, materials and fees at the institution in which the student is enrolled, not to exceed an amount equal to the highest total cost of tuition, books, materials and fees assessed by a state institution of higher learning during that school year. Teachers who relocate within Mississippi from out-of-state in order to participate in the program shall be classified as residents of the state for tuition purposes.

(4) Students awarded financial scholarships under the University Assisted Teacher Recruitment and Retention Grant Program may receive such awards for a maximum of four (4) school years; however, the maximum number of awards which may be made shall not exceed the length of time required to complete the number of academic hours necessary to obtain a Master of Education degree or an Educational Specialist degree. Financial scholarships under the program shall not be based upon an applicant's eligibility for financial aid.

(5) Persons relocating to a geographical area of the state where there exists a critical shortage of teachers, as approved by the State Board of Education, to participate in the University



Assisted Teacher Recruitment and Retention Grant Program shall be eligible for reimbursement for their moving expenses to the critical teacher shortage area from the State Board of Education. The State Board of Education shall promulgate rules and regulations necessary for the administration of the relocation expense reimbursement component of the University Assisted Teacher Recruitment and Retention Grant Program.

(6) Subject to the availability of funds, the State Board of Education may provide for professional development and support services as may be necessary for the retention of teachers participating in the program in those geographical areas of the state where there exists a critical shortage of teachers.

(7) Any person participating in the program who fails to complete a program of study that will enable that person to obtain a Master of Education degree or Educational Specialist degree shall become liable immediately to the State Board of Education for the sum of all awards made to that person under the program, plus interest accruing at the current Stafford Loan rate at the time the person abrogates his participation in the program.

(8) As a condition for participation in the program, a teacher shall agree to employment as a licensed teacher in a school district located in a geographical area of the state where there exists a critical shortage of teachers, as designated by the State Board of Education, for a period of not less than three (3) years, which shall include those years of service rendered while obtaining the Master of Education degree or Educational Specialist degree. However, for any person who obtained a baccalaureate degree in education with a financial scholarship under the Critical Needs Teacher Scholarship Program and who entered the University Assisted Teacher Recruitment and Retention Grant Program before rendering service as a teacher, the period of employment for the purposes of this subsection shall be two (2) years, in addition to the employment commitment required under the



95 Critical Needs Teacher Scholarship Program. Service rendered by a
96 participant as a licensed teacher in a school district in a
97 geographical critical teacher shortage area before that teacher
98 becomes a participant in the program may not be considered to
99 fulfill the employment commitment required under this subsection.
100 Any person failing to comply with this employment commitment in
101 any required school year shall immediately be in breach of
102 contract and become liable immediately to the State Department of
103 Education for the sum of all scholarships awarded and relocation
104 expenses granted to that person, less one-third (1/3) of the
105 amount of that sum for each year that service was rendered, or for
106 those persons whose required period of employment is two (2)
107 years, less one-half (1/2) of the amount of that sum for each year
108 that service was rendered, plus interest accruing at the current
109 Stafford Loan rate at the time the breach occurs, except in the
110 case of a deferral for cause by the State Board of Education when
111 there is no employment position immediately available upon the
112 teachers obtaining of the Master of Education degree or
113 Educational Specialist degree. After the period of such deferral,
114 the person shall begin or resume the required teaching duties or
115 shall become liable to the board under this subsection. If a
116 claim for repayment under this subsection is placed in the hands
117 of an attorney for collection after default, then the obligor
118 shall be liable for an additional amount equal to a reasonable
119 attorney's fee.

120 (9) All funds received by the State Department of Education
121 from the repayment of scholarship awards and relocation expenses
122 by program participants shall be deposited in the Mississippi
123 Critical Teacher Shortage Fund.

124 (10) The State Board of Education shall promulgate rules and
125 regulations necessary for the proper administration of the
126 University Assisted Teacher Recruitment and Retention Grant
127 Program.



128 **SECTION 2.** This act shall take effect and be in force from
129 and after July 1, 2003.

