HOUSE BILL NO. 475
(As Sent to Governor)

AN ACT TO ESTABLISH A SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM ADMINISTERED BY THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF STATE INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING FOR FAMILY PROTECTION WORKERS WHO ARE EMPLOYED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES TO OBTAIN THE COLLEGE EDUCATION NECESSARY TO BECOME LICENSED AS SOCIAL WORKERS AND BECOME FAMILY PROTECTION SPECIALISTS FOR THE DEPARTMENT; TO PROVIDE THAT ANY PERSON WHO RECEIVES A SCHOLARSHIP UNDER THE PROGRAM, OBTAINS A COLLEGE DEGREE NECESSARY TO BECOME LICENSED AS A SOCIAL WORKER AND RECEIVES SUCH A LICENSE, SHALL RENDER SERVICE AS A FAMILY PROTECTION SPECIALIST FOR THE DEPARTMENT FOR A PERIOD OF NOT LESS THAN THREE YEARS FROM THE DATE THAT THE PERSON BECAME A FAMILY PROTECTION SPECIALIST; TO PROVIDE THAT ANY PERSON WHO RECEIVES A SCHOLARSHIP UNDER THE PROGRAM WHO FAILS TO COMPLETE A PROGRAM OF STUDY NECESSARY TO BECOME LICENSED AS A SOCIAL WORKER, AND ANY PERSON WHO RECEIVES A SCHOLARSHIP UNDER THE PROGRAM WHO FAILS TO COMPLETE HIS OR HER SERVICE OBLIGATION AS A FAMILY PROTECTION SPECIALIST FOR THE DEPARTMENT FOR NOT LESS THAN THREE YEARS, SHALL BECOME LIABLE IMMEDIATELY TO THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES FOR THE SUM OF ALL SCHOLARSHIP AWARDS RECEIVED, PLUS INTEREST; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES.

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

SECTION 1. (1) There is established a scholarship program to encourage family protection workers employed by the Department of Human Services to obtain the college education necessary to become licensed as a social worker, master social worker or certified social worker and become a family protection specialist for the department.

(2) Any person who is employed as a family protection worker for the Department of Human Services shall be eligible for a financial scholarship from the Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning, which shall be used to pay the costs of the person's education at a state institution of higher learning in Mississippi to obtain a college degree that is necessary to become licensed as a social worker, master social worker or certified social worker and become a family protection specialist for the department. The annual amount of a scholarship...
award under the program shall be equal to the total cost of
tuition and fees at the college or university in which the student
is enrolled, not to exceed an amount equal to the highest total
cost of tuition and fees assessed by a state institution of higher
learning during that school year.

(3) Scholarship awards made under the program shall be
available to both full-time and part-time students. Students
enrolling on a full-time basis may receive a maximum of two (2)
annual awards. The maximum number of scholarship awards that may
be made to students attending school on a part-time basis, and the
maximum time period for part-time students to complete the number
of academic hours necessary to obtain the necessary degree, shall
be established by rules and regulations of the Board of Trustees
of State Institutions of Higher Learning. Scholarships under the
program shall not be based upon an applicant’s eligibility for
financial aid. A student must maintain a "C" average or higher in
his or her college coursework in order to continue receiving the
scholarship.

(4) After a person who received a scholarship under the
program has obtained a college degree that is necessary to become
licensed as a social worker, master social worker or certified
social worker and has received such a license from the Board of
Examiners for Social Workers and Marriage and Family Therapists,
the person shall render service as a family protection specialist
for the Department of Human Services for a period of not less than
three (3) years from the date that the person became a family
protection specialist.

(5) Any person who receives a scholarship under the program
who fails to complete a program of study that is necessary to
become licensed as a social worker, master social worker or
certified social worker, or who fails to receive such a license
from the Board of Examiners for Social Workers and Marriage and
Family Therapists, shall become liable immediately to the Board of
Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning for the sum of all scholarship awards made to that person, plus interest accruing at the current Stafford Loan rate at the time the person discontinues his or her participation in the program. Any person who fails to complete his or her service obligation as a family protection specialist for the Department of Human Services for not less than three (3) years, as required under subsection (4) of this section, shall become liable immediately to the board for the sum of all scholarship awards made to that person, plus interest accruing at the current Stafford Loan rate at the time the person discontinues his or her service. If a claim for payment under this subsection is placed in the hands of an attorney for collection, the obligor shall be liable for an additional amount equal to a reasonable attorney's fee.

(6) It is the intent of the Legislature that the pursuit of necessary college education by family protection workers through the scholarship program shall not interfere with the duties of the family protection workers with the Department of Human Services. The department shall promulgate regulations regarding family protection workers who participate in the scholarship program to ensure that such participation does not interfere with their duties with the department.

(7) The Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning shall promulgate rules and regulations necessary for the proper administration of the scholarship program established under this section. The board shall be the administering agency of the program.

(8) If insufficient funds are available to fully fund scholarship awards to all eligible students, the Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning shall make the awards to first-time students on a first-come, first-served basis; however, priority consideration shall be given to persons previously receiving awards under the program.
(9) The total amount of state funds that may be expended for this program shall not exceed Three Hundred Twenty Thousand Dollars ($320,000.00) in any fiscal year.

SECTION 2. This act shall take effect and be in force from and after July 1, 2007.