

By: Representative Lott

To: Education; Public Health
and Human Services

HOUSE BILL NO. 1296

1 AN ACT TO AMEND SECTION 37-21-51, MISSISSIPPI CODE OF 1972,
2 TO CREATE "THE EARLY LEARNING COLLABORATIVE ACT OF 2007," TO
3 REQUIRE THE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES TO IMPLEMENT A VOLUNTARY
4 EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION GRANT PROGRAM BY SUBCONTRACTING
5 WITH HEAD START, LICENSED CHILD CARE CENTERS AND PUBLIC AND
6 PRIVATE SCHOOL PREKINDERGARTEN PROGRAMS, TO PROVIDE FOR THE
7 ALLOCATION OF FUNDS, TO ESTABLISH A GRANT APPLICATION PROCESS, TO
8 PROVIDE FOR A GRANT APPLICATION OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE, TO PRESCRIBE
9 CERTAIN CONDITIONS FOR APPROVED PROGRAMS, AND TO PROVIDE THAT THE
10 GRANTS ARE SUBJECT TO LEGISLATIVE APPROPRIATION; AND FOR RELATED
11 PURPOSES.

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

13 **SECTION 1.** Section 37-21-51, Mississippi Code of 1972, is
14 amended as follows:

15 37-21-51. (1) As used in Sections 37-21-51 through
16 37-21-55, the term "preschool children" means any children who
17 have not entered kindergarten.

18 (2) To ensure that all children have access to quality early
19 childhood education and development services, the Legislature
20 finds and declares the following:

21 (a) Parents have the primary duty to educate their
22 young preschool children;

23 (b) The State of Mississippi can assist and educate
24 parents in their role as the primary caregivers and educators of
25 young preschool children; and

26 (c) There is a need to explore innovative approaches
27 and strategies for aiding parents and families in the education
28 and development of young preschool children.

29 (3) (a) This subsection shall be known and may be cited as
30 the "Early Learning Collaborative Act of 2007."

31 (b) The Mississippi Department of Human Services shall
32 implement a voluntary early childhood care and education grant
33 program, which shall be a collaboration among the entities
34 providing prekindergarten programs, including Head Start, licensed
35 child care facilities and public and private school
36 prekindergarten programs. Under this program, eligible entities
37 may submit an application for funds to: (i) defray the cost of
38 additional teaching staff and appropriate educational materials
39 and equipment at existing state certified early childhood programs
40 in order to improve the quality of educational experiences offered
41 to four-year-old children; (ii) extend developmentally appropriate
42 education services at existing state certified programs serving
43 four-year-old children to include practices of high quality
44 instruction; and (iii) administer, implement, monitor and evaluate
45 the programs. Grant funds must be provided on a local entity
46 matching fund basis to be determined by the Department of Human
47 Services.

48 (c) The Department of Human Services shall contract
49 with an appropriate early childhood program entity to serve as the
50 fiscal agent for the program. All grant applicants must:
51 collaborate with other early childhood programs receiving grant
52 funds; provide a local community match to the grant award;
53 designate one (1) entity as fiscal agent for the grant; meet
54 teacher qualifications; and meet teacher and assistant teacher
55 salary levels based on the Mississippi Adequate Education Program
56 salary scale provided under Sections 37-19-7 and 37-21-7 for
57 teachers and assistant teachers whose salaries are provided under
58 the grant program.

59 (d) The early childhood care and education program
60 grants must be awarded to successful applicants who meet the
61 criteria developed by a committee appointed by the Governor,
62 consisting of, but not limited to, representatives of the
63 Mississippi Department of Human Services Office for Children and

64 Youth, the Mississippi Head Start Association, the Mississippi
65 Head Start Collaboration Office, the State Department of
66 Education, the Mississippi State Department of Health Child Care
67 Licensure Division and licensed child care facilities in the
68 state. The committee shall meet upon call of the Governor and
69 shall organize for business by electing a chairman.
70 Administrative and clerical support for the committee shall be
71 provided by the Department of Human Services. The committee shall
72 establish grant application criteria, procedures and deadlines.
73 The criteria must include all conditions prescribed in paragraph
74 (c), and must include, but not be limited to: voluntary
75 enrollment of children; qualifications and salary range for
76 teachers and assistant teachers; allowable expenses; children with
77 special needs; use of a center-based curriculum based on the
78 Mississippi Early Learning Guidelines for Four-Year-Old Children,
79 teacher: child ratios; child care facility licensure
80 requirements; and collaboration with other early childhood
81 programs. An equal number of grants must be awarded in each of
82 the state's four (4) congressional districts. Subject to the
83 availability of funds, additional grant awards may be made to high
84 quality projects located in areas of greatest need as determined
85 by: (i) the percentage of four-year-old children not currently
86 being served by prekindergarten programs; or (ii) the existence of
87 a school that is under state supervision or conservatorship due to
88 the low academic performance of students.

89 (e) Any teacher, assistant teacher or other employee
90 whose salary and fringe benefits are paid from early childhood
91 care and education grants under this section may not be deemed to
92 be a state or local school district employee and is not eligible
93 for state health insurance benefits or membership in the Public
94 Employees' Retirement System.

95 (f) Subject to the availability of funds appropriated
96 therefor, the Department of Human Services shall administer the

97 development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the
98 early childhood care and education grant program, including the
99 awards and the application process. Funding shall be provided
100 subject to appropriation beginning with the 2008 fiscal year. The
101 department shall make an annual report to the Legislature and the
102 Governor regarding the effectiveness of the program.

103 (g) This subsection shall stand repealed on July 1,
104 2010.

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