To: Education; Public Health and Human Services

MISSISSIPPI LEGISLATURE
By: Representative Lott

HOUSE BILL NO. 1296

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(3) (a) This subsection shall be known and may be cited as the "Early Learning Collaborative Act of 2007."
(b) The Mississippi Department of Human Services shall implement a voluntary early childhood care and education grant program, which shall be a collaboration among the entities providing prekindergarten programs, including Head Start, licensed child care facilities and public and private school prekindergarten programs. Under this program, eligible entities may submit an application for funds to: (i) defray the cost of additional teaching staff and appropriate educational materials and equipment at existing state certified early childhood programs in order to improve the quality of educational experiences offered to four-year-old children; (ii) extend developmentally appropriate education services at existing state certified programs serving four-year-old children to include practices of high quality instruction; and (iii) administer, implement, monitor and evaluate the programs. Grant funds must be provided on a local entity matching fund basis to be determined by the Department of Human Services.

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

(d) The early childhood care and education program grants must be awarded to successful applicants who meet the criteria developed by a committee appointed by the Governor, consisting of, but not limited to, representatives of the Mississippi Department of Human Services Office for Children and...
Youth, the Mississippi Head Start Association, the Mississippi Head Start Collaboration Office, the State Department of Education, the Mississippi State Department of Health Child Care Licensure Division and licensed child care facilities in the state. The committee shall meet upon call of the Governor and shall organize for business by electing a chairman.

Administrative and clerical support for the committee shall be provided by the Department of Human Services. The committee shall establish grant application criteria, procedures and deadlines. The criteria must include all conditions prescribed in paragraph (c), and must include, but not be limited to: voluntary enrollment of children; qualifications and salary range for teachers and assistant teachers; allowable expenses; children with special needs; use of a center-based curriculum based on the Mississippi Early Learning Guidelines for Four-Year-Old Children, teacher: child ratios; child care facility licensure requirements; and collaboration with other early childhood programs. An equal number of grants must be awarded in each of the state's four (4) congressional districts. Subject to the availability of funds, additional grant awards may be made to high quality projects located in areas of greatest need as determined by: (i) the percentage of four-year-old children not currently being served by prekindergarten programs; or (ii) the existence of a school that is under state supervision or conservatorship due to the low academic performance of students.

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

Subject to the availability of funds appropriated therefor, the Department of Human Services shall administer the
ST: Early childhood care and education grant program; authorize collaboration under DHS.

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

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

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