

April 21, 2007

TO THE MISSISSIPPI HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES:

I am returning House Bill 1681, "AN ACT MAKING AN APPROPRIATION FOR THE PURPOSE OF DEFRAYING THE EXPENSES OF THE OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL FOR FISCAL YEAR 2008" partly approved and partly not approved pursuant to the authority of Article IV, Section 73 of the Mississippi Constitution and assign the following reasons for partial veto of this bill:

After full consideration, I am vetoing Section 14 of House Bill 1681, which appropriates \$5.5 million of Temporary Assistance for Needy Family (TANF) funds to the Attorney General's office for certain programs. Absent this appropriation, those funds would be appropriated to the Department of Human Services (DHS) for the purpose of providing valuable social service programs to the poor.

Each year, the federal government provides funds for the State of Mississippi to provide services to the approximately 22,500 Mississippians on welfare and to help these Mississippians most at risk of sinking into dependency. The State, through DHS, uses these funds for essential social service missions such as monthly assistance payments, help with transportation costs to and from a job, and our state foster care system. In addition, since I have been Governor, my Administration has transferred the maximum amount of TANF funds allowed by the federal government into the child care subsidy program, resulting in more than 20,000 children of low income working mothers benefiting from child care. With this child care assistance, the parents are able to go to work and avoid welfare.

Recent federal welfare reform legislation requires a significant increase in the number of TANF recipients who must meet the federal work participation requirement. If we do not meet this new standard, the State will receive less TANF money. In Mississippi, to meet this new standard, we are redeploying our TANF resources to areas such as job training and transportation subsidies, while maintaining our maximum commitment to child care assistance. In addition, we plan to expand the Adolescent Offender Program statewide, to reduce the risk of youth joining the welfare rolls. Such an expansion would also help meet the objectives of the Department of Justice consent decree by increasing community based services and thus reducing the number of youth assigned to our training schools. In anticipation of the new federal standards, DHS wisely set-aside TANF funds from previous years to fund these new programs.

Section 14 of House Bill 1681 puts these efforts at risk by appropriating valuable resources to the Attorney General's office instead of DHS. In previous years, I have approved legislation which has diverted \$4.5 million of our reoccurring annual allotment of TANF funds from the federal government away from DHS to the Attorney General's office. These funds have benefited Boys and Girls Clubs and the YMCA, which I support. In fact, I am signing into law Section 15 of House Bill 1681 which provides an additional \$1 million for the Boys and Girls Clubs and the Cal Ripken Sr. Foundation.

Section 14 of House Bill 1681 increases the TANF diversion by another \$1 million when DHS faces increased federal mandates. While DHS and I are committed to working with the Boys and Girls Clubs and the YMCA to maintain their activities through the TANF program, the state can not afford for additional TANF funds to be diverted from the core mission of the TANF program.

For these reasons, I urge the members to sustain the partial veto of House Bill 1681.

Respectfully submitted,

Haley Barbour,
GOVERNOR