HOUSE BILL NO. 582

AN ACT TO AMEND SECTION 37-159-9, MISSISSIPPI CODE OF 1972, TO ESTABLISH THE MISSISSIPPI CLASSIFIED SCHOOL EMPLOYEE TEACHER CREDENTIALING AND RETENTION GRANT PROGRAM FOR THE PURPOSE OF PROVIDING SCHOLARSHIPS TO ASSISTANT TEACHERS AND PARAPROFESSIONALS AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO EARN A BACHELOR OF EDUCATION DEGREE FOR THE PURPOSE OF EMPLOYMENT AS LICENSED TEACHERS IN GEOGRAPHICAL CRITICAL TEACHER SHORTAGE AREAS AS DETERMINED BY THE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION; TO REQUIRE PARTICIPATING INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING TO COLLABORATE WITH THE MISSISSIPPI TEACHER CENTER TO IDENTIFY, RECRUIT AND PLACE TEACHER EDUCATION GRADUATES IN GEOGRAPHICAL CRITICAL TEACHER SHORTAGE AREAS; TO REQUIRE ASSISTANT TEACHERS AND PARAPROFESSIONALS WHO COMPLETE THE PROGRAM WITH A BACHELOR OF EDUCATION DEGREE TO COMMIT TO TEACHING IN A PUBLIC SCHOOL IN A GEOGRAPHICAL CRITICAL TEACHER SHORTAGE AREA FOR A PERIOD OF NOT LESS THAN THREE YEARS AFTER COMPLETION; TO PROVIDE THAT INDIVIDUALS THAT FAIL TO COMPLETE THE PROGRAM OR COMPLY WITH EMPLOYMENT REQUIREMENTS SHALL BE LIABLE FOR THE SUM OF ALL AWARDS RECEIVED UNDER THE PROGRAMS, PLUS INTEREST ACCRUING AT THE CURRENT STAFFORD LOAN RATE; TO EXTEND THE DATE OF REPEAL ON THESE PROGRAMS UNTIL JULY 1, 2024; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES.

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

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

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

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

(3) There is established the Mississippi Classified School Employee Teacher Credentialing and Retention Grant Program within the State Department of Education. The purposes of the program shall be to attract additional qualified teachers to those geographical areas of the state where there exists a critical shortage of teachers and to grow persons already serving as assistant teachers or paraprofessionals in geographical critical teacher shortage areas by making available scholarships towards...
earning a Bachelor of Education degree at any institution of higher learning in the State of Mississippi, whether public or private, which has its teacher education program approved by the State Board of Education.

(4) Any institution of higher learning in the State of Mississippi, whether public or private, which offers a Bachelor of Education degree, may apply to the department for participation in the program described in subsection (3) of this section. As part of the program, participating institutions of higher learning shall collaborate with the Mississippi Teacher Center to identify, recruit and place teacher education graduates, from within the state, in school districts situated within those areas of the state where there exists a critical shortage of teachers, as designated by the State Board of Education.

(* * *) 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 under subsections (1) and (2) of this section, and to qualified persons pursuing a Bachelor of Education degree under subsections (3) and (4) of this section, 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 programs shall be classified as residents of the state for tuition purposes.

(∗∗∗6) Students awarded financial scholarships under the University Assisted Teacher Recruitment and Retention Grant Program and the Mississippi Classified School Employee Teacher Credentialing 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 Bachelor of Education degree, Master of Education degree or an Educational Specialist degree, respective to the program in which the student is a participant. Financial scholarships under the programs shall not be based upon an applicant's eligibility for financial aid.

(∗∗∗7) 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 and the Mississippi Classified School Employee Teacher Credentialing 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 and the Mississippi Classified School
Employee Teacher Credentialing and Retention Grant Program.

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 programs in those geographical areas of the
state where there exists a critical shortage of teachers.

Any person participating in the programs who fails
to complete a program of study that will enable that person to
obtain a Bachelor of Education degree, 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 programs, plus interest accruing at the
current Stafford Loan rate at the time the person abrogates his
participation in the programs.

As a condition for participation in the
programs, a teacher, assistant teacher or paraprofessional 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:

(i) For licensed teachers, 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;

(ii) For assistant teachers and paraprofessionals, for a period of not less than three (3) years after obtaining the Bachelor of Education degree; and

(iii) 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 Critical Needs Teacher Scholarship Program.

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

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

(***12) The State Board of Education shall promulgate
rules and regulations necessary for the proper administration of
the University Assisted Teacher Recruitment and Retention Grant
Program and the Mississippi Classified School Employee Teacher Credentialing and Retention Grant Program.

This section shall stand repealed on July 1, 2024.

SECTION 2. This act shall take effect and be in force from and after July 1, 2019.