HOUSE BILL NO. 1667

AN ACT TO REQUIRE THE MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF EMPLOYMENT SECURITY (MDES) TO REPORT TO THE CHAIR OF THE HOUSE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE AND THE CHAIR OF THE SENATE LABOR COMMITTEE THE COSTS INCURRED BY THE STATE UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE FUND THAT HAVE BEEN INCURRED DUE TO THE COVID-19 PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY AND THAT WERE NOT REIMBURSED TO THE MDES OR THE MISSISSIPPI UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE TRUST FUND BY THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT; TO REQUIRE THE LEGISLATURE TO APPROPRIATE FUNDS FROM THE CARES ACT IN THE AMOUNT PROVIDED IN THE MDES REPORT TO REPLENISH THE UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE TRUST FUND; TO PROVIDE THAT MDES SHALL ENSURE, TO THE EXTENT POSSIBLE, THAT ITS PHONE SYSTEM CAN PERFORM CERTAIN FUNCTIONS; TO REQUIRE THE MDES TO ENSURE, TO THE EXTENT POSSIBLE, THAT ITS WEBSITE CONTAINS CERTAIN INFORMATION; TO REQUIRE THE LEGISLATURE TO APPROPRIATE FROM AVAILABLE CARES ACT FUNDS THE NECESSARY FUNDS TO EXPEDITE THE SHIPPING OF DEBIT CARDS TO THOSE PEOPLE WHO HAVE QUALIFIED FOR UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS AND CHosen TO RECEIVE THEIR FUNDS IN THE FORM OF A DEBIT CARD; TO AUTHORIZE THE MDES TO EMPLOY A PROFESSIONAL GROUP OR PERSON TO CREATE PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS REGARDING UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION FOR RADIO AND TELEVISION AND INSTRUCTIONAL VIDEOS TO BE POSTED ON THE MDES WEBSITE; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES.

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

SECTION 1. (1) The Mississippi Department of Employment Security (MDES) shall report to the Chair of the House Workforce Development Committee and the Chair of the Senate Labor Committee costs incurred by the state unemployment insurance fund that have been incurred due to the COVID-19 public health emergency and that
were not reimbursed to the MDES or the Mississippi Unemployment Insurance Trust Fund by the United States government pursuant to Sections 2102 through 2107 or other applicable portions of the CARES Act other than Coronavirus Relief Funds made available to the State under CARES Act Section 5001 (hereinafter known as the "total reimbursement shortfall"). Such report, in addition to stating the total reimbursement shortfall, shall identify the following sums, which, added together, constitute the total reimbursement shortfall:

(a) The total nonfederally-reimbursed costs incurred by the state unemployment insurance funds that have been incurred due to the COVID-19 public health emergency that were attributable to regular Mississippi unemployment assistance payments made to unemployed former employees of reimbursable employers;

(b) The total nonfederally-reimbursed costs incurred by the state unemployment insurance funds that have been incurred due to the COVID-19 public health emergency that were attributable to regular Mississippi unemployment assistance payments made to unemployed former employees of rated employers; and

(c) Any additional administrative expenses incurred by the state by reason of its agreement(s) with the United States government to provide Pandemic Unemployment Assistance, Federal Pandemic Unemployment Assistance, Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Assistance, Disaster Unemployment Assistance, Extended Benefits or any other form of COVID-19-related unemployment assistance for
which federal funds were provided and administrative expenses were allowed under the CARES Act. This report shall be provided within ninety (90) days of the effective date of this act. The Legislature shall appropriate funds from the CARES Act in the amount provided in the MDES report to replenish the Unemployment Insurance Trust Fund or other applicable MDES fund.

(2) The MDES shall ensure, to the extent possible, that its phone system can perform the following functions:

(a) Provide an automated call-back option;

(b) Provide options for the caller to choose to enable him or her to better choose the extension that will meet his or her needs; and

(c) Require that callers will be on hold for thirty (30) minutes or less before speaking to a MDES representative.

(3) The MDES shall ensure, to the extent possible, that its website contains the following information:

(a) Detailed description of all documents and other information that is required to apply for unemployment compensation online;

(b) Instructional video detailing the process of applying for unemployment compensation online;

(c) An online chat capability; and

(d) An option for people who are filing for unemployment compensation or otherwise have questions for the MDES
to choose an appointment time to speak via telephone with a MDES representative.

Such information on the website shall be easy to understand, user-friendly and located on the main webpage. The MDES shall make the website mobile-friendly or create an MDES app for mobile use.

(4) The MDES shall, within seven (7) days of the effective date of this act, report to the Chair of the House Workforce Development Committee and the Chair of the Senate Labor Committee on the feasibility of the improvements required in subsections (2) and (3). The MDES shall provide regular reports of the status of the phone system and webpage to the Chair of the House Workforce Development Committee and the Chair of the Senate Labor Committee.

(5) The Legislature shall appropriate from available CARES Act funds the necessary funds to expedite the shipping of debit cards to those people who have qualified for unemployment benefits and chosen to receive their funds in the form of a debit card.

(6) The MDES shall be authorized to employ a professional group or person to create public service announcements regarding unemployment compensation for radio and television and instructional videos to be posted on the MDES website as provided in subsection (3) of this act. The MDES shall solicit bids from not less than three (3) companies and choose the lowest and best bid. The total amount of the contract shall not be more than One Hundred Thousand Dollars ($100,000.00).
SECTION 2. This act shall take effect and be in force from and after its passage.