

By: Senator(s) Wiggins, Parker, DeBar, Doty, To: Judiciary, Division A  
Branning, Sojourner

## SENATE BILL NO. 2555

1 AN ACT TO AMEND SECTION 43-15-51, MISSISSIPPI CODE OF 1972,  
2 TO PROVIDE A LIMITED IMMUNITY FROM CIVIL LIABILITY TO CHILD  
3 ADVOCACY CENTERS AND MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAM MEMBERS; AND FOR  
4 RELATED PURPOSES.

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

6 **SECTION 1.** Section 43-15-51, Mississippi Code of 1972, is  
7 amended as follows:

8 43-15-51. (1) The district attorneys, the Department of  
9 Human Services or the Department of Child Protection Services may  
10 initiate formal cooperative agreements with the appropriate  
11 agencies to create multidisciplinary child protection teams in  
12 order to implement a coordinated multidisciplinary team approach  
13 to intervention in reports involving alleged commercial sexual  
14 exploitation, human trafficking, or severe or potential felony  
15 child physical or sexual abuse, exploitation, or maltreatment.  
16 The multidisciplinary team also may be known as a child abuse task  
17 force. The purpose of the team or task force shall be to assist  
18 in the evaluation and investigation of reports and to provide  
19 consultation and coordination for agencies involved in child



20 protection cases. The agencies to be included as members of the  
21 multidisciplinary team are: the district attorney's office, city  
22 and county law enforcement agencies, county attorneys, youth court  
23 prosecutors, the Human Trafficking Coordinator or his or her  
24 designee and other agencies as appropriate. The Department of  
25 Child Protection Services shall be included as a member of the  
26 multidisciplinary team if the department does not initiate  
27 creation of the team.

28 (2) To implement the multidisciplinary child abuse team, the  
29 team or task force must be authorized by court order from the  
30 appropriate youth court. The court order will designate which  
31 agencies will participate in the cooperative multidisciplinary  
32 team.

33 (3) (a) Teams created under this section may invite other  
34 persons to serve on the team who have knowledge of and experience  
35 in child abuse and neglect and commercial sexual exploitation and  
36 human trafficking matters. These persons may include licensed  
37 mental and physical health practitioners and physicians, dentists,  
38 representatives of the district attorney's office and the Attorney  
39 General's office, experts in the assessment and treatment of  
40 substance abuse or sexual abuse, the victim assistance coordinator  
41 of the district attorney's office, staff members of a child  
42 advocacy center and experts in providing services to commercial  
43 sexual exploitation and human trafficking victims.



44 (b) (i) A child advocacy center means an agency that  
45 advocates on behalf of children alleged to have been abused and  
46 assists in the coordination of the investigation of child abuse by  
47 providing a location for forensic interviews and promoting the  
48 coordination of services for children alleged to have been abused.  
49 A child advocacy center provides services that include, but are  
50 not limited to, forensic medical examinations, mental health and  
51 related support services, court advocacy, consultation, training  
52 for social workers, law enforcement training, and child abuse  
53 multidisciplinary teams, and staffing of multidisciplinary teams.

54 (ii) Child advocacy centers may provide a  
55 video-taped forensic interview of the child in a child friendly  
56 environment or separate building. The purpose of the video-taped  
57 forensic interview is to prevent further trauma to a child in the  
58 investigation and prosecution of child physical and sexual abuse  
59 cases. Child advocacy centers can also assist child victims by  
60 providing therapeutic counseling subsequent to the interview by a  
61 qualified therapist. Child advocacy centers can also assist law  
62 enforcement and prosecutors by acquainting child victim witnesses  
63 and their parents or guardians to the courtroom through child  
64 court school programs.

65 (4) A team or task force created under this section shall  
66 review records on cases referred to the team by the Department of  
67 Human Services or law enforcement or the district attorney's  
68 office. The team shall meet at least monthly.



69           (5) No person shall disclose information obtained from a  
70 meeting of the multidisciplinary team unless necessary to comply  
71 with Department of Human Services' regulations or conduct and  
72 proceeding in youth court or criminal court proceedings or as  
73 authorized by a court of competent jurisdiction.

74           (6) A child advocacy center or a member of the  
75 multidisciplinary team is not liable for civil damages while  
76 acting within the scope of official team duties if the member, in  
77 good faith, refers a report of alleged child abuse for  
78 investigation, conducts an investigation, makes an investigative  
79 judgment or disposition, or releases or uses information for the  
80 purpose of protecting a child. The limitation of civil liability  
81 does not apply if a multidisciplinary team member is not acting in  
82 good faith.

83           **SECTION 2.** This act shall take effect and be in force from  
84 and after July 1, 2020.

