

By: Representative Scott

To: Education;
Appropriations

HOUSE BILL NO. 1458

1 AN ACT TO ESTABLISH THE ASSISTANT TEACHER SALARY WAIVER GRANT
 2 PROGRAM FOR THE PURPOSE OF HELPING ELIGIBLE ASSISTANT TEACHERS TO
 3 BECOME LICENSED TEACHERS THROUGH THE AWARDING OF GRANTS TO ATTRACT
 4 AND RETAIN QUALIFIED TEACHERS IN THE TEACHING PROFESSION; TO
 5 REQUIRE THE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION TO IMPLEMENT AND ADMINISTER
 6 THE GRANT PROGRAM; TO AUTHORIZE SCHOOL DISTRICTS TO ENTER INTO
 7 AGREEMENTS WITH QUALIFIED ASSISTANT TEACHERS TO WAIVE THAT PORTION
 8 OF THEIR SALARY EQUAL TO THE AMOUNT ESTABLISHED AS THE STATUTORY
 9 MINIMUM SALARY IN LIEU OF A GRANT FOR TUITION AT A POSTSECONDARY
 10 INSTITUTION FOR THE COMPLETION OF A BACCALAUREATE DEGREE FOR
 11 PURPOSES OF BECOMING A LICENSED TEACHER; TO PRESCRIBE THE CRITERIA
 12 TO BE USED IN DETERMINING ELIGIBILITY AND REQUIREMENTS OF THE
 13 PROGRAM; TO REQUIRE THE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION TO MAKE AN ANNUAL
 14 REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE BY DECEMBER 31 OF EACH YEAR ON THE
 15 NUMBER OF VACANT TEACHER POSITIONS THAT ARE AVAILABLE THROUGHOUT
 16 THE STATE AND THE NUMBER OF TEACHER POSITIONS FILLED BY
 17 INDIVIDUALS WHO HOLD A PROVISIONAL OR EMERGENCY LICENSE; TO IMPOSE
 18 FINANCIAL LIABILITY UPON ANY INDIVIDUAL WHO FAILS TO FULFILL HIS
 19 OR HER TEACHING OBLIGATION UNDER THE GRANT PROGRAM UPON COMPLETING
 20 A BACCALAUREATE DEGREE; TO AMEND SECTION 37-21-7, MISSISSIPPI CODE
 21 OF 1972, IN CONFORMITY TO THE PROVISIONS OF THIS ACT; AND FOR
 22 RELATED PURPOSES.

23 WHEREAS, for all students to learn well in an academically
 24 competitive global society, they must have highly skilled,
 25 committed and professionally supported teachers in every core
 26 content area of the state's adopted curriculum standards; and

27 WHEREAS, nationally there are simply not enough such teachers
 28 entering the profession or committing to long-term careers in the



29 profession, and a variety of actions from many individuals and
30 organizations are needed to recruit, prepare and retain a
31 sufficient number of licensed teachers; and

32 WHEREAS, it is the intent of this Legislature to reinforce
33 the commitment that the State of Mississippi has always had to its
34 public educational system, the children and families served, and
35 to the educational professionals who provide daily instruction to
36 ensure that our state's most valuable resource is equipped to
37 compete and succeed on the global academic stage, by further
38 investing in the training and preparation of educators and
39 prospective educators in order to place quality teachers in every
40 classroom; and

41 WHEREAS, teacher quality includes, but is not limited to,
42 appropriate subject matter content knowledge; deep interest in
43 core subject content areas; a commitment to lifelong professional
44 improvement; the desire and skill to help students learn and apply
45 subject content-specific knowledge; and the ability to use the
46 resources necessary to teach effectively; and

47 WHEREAS, the welfare of all our children calls for policies
48 to attract new teachers into the profession in a way that benefits
49 all students, as the shortage of teachers hurts all of our schools
50 by increasing job stress on teachers and administrators alike,
51 which in turn leads to increased turnover of staff, undermines
52 curriculum quality and hinders efforts at staff development; and



53 WHEREAS, moreover, the shortage of qualified teachers hurts
54 our children by forcing too many students into too few classrooms,
55 reducing the amount of time that teachers can spend helping
56 individual students, and spans the breadth of education,
57 threatening to deprive the children of all races and social
58 classes, in rural, urban and suburban communities, of the quality
59 education needed to meet the challenges of the future; and

60 WHEREAS, in view of this pending crisis, the Mississippi
61 Legislature believes that addressing the growing shortage of
62 quality teachers must become one of our state's highest public
63 policy priorities, and we call on all legislators to come together
64 in a bipartisan effort to craft policies that promote more
65 vigorously the recruitment, retention and development of quality
66 teachers for all our children; NOW, THEREFORE,

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

68 **SECTION 1.** (1) There is established the Assistant Teacher
69 Salary Waiver Grant Program for the purpose of helping eligible
70 assistant teachers to become licensed teachers through the
71 awarding of grants to attract and retain qualified teachers in the
72 teaching profession. The grant program must be implemented and
73 administered by the State Board of Education.

74 (2) Under the Assistant Teacher Salary Waiver Grant Program,
75 qualified assistant teachers may be awarded financial assistance
76 in an amount equal to the minimum annual salary established for
77 assistant teachers under Section 37-21-7. However, an assistant



78 teacher may not receive a salary waiver grant through the program
79 for more than two (2) academic years. An assistant teacher grant
80 may not be based upon an applicant's financial need, and the
81 receipt of any other grant or financial assistance may not affect
82 an assistant teacher's eligibility under the program.

83 (3) In order to qualify for an assistant teacher grant, an
84 applicant must satisfy the following requirements:

85 (a) The applicant must be employed full-time as an
86 assistant teacher with a local school district, with a minimum of
87 five (5) years of classroom experience;

88 (b) The applicant must be enrolled as a full-time
89 student at a baccalaureate degree-granting institution of higher
90 learning in the State of Mississippi that is regionally accredited
91 and approved by the board with two (2) years or less remaining
92 until he or she completes all courses for graduation;

93 (c) The applicant must maintain a minimum cumulative
94 grade point average of 2.5 calculated on a 4.0 scale for the
95 duration of his or her academic tenure;

96 (d) The applicant must achieve a qualifying score on
97 the Praxis Core Academic Skills for Education examination as
98 established by the State Board of Education upon completion of his
99 or her first academic year of course instruction;

100 (e) The applicant must sign a salary waiver statement
101 that expresses that the assistant teacher will waive the
102 statutorily authorized portion of his or her salary authorized



103 under Section 37-21-7 for purposes of receiving a grant to be paid
104 towards tuition and any books and other instructional material
105 required by the institution of higher learning of enrollment and
106 directly related to pre-major coursework; and

107 (f) The applicant must have expressed in writing a
108 present intention to teach in the state for each year he or she
109 receives a grant.

110 (4) At the beginning of the school year next succeeding the
111 date on which a person who has received an assistant teacher grant
112 obtains a baccalaureate degree, that person must begin to render
113 service as a licensed teacher in the school district of employment
114 at the time the person entered the grant program or in a school
115 district designated by the State Board of Education. The State
116 Board of Education shall report to the Legislature, by December 31
117 of each year, the number of vacant teacher positions that are
118 available throughout the state and the number of teacher positions
119 filled by individuals who hold a provisional or emergency license.
120 An assistant teacher who receives a grant under this section and
121 fails to fulfill his or her required teaching obligations is
122 liable to the school district of employment for which the salary
123 waiver agreement was entered for the sum of all grants made to
124 that person plus a penalty of five percent (5%) of the loan awards
125 and interest on the combined amount accruing at the current
126 unsubsidized Federal Stafford loan rate at the time the person
127 abrogates.



128 **SECTION 2.** Section 37-21-7, Mississippi Code of 1972, is
129 amended as follows:

130 37-21-7. (1) This section shall be referred to as the
131 "Mississippi Elementary Schools Assistant Teacher Program," the
132 purpose of which shall be to provide an early childhood education
133 program that assists in the instruction of basic skills. The
134 State Board of Education is authorized, empowered and directed to
135 implement a statewide system of assistant teachers in kindergarten
136 classes and in the first, second and third grades. The assistant
137 teacher shall assist pupils in actual instruction under the strict
138 supervision of a licensed teacher.

139 (2) (a) Except as otherwise authorized under subsection
140 (7), each school district shall employ the total number of
141 assistant teachers funded under subsection (6) of this section.
142 The superintendent of each district shall assign the assistant
143 teachers to the kindergarten, first-, second- and third-grade
144 classes in the district in a manner that will promote the maximum
145 efficiency, as determined by the superintendent, in the
146 instruction of skills such as verbal and linguistic skills,
147 logical and mathematical skills, and social skills.

148 (b) If a licensed teacher to whom an assistant teacher
149 has been assigned is required to be absent from the classroom, the
150 assistant teacher may assume responsibility for the classroom in
151 lieu of a substitute teacher. However, no assistant teacher shall
152 assume sole responsibility of the classroom for more than three



153 (3) consecutive school days. Further, in no event shall any
154 assistant teacher be assigned to serve as a substitute teacher for
155 any teacher other than the licensed teacher to whom that assistant
156 teacher has been assigned.

157 (3) Assistant teachers shall have, at a minimum, a high
158 school diploma or a High School Equivalency Diploma equivalent,
159 and shall show demonstratable proficiency in reading and writing
160 skills. The State Department of Education shall develop a testing
161 procedure for assistant teacher applicants to be used in all
162 school districts in the state.

163 (4) (a) In order to receive funding, each school district
164 shall:

165 (i) Submit a plan on the implementation of a
166 reading improvement program to the State Department of Education;
167 and

168 (ii) Develop a plan of educational accountability
169 and assessment of performance, including pretests and posttests,
170 for reading in Grades 1 through 6.

171 (b) Additionally, each school district shall:

172 (i) Provide annually a mandatory preservice
173 orientation session, using an existing in-school service day, for
174 administrators and teachers on the effective use of assistant
175 teachers as part of a team in the classroom setting and on the
176 role of assistant teachers, with emphasis on program goals;



177 (ii) Hold periodic workshops for administrators
178 and teachers on the effective use and supervision of assistant
179 teachers;

180 (iii) Provide training annually on specific
181 instructional skills for assistant teachers;

182 (iv) Annually evaluate their program in accordance
183 with their educational accountability and assessment of
184 performance plan; and

185 (v) Designate the necessary personnel to supervise
186 and report on their program.

187 (5) The State Department of Education shall:

188 (a) Develop and assist in the implementation of a
189 statewide uniform training module, subject to the availability of
190 funds specifically appropriated therefor by the Legislature, which
191 shall be used in all school districts for training administrators,
192 teachers and assistant teachers. The module shall provide for the
193 consolidated training of each assistant teacher and teacher to
194 whom the assistant teacher is assigned, working together as a
195 team, and shall require further periodic training for
196 administrators, teachers and assistant teachers regarding the role
197 of assistant teachers;

198 (b) Annually evaluate the program on the district and
199 state level. Subject to the availability of funds specifically
200 appropriated therefor by the Legislature, the department shall
201 develop: (i) uniform evaluation reports, to be performed by the



202 principal or assistant principal, to collect data for the annual
203 overall program evaluation conducted by the department; or (ii) a
204 program evaluation model that, at a minimum, addresses process
205 evaluation; and

206 (c) Promulgate rules, regulations and such other
207 standards deemed necessary to effectuate the purposes of this
208 section. Noncompliance with the provisions of this section and
209 any rules, regulations or standards adopted by the department may
210 result in a violation of compulsory accreditation standards as
211 established by the State Board of Education and the Commission on
212 School Accreditation.

213 (6) (a) In addition to other funds allotted under the
214 Minimum Education or Adequate Education Program, each school
215 district shall be allotted sufficient funding for the purpose of
216 employing assistant teachers. No assistant teacher shall be paid
217 less than the amount he or she received in the prior school year.
218 No school district shall receive any funds under this section for
219 any school year during which the aggregate amount of the local
220 contribution to the salaries of assistant teachers by the district
221 shall have been reduced below such amount for the previous year.

222 For assistant teachers, the minimum annual salary shall be as
223 follows:

224 2022-2023 and Subsequent Years Minimum Salary.....\$17,000.00

225 * * *



226 (b) As an alternative to compensating an assistant
227 teacher the minimum salary prescribed under paragraph (a) of this
228 subsection, a school district may enter into agreement with an
229 eligible assistant teacher for the payment of an Assistant Teacher
230 Salary Waiver Grant for educational purposes as authorized under
231 Section 1 of House Bill No. , 2023 Regular Session.

232 (c) The assistant teachers shall not be restricted to
233 working only in the grades for which the funds were allotted, but
234 may be assigned to other classes as provided in subsection (2) (a)
235 of this section.

236 (7) (a) As an alternative to employing assistant teachers,
237 any school district may use the allotment provided under
238 subsection (6) of this section for the purpose of employing
239 licensed teachers for kindergarten, first-, second- and
240 third-grade classes; however, no school district shall be
241 authorized to use the allotment for assistant teachers for the
242 purpose of employing licensed teachers unless the district has
243 established that the employment of licensed teachers using such
244 funds will reduce the teacher:student ratio in the kindergarten,
245 first-, second- and third-grade classes. All state funds for
246 assistant teachers shall be applied to reducing teacher:student
247 ratio in Grades K-3.

248 It is the intent of the Legislature that no school district
249 shall dismiss any assistant teacher for the purpose of using the
250 assistant teacher allotment to employ licensed teachers. School



251 districts may rely only upon normal attrition to reduce the number
252 of assistant teachers employed in that district.

253 (b) Districts meeting the highest levels of
254 accreditation standards, as defined by the State Board of
255 Education, shall be exempted from the provisions of subsection (4)
256 of this section.

257 **SECTION 3.** This act shall take effect and be in force from
258 and after July 1, 2023.

