

By: Senator(s) Parks

To: Universities and
Colleges; Appropriations

SENATE BILL NO. 2580

1 AN ACT TO AMEND SECTION 37-106-75, MISSISSIPPI CODE OF 1972,
 2 TO REVISE THE PROVISIONS OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION LEGISLATIVE PLAN
 3 (HELP) GRANT TO PRESCRIBE AWARD MINIMUMS BASED ON CLASSIFICATION
 4 AND ENROLLMENT STATUS; TO AMEND SECTION 37-106-29, MISSISSIPPI
 5 CODE OF 1972, TO REVISE THE PROVISIONS OF THE MISSISSIPPI RESIDENT
 6 TUITION ASSISTANCE GRANT PROGRAM FOR THE PURPOSE OF STRENGTHENING
 7 MISSISSIPPI'S WORKFORCE PIPELINE; TO PROVIDE MORE MISSISSIPPIANS
 8 ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE EDUCATION PATHWAYS FOR IN-DEMAND CAREERS; TO
 9 RENAME THE PROGRAM AS THE "MTAG WORKS GRANT PROGRAM"; TO ESTABLISH
 10 ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR RECIPIENTS TO QUALIFY FOR GRANT AWARDS;
 11 TO PROVIDE FOR BONUSES FOR STUDENTS ENROLLED IN EDUCATION PROGRAMS
 12 THAT LEAD TO EMPLOYMENT IN A HIGH-NEED OR HIGH-DEMAND FIELD; AND
 13 FOR RELATED PURPOSES.

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

15 **SECTION 1.** Section 37-106-75, Mississippi Code of 1972, is
 16 amended as follows:

17 37-106-75. (1) The Legislature hereby establishes the
 18 Higher Education Legislative Plan Grant Program.

19 (2) For purposes of this section:

20 (a) "Institution of higher education" shall mean any
 21 state institution of higher learning or public community or junior
 22 college, or any regionally accredited, state-approved, nonprofit



23 two-year or four-year college or university located in the State
24 of Mississippi approved by the board.

25 (b) "Tuition" shall mean the semester or trimester or
26 term charges and all required fees imposed by an institution of
27 higher education as a condition of enrollment by all
28 students. * * *

29 (3) * * * The state * * * shall make awards to students who
30 enroll at any approved state institution of higher education to
31 pursue an academic undergraduate degree who apply for the
32 assistance under the program and who meet all of the following
33 qualifications:

34 (a) Resident of the State of Mississippi. Resident
35 status for the purpose of receiving assistance under this chapter
36 shall be determined in the same manner as resident status for
37 tuition purposes in Sections 37-103-1 through 37-103-29, with the
38 exception of Section 37-103-17;

39 (b) Graduate from high school within the two (2) years
40 preceding the application with a minimum cumulative grade point
41 average of 2.5 calculated on a 4.0 scale;

42 * * *

43 (* * * c) Have a composite score on the American
44 College Test of at least twenty (20) on the 1989 version or an
45 equivalent concordant value on an enhanced version of such test;
46 and



47 (* * *d) Have no criminal record, except for
48 misdemeanor traffic violations * * *.

49 * * *

50 (4) * * * The state * * * shall make awards to students who
51 enroll at any approved state institution of higher education to
52 pursue an academic undergraduate degree or associate degree who
53 apply for assistance under the program and who meet the
54 qualifications established in * * * subsection (3) * * *. The
55 award may be applied to tuition, rooms, meals, books, materials
56 and fees, and any other education-related expenses as long as the
57 student's total award package does not exceed the student's cost
58 of attendance as determined by the institution.

59 (5) Award amounts for junior and senior students attending
60 public four-year universities in the State of Mississippi shall be
61 equal to tuition and required fees. Award amounts for junior and
62 senior students attending four-year regionally accredited,
63 state-approved, nonprofit colleges and universities in the State
64 of Mississippi shall be equal to the average tuition and required
65 fees charged by the state's public four-year universities. Award
66 amounts for freshmen and sophomore students attending public
67 two-year colleges in the State of Mississippi shall be equal to
68 tuition and required fees. Award amounts for freshmen and
69 sophomore students attending public four-year universities or
70 regionally accredited, state-approved nonprofit two-year or
71 four-year colleges and universities in the State of Mississippi,



72 shall be equal to the average tuition and required fees charged by
73 the state's public two-year colleges.

74 (* * *6) To maintain continued state payment of * * * the
75 grant, once enrolled in an institution of higher education, a
76 student shall meet all of the following requirements:

77 (a) Make steady academic progress toward a degree,
78 earning not less than the minimum number of hours of credit
79 required for full-time standing in each academic period requiring
80 such enrollment;

81 (b) Maintain continuous enrollment for not less than
82 two (2) semesters or three (3) quarters in each successive
83 academic year, unless granted an exception for cause by the board;

84 (c) Have a cumulative grade point average of at least
85 2.5 calculated on a 4.0 scale at the end of the first academic
86 year and thereafter maintain such a cumulative grade point average
87 as evaluated at the end of each academic year;

88 (d) Have no criminal record, except for misdemeanor
89 traffic violations; and

90 (e) Be in financial need.

91 (* * *7) The provisions of this section shall be
92 administered by the board. The board may promulgate rules for all
93 matters necessary for the implementation of this section. By
94 rule, the board shall provide for:

95 (a) A mechanism for informing all students of the
96 availability of the assistance provided under this section early



97 enough in their schooling that a salutary motivational effect is
98 possible; and

99 (b) Applications, forms, financial audit procedures,
100 eligibility and other program audit procedures and other matters
101 related to efficient operation * * *.

102 * * *

103 (* * *8) An applicant shall be found to be in financial
104 need if:

105 (a) The family has one (1) child under the age of
106 twenty-one (21), and the annual adjusted gross income of the
107 family is less than Forty-two Thousand Five Hundred Dollars
108 (\$42,500.00); or

109 (b) The family has an annual adjusted gross income of
110 less than Forty-two Thousand Five Hundred Dollars (\$42,500.00)
111 plus Five Thousand Dollars (\$5,000.00) for each additional child
112 under the age of twenty-one (21).

113 The annual adjusted gross income of the family shall be
114 verified by completion of the Free Application for Federal Student
115 Aid (FAFSA) and the completion of the verification process if the
116 applicant is selected for it.

117 As used in this subsection, the term "family" for an
118 unemancipated applicant means the applicant, the applicant's
119 parents and other children under age twenty-one (21) of the
120 applicant's parents. The term "family" for an emancipated



121 applicant means the applicant, an applicant's spouse, and any
122 children under age twenty-one (21) of the applicant and spouse.

123 (* * *9) No student shall receive a grant under this
124 section in an amount greater than the tuition charged by the
125 school. The student must apply for a federal grant prior to
126 receiving state funds.

127 **SECTION 2.** Section 37-106-29, Mississippi Code of 1972, is
128 amended as follows:

129 37-106-29. (1) There is established the Mississippi
130 Resident Tuition Assistance Grant Program, which shall be called
131 "MTAG Works" to signify the state's commitment to strengthening
132 Mississippi's workforce pipeline by providing expanded access to
133 postsecondary education for working adults and part-time students
134 in addition to students matriculating from high school. The grant
135 shall be for college or university freshmen, sophomores, juniors
136 and seniors to be administered by the Mississippi Postsecondary
137 Education Financial Assistance Board established under Section
138 37-106-9, Mississippi Code of 1972, which shall set the dates and
139 deadlines for applying for an award under this section. The board
140 shall establish such rules and regulations as it deems necessary
141 and proper to carry out the purposes and intent of this section.

142 (2) The board shall approve grants to full-time freshmen,
143 sophomore, junior and senior Mississippi residents who meet the
144 general requirements for student eligibility as provided in
145 subsection (4) of this section.



146 (3) * * * MTAG Works grants shall be for Mississippi
147 resident students from any Mississippi family whose prior year
148 adjusted gross income (AGI) * * * does not exceed two hundred
149 percent (200%) of the state's family median income as determined
150 by the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. The award * * *
151 may be applied to tuition, rooms and meals, books,
152 materials * * *, fees * * * and any other education-related
153 expense, as long as the student's total award package does not
154 exceed the student's cost of attendance as determined by the
155 institution. Award amounts for full-time students shall not be
156 less than Two Thousand Dollars (\$2,000.00) for junior and senior
157 students attending state institutions of higher learning in
158 Mississippi or four-year regionally accredited, state-approved,
159 nonprofit colleges and universities in Mississippi, and * * * One
160 Thousand Dollars (\$1,000.00) for freshmen and sophomores attending
161 state institutions of higher learning or public community or
162 junior colleges in Mississippi, or regionally accredited,
163 state-approved, nonprofit two-year or four-year colleges in
164 Mississippi * * *. Award amounts for part-time students will be
165 reduced as determined by the board.

166 (4) The general requirements for initial eligibility of
167 students for * * * MTAG Works Grants consist of the following:

168 (a) Member of a Mississippi family whose prior year
169 adjusted gross income (AGI) exceeds * * * one hundred percent



170 (100%) of the state's median family income as determined by the
171 Free Application for Federal Student Aid.

172 (b) Acceptance for enrollment at any state institution
173 of higher learning or public community or junior college located
174 in Mississippi, or any regionally accredited, state-approved,
175 nonprofit two-year or four-year college or university located in
176 Mississippi and approved by the board.

177 * * *

178 (* * *c) Any student currently enrolled in any
179 qualified institution shall have to only meet the same
180 requirements as students who are applying for a renewal award.

181 * * *

182 (* * *5) Eligibility for renewal of * * * MTAG Works grants
183 shall be evaluated at the end of * * * each academic year. As a
184 condition for renewal, a student shall:

185 (a) Make steady academic progress toward a certificate
186 or degree, as outlined in the school Satisfactory Academic
187 Progress Standards and certified by the institution's registrar.

188 * * *

189 (* * *b) Have a cumulative grade point average of at
190 least 2.50 calculated on a 4.0 scale at the end of each * * *
191 academic year.

192 (* * *6) Each student, each year, must complete * * * the
193 Free Application for Federal Student Aid * * * to determine his or
194 her eligibility for a * * * MTAG Works grant.



195 (* * *7) (a) The amount of the * * * MTAG Works grant
196 awarded to any one (1) full-time student * * * shall be determined
197 by the board, but shall not be less than the amount provided in
198 subsection (3) of this section * * *. The amount of the MTAG
199 Works grant awarded to any one (1) student enrolled less than
200 full-time shall be a reduced amount determined by the board.

201 (b) A bonus shall be paid to any MTAG Works recipient
202 who is enrolled as a full-time student in an education program
203 that leads to employment in a high-need or high-demand field as
204 determined by the Mississippi Office of Workforce Development
205 (Accelerate Mississippi). A reduced bonus amount determined by
206 the board shall be paid to any MTAG Works recipient who is
207 enrolled less than full-time in an approved education program that
208 led to employment in a high-need or high-demand field.

209 (* * *c) Payment of the * * * MTAG Works grant shall
210 be made payable to the recipient and the educational institution
211 and * * * delivered directly to the institution * * *.

212 (8) (a) By accepting a MTAG Works grant, the student is
213 attesting that the information provided demonstrates that the
214 student's eligibility is accurate, complete and correct.
215 Falsification of such information shall result in the denial of
216 any pending grant and revocation of any award currently held to
217 the extent that no further payments shall be made by the board on
218 the student's behalf. Any student knowingly making false
219 statements in order to receive a grant shall be guilty of a



220 misdemeanor and, upon conviction thereof, shall be punishable by a
221 fine not to exceed Ten Thousand Dollars (\$10,000.00), or
222 imprisonment up to one (1) year in the county jail, or by both
223 such fine and imprisonment.

224 (b) In addition to any such fine or imprisonment which
225 may be imposed, the court shall order that restitution be made to
226 the board. The measure for restitution in money shall be the
227 current replacement value of the actual monetary benefit received
228 under the MTAG Works Grant Program plus any interest accrued
229 thereon.

230 (9) In order for an institution to remain eligible for its
231 students to participate in the * * * MTAG Works Grant Program, the
232 institution shall comply with the following requirements:

233 (a) A complete and accurate roster of the eligibility
234 status of each awarded student shall be made to the board for each
235 term, semester or quarter of the academic year the student
236 receives a * * * MTAG Works grant.

237 (b) The institution is required to make refunds to
238 the * * * MTAG Works Grant Fund for any funds * * * for which the
239 student is ineligible according to the rules established by the
240 board.

241 (c) * * * The award for an eligible student * * *
242 enrolled for less than full-time status * * *, as defined by the
243 board, will be prorated based on the student's level of
244 enrollment.



245 (d) The board may conduct its own annual audits of any
246 institution participating in the * * * MTAG Works Grant Program.
247 The board may suspend or revoke an institution's eligibility to
248 receive future monies under the program if it finds that the
249 institution has not complied with the provisions of this section.
250 In determining a student's initial eligibility, the number of
251 prior semesters enrolled will not be counted against the student.

252 (10) No student may receive a * * * MTAG Works grant for
253 more than the equivalent semesters or quarters required to
254 complete one (1) baccalaureate degree or one (1) certificate or
255 associate degree program per institution.

256 (11) No student receiving * * * another state grant for
257 undergraduate education shall be eligible to receive the * * *
258 MTAG Works Grant pursuant to this section * * *.

259 For purposes of this section, certificated shall mean, but
260 not be limited to, all postsecondary vocational programs in
261 eligible institutions approved by the board.

262 **SECTION 3.** The board shall determine the annual award and
263 bonus amounts. It is the intention of the Legislature that award
264 amounts for full-time junior and senior students equal
265 approximately twenty percent (20%) to twenty-five percent (25%) of
266 the average tuition of the state's public four-year universities
267 and bonus amounts equal approximately twenty-five percent (25%) of
268 the full-time award. Award amounts for full-time freshmen and
269 sophomore students shall be half of the amount determined by the



270 board to be awarded for juniors and seniors. If funds are
271 insufficient to make full awards to all eligible students, the
272 board shall first withhold or restrict bonuses. The board shall
273 then prorate awards among all eligible students.

274 **SECTION 4.** Initial awards under the MTAG Works Grant Program
275 shall be made first available during the 2024-2025 academic year.

276 **SECTION 5.** Any student who previously received a Mississippi
277 Resident Tuition Assistance Grant, but does not qualify for a MTAG
278 Works Grant, shall continue to receive the Mississippi Resident
279 Tuition Assistance Grant through the 2026-2027 academic year
280 according to the rules and regulations established by the board.

281 **SECTION 6.** This act shall take effect and be in force from
282 and after July 1, 2023.

