

By: Representative Bell (21st)

To: Workforce Development;
Appropriations E

HOUSE BILL NO. 11

1 AN ACT TO CREATE THE MISSISSIPPI CAREER AND TECHNICAL
2 EDUCATION EMPLOYABILITY (MISSCATEE) PROGRAM, WHICH SHALL BE
3 DIRECTED BY THE OFFICE OF WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT FOR THE PURPOSE OF
4 PROVIDING TUITION-FREE COMMUNITY COLLEGE ATTENDANCE FOR ELIGIBLE
5 RECIPIENTS FOR CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION (CTE) AND TRAINING
6 LEADING TO ASSOCIATE DEGREE CREDENTIALS OR INDUSTRY CERTIFICATIONS
7 IN HIGH-WAGE, HIGH-DEMAND INDUSTRIES WITH DOCUMENTED WORKFORCE
8 SHORTAGES PRIORITIZED BY THE OFFICE; TO PROVIDE FOR DEFINITIONS;
9 TO PROVIDE THAT THE OFFICE OF WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT (ACCELERATE
10 MS) SHALL SERVE AS FISCAL AGENT IN ADMINISTERING THE FUNDS; TO
11 PRESCRIBE THE REQUIREMENTS TO ESTABLISH ELIGIBILITY AND TO REMAIN
12 ELIGIBLE FOR THE RECEIPT OF PROGRAM FUNDS; TO PROVIDE THAT THE
13 RECIPIENT OF A GRANT SHALL COMMIT TO SERVING IN THE INDUSTRY
14 SECTOR FOR WHICH HIS DEGREE CREDENTIAL OR INDUSTRY CERTIFICATION
15 WAS GRANTED FOR SUCH A PERIOD OF TIME IN THE STATE AS DETERMINED
16 BY THE OFFICE OF WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT; TO PROVIDE THE REPORTING
17 REQUIREMENTS; TO PROVIDE FOR THE RECOUPING OF FUNDS BY THE OFFICER
18 OF WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT FROM ANY RECIPIENT WHO FAILS TO ADHERE TO
19 HIS OR HER AGREEMENT REGARDING COMPLETION OF THE PROGRAM OR WORK
20 AND RESIDENCY COMMITMENT; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES.

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

22 **SECTION 1.** This act shall be known and cited as the
23 "Mississippi Connecting Career and Technical Education
24 Employability (MissCATEE) Program."

25 **SECTION 2.** (1) The Legislature finds that establishing
26 attainable workforce goals reflect Mississippi's commitment to
27 creating a pipeline of skilled workers to address workforce



shortages and build a sustainable economic future begins with investing in career and technical education (CTE) programs that meet the needs of employers and communities. Mississippi's workforce development goals center around equipping its citizens with the skills necessary to meet the demands of high-growth, high-demand industries. These goals, include the following:

(a) Expanded career and technical education (CTE) opportunities, which:

(i) Increase access to CTE programs at community colleges to prepare students for technical and skilled trade careers;

(ii) Focus on industry-recognized certifications and associate degrees aligned with state workforce needs; and

(iii) Promote dual-enrollment opportunities for high school students to participate in CTE pathways;

(b) Align education and training with emphasis on Mississippi's workforce development sector strategies targeting industries with workforce shortages. High-priority sectors include:

(i) Advanced manufacturing: addressing the growing need for skilled machinists, engineers and technicians;

(ii) Healthcare: expanding the pipeline for nurses, allied health professionals and paramedics;

(iii) Information technology: preparing workers for roles in cybersecurity, software development and IT support;



(iv) Transportation and logistics: training workers for commercial driving, warehousing and supply chain management; and

(v) Energy and construction: focusing on renewable energy technologies, traditional utilities and skilled trades like electricians and plumbers;

(c) Address workforce shortages in rural areas to:

(i) Prioritize investments in CTE programs to serve underserved rural communities where skilled labor gaps are most acute; and

(ii) Develop programs to retain graduates within the state, with special incentives for those who commit to working in rural areas;

(d) Promote lifelong learning and upskilling that:

(i) Encourage adults aged eighteen (18) and older to re-enter the workforce or enhance their skills through CTE programs; and

(ii) Provide pathways for individuals without postsecondary education to earn certifications or degrees, fostering upward economic mobility;

(e) Support economic resilience through public-private partnerships by:

(i) Collaborating with industries to identify workforce needs and design CTE curricula that address specific skill gaps; and



(ii) Incentivizing employers to participate in apprenticeship programs, internships and on-the-job training for students;

(f) Increase access to funding and support services that:

(i) Offer financial aid programs, like tuition-free grants or scholarships, to eliminate barriers to CTE participation; and

(ii) Provide wraparound support services such as childcare, transportation and academic counseling to ensure student success; and

(g) Focus on data-driven workforce solutions that:

(i) Use labor market data to identify emerging industries and predict workforce needs; and

(ii) Regularly update sector strategies and CTE offerings to reflect changes in Mississippi's economic landscape.

(2) Therefore, the intent of the Legislature is:

(a) To provide funding to the Office of Workforce Development to establish a scholarship program for the purposes outlined herein.

(b) To provide tuition-free access to community colleges with accredited CTE programs that are aligned with Mississippi's workforce sector strategies, as identified by Accelerate MS, which result in a degree credential or industry



certification in an identified industry sector, ensuring a pipeline of skilled workers to meet the state's economic demands.

(c) To gauge the effectiveness of this program by gathering data related to the participation and employment outcomes in order to replicate successful efforts in future workforce development programs.

SECTION 3. (1) There is established the Mississippi Connecting Career and Technical Education Employability (MissCATEE) Program, which shall be directed by the Office of Workforce Development (Accelerate MS) for the purpose of providing tuition-free community college attendance for eligible recipients for career and technical education (CTE) and training for associate degree credential or industry certification in high-wage, high-demand industries with documented workforce shortages prioritized by the office. This program shall be subject to the availability of funds appropriated by the Legislature.

(2) As used in this section, the following words and phrases shall have the meanings as defined herein unless the context clearly indicates otherwise:

(a) "Accelerate MS" or "office" means the Office of Workforce Development.

(b) "Eligible institution" means any community college, local workforce development area or other eligible recipient of funding under this section.



127 (c) "Eligible program" means a career and technical
128 (CTE) program administered at an eligible institution and approved
129 by the Office of Workforce Development (Accelerate MS), which is
130 aligned with identified workforce sector strategies.

131 (d) "Eligible recipient" means a person who:

132 (i) Has been a resident of Mississippi for at
133 least one (1) year prior to enrollment in an eligible program at
134 an eligible institution and continues to physically reside herein;

135 (ii) Is a United States citizen, lawful permanent
136 resident, or non-citizen eligible under Title IV regulations for
137 student aid eligibility;

138 (iii) Is at least eighteen (18) years of age;

139 (iv) Has a high school diploma, GED or equivalent;

140 (v) Is enrolled in an eligible CTE program at a
141 Mississippi community college;

142 (vi) Has completed a Free Application for Federal
143 Student Aid (FAFSA);

144 (vii) Maintains satisfactory academic progress as
145 defined by the administering institution upon enrollment;

146 (viii) Has not previously earned an associate or
147 bachelor's degree; and

148 (ix) Agrees to remain in the State of Mississippi
149 and work in the industry sector in which the degree credential or
150 industry certification was earned for such a period of time as



prescribed by policies promulgated by the Office of Workforce Development for each sector strategy.

(e) "High-wage, high-demand industry" means those industries paying above Mississippi's median annual income and prioritized by the office across the eight (8) workforce ecosystems.

(f) "Sector strategy" means the workforce needs of an industry within a regional labor market that has been collaboratively identified by a partnership of employers within a critical industry that brings together education, economic development, workforce systems and community organizations to collaboratively provide job-readiness training (including professional skills development), occupational skills training and support services.

(3) The Office of Workforce Development shall serve as fiscal agent in administering the funds, and shall disburse appropriate funds to eligible institutions on a semester basis upon receipt of verification of eligible recipients' enrollment in an eligible program.

(4) Subject to appropriation by the Legislature, allocations to eligible recipients shall be awarded to the eligible institution of enrollment by the office through an application process.

(5) The office shall:



(a) Inform each recipient of the amount his or her portion of the program funds available for use, dependent on enrollment as a full-time or part-time student; and

(b) Develop regulations and procedures to govern the administration of the program.

(7) The office may use a minimal amount of funds allocated for this section for the administration of the program, to be approved by the State Workforce Investment Board Executive Committee.

SECTION 4. The office shall enter into a contract agreement with each eligible recipient of funds under the program that incorporates the following obligations and conditions:

(a) The recipient of funds shall commit to working in the industry sector which correlates to his or her earned degree credential or industry certification within the State of Mississippi such a period of time as prescribed by policies promulgated by the Office of Workforce Development for each sector strategy;

(b) If any recipient of program funds does not engage in working in the industry sector which correlates to his or her earned degree credential or industry certification in accordance with the terms of this act, the recipient shall be obligated to repay all amounts received, together with interest thereon at the maximum rate allowed by Mississippi law or the federal discount rate plus five percent (5%) per year, whichever is less, the



interest to accrue from the date that each payment of funds was received by the recipient;

(c) No interest shall accrue and there shall be no obligation to repay the principal sums accrued during any one (1) period of time that the recipient involuntarily serves on active duty in the United States Armed Forces; and

(d) Repayment of the principal with interest shall be due and payable in full immediately on the occurrence of either of the following events:

(i) Failure to remain in the State of Mississippi for such a period of time as prescribed by policies promulgated by the Office of Workforce Development for each sector strategy for any reason other than temporary personal illness; or

(ii) Failure to work in the industry sector which correlates to his or her earned degree credential or industry certification on a regularly sustained basis as provided in the eligibility requirements of Section 3 of this act.

SECTION 5. The Office of Workforce Development shall submit an annual report on the program to the Governor, the Lieutenant Governor, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Chair of the House Workforce Development Committee, the Chair of the Senate Economic and Workforce Development Committee and the Chairperson of the House and Senate Universities and Colleges Committees. The report shall contain a detailed explanation of how the funds appropriated for the program were awarded and how



225 many students have participated in the grant program and their
226 employment outcomes.

227 **SECTION 6.** This act shall take effect and be in force from
228 and after July 1, 2025.

