By: Senator(s) Chassaniol, Jordan

To: Corrections; Economic and Workforce Development

SENATE BILL NO. 2357
(As Passed the Senate)

AN ACT TO AUTHORIZE THE MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS TO ENTER INTO A CONTRACT WITH THE GREENWOOD-LEFLORE-CARROLL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT, CONSTRUCTION, OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE OF A DELTA WORK RELEASE PROGRAM TO EMPLOY OFFENDERS WITHIN THE CUSTODY OF THE DEPARTMENT OR PRISON INDUSTRIES IN LOCAL INDUSTRIES OR BUSINESSES TO ASSIST LOCAL INDUSTRIES' WORKFORCE NEEDS; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES.

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

SECTION 1. (1) The Mississippi Department of Corrections is hereby empowered, authorized and directed to enter into necessary contracts with the Greenwood-Leflore-Carroll Economic Development Foundation for the establishment, construction, operation and maintenance of a Delta Work Release Program to employ offenders within the custody of the department or prison industries in local industries or businesses to assist local industries' or business' workforce needs.

(2) (a) The offenders shall be paid, by the entity or entities, wages at a rate which is not less than that paid for similar work in the locality in which the work is performed.

(b) The offender shall maintain an account through a local financial institution and shall provide a copy of a check stub to the administrator. The offender shall be required to pay his or her wages earned as a participant under the programs for the following purposes:

(i) To pay twenty-five percent (25%) toward any support of dependents or to the Mississippi Department of Human Services on behalf of dependents as may be ordered by a judge of competent jurisdiction as well as fines, restitution, or costs as ordered by the court to include any fines and fees associated with obtaining a valid driver's license upon release. Once all the aforementioned balances have been cleared, or if no liability exists, these funds shall be added to the participants savings diversion program.

(ii) To save fifty percent (50%) of the offender's wages in the account required under paragraph (a) of this subsection. Monies under this subparagraph shall be made available to the offender upon parole or release.

(iii) To pay up to fifteen percent (15%) of the offender's wages to the MDOC for administrative expenses to include transportation costs.

(iv) The offender shall have access to the remaining ten percent (10%) of the monies in his/her account to purchase incidental expenses.

(3) Notwithstanding any provision of the law to the contrary, the offenders shall not be qualified to receive any payments for unemployment compensation while incarcerated. However, the offenders shall not solely by their status as offenders be deprived of the right to participate in benefits made available by the federal or state government to other individuals on the basis of their employment, such as workers' compensation.

(4) Offenders who participate in the employment must do so voluntarily and must agree in advance to the specific deductions made from gross wages pursuant to this section and to all other financial arrangements or benefits resulting from participation in the employment.

SECTION 2. This act shall take effect and be in force from and after July 1, 2025.