

By: Senator(s) Fillingane

To: Judiciary, Division A

## SENATE BILL NO. 2459

1 AN ACT TO AMEND SECTION 43-21-257, MISSISSIPPI CODE OF 1972,  
2 TO REQUIRE THE DEPARTMENT OF CHILD PROTECTION SERVICES TO REMOVE  
3 FROM THE CENTRAL REGISTRY THE NAME OF ANY SUBSTANTIATED  
4 PERPETRATOR WHO WAS LATER DETERMINED TO BE WRONGFULLY CONVICTED OR  
5 ADJUDICATED; TO AMEND SECTION 43-21-353, MISSISSIPPI CODE OF 1972,  
6 TO REQUIRE THE DEPARTMENT OF CHILD PROTECTION SERVICES TO RECORD  
7 THE NAME OF A REPORTER WHEN RECEIVING A REPORT OF CHILD ABUSE; TO  
8 REQUIRE THE DEPARTMENT OF CHILD PROTECTION SERVICES TO DISCLOSE  
9 THE NAME OF THE REPORTER TO THE ALLEGED PERPETRATOR IN CASES OF  
10 FALSE REPORTS AND PURGE ITS RECORDS OF ANY REFERENCE TO THE  
11 IDENTITY OF THE ALLEGED PERPETRATOR; TO REQUIRE A COURT TO STRIKE  
12 FALSE REPORTS FROM ITS RECORDS; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES.

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

14 **SECTION 1.** Section 43-21-257, Mississippi Code of 1972, is  
15 amended as follows:

16 43-21-257. (1) Unless otherwise provided in this section,  
17 any record involving children, including valid and invalid  
18 complaints, and the contents thereof maintained by the Department  
19 of Human Services or the Department of Child Protection Services,  
20 or any other state agency, shall be kept confidential and shall  
21 not be disclosed except as provided in Section 43-21-261.

22 (2) The Office of Youth Services shall maintain a state  
23 central registry containing the number and disposition of all



24 cases together with such other useful information regarding those  
25 cases as may be requested and is obtainable from the records of  
26 the youth court. The Office of Youth Services shall annually  
27 publish a statistical record of the number and disposition of all  
28 cases, but the names or identity of any children shall not be  
29 disclosed in the reports or records. The Office of Youth Services  
30 shall adopt such rules as may be necessary to carry out this  
31 subsection. The central registry files and the contents thereof  
32 shall be confidential and shall not be open to public inspection.  
33 Any person who discloses or encourages the disclosure of any  
34 record involving children from the central registry shall be  
35 subject to the penalty in Section 43-21-267. The youth court  
36 shall furnish, upon forms provided by the Office of Youth  
37 Services, the necessary information, and these completed forms  
38 shall be forwarded to the Office of Youth Services. The  
39 Department of Human Services and its employees are exempt from any  
40 civil liability as a result of any action taken pursuant to the  
41 compilation or release of information on the central registry  
42 under this section and any other applicable section of this code,  
43 unless determined that an employee has willfully and maliciously  
44 violated the rules and administrative procedures of the department  
45 pertaining to the central registry or any section of this code.  
46 If an employee is determined to have willfully and maliciously  
47 performed such a violation, said employee shall not be exempt from  
48 civil liability in this regard.



49           (3) The Department of Child Protection Services shall  
50 maintain a state central registry on neglect and abuse cases  
51 containing (a) the name, address and age of each child, (b) the  
52 nature of the harm reported, (c) the name and address of the  
53 person responsible for the care of the child, and (d) the name and  
54 address of the substantiated perpetrator of the harm reported.  
55 "Substantiated perpetrator" shall be defined as an individual who  
56 has committed an act(s) of sexual abuse or physical abuse that  
57 would otherwise be deemed as a felony or any child neglect that  
58 would be deemed as a threat to life. A name is to be added to the  
59 registry only based upon a criminal conviction or an adjudication  
60 by a youth court judge or court of competent jurisdiction,  
61 ordering that the name of the perpetrator be listed on the central  
62 registry. The central registry shall be confidential and shall  
63 not be open to public inspection. Any person who discloses or  
64 encourages the disclosure of any record involving children from  
65 the central registry without following the rules and  
66 administrative procedures of the department shall be subject to  
67 the penalty in Section 43-21-267. The Department of Child  
68 Protection Services and its employees are exempt from any civil  
69 liability as a result of any action taken pursuant to the  
70 compilation or release of information on the central registry  
71 under this section and any other applicable section of this code,  
72 unless determined that an employee has willfully and maliciously  
73 violated the rules and administrative procedures of the department



74 pertaining to the central registry or any section of this code.  
75 If an employee is determined to have willfully and maliciously  
76 performed such a violation, said employee shall not be exempt from  
77 civil liability in this regard. If it is later determined that a  
78 person has been wrongfully convicted or adjudicated, the  
79 Department of Child Protection Services shall remove the name and  
80 address of that person from the state central registry and purge  
81 any reference to the identity of the person from their records.

82 (4) The Mississippi State Department of Health may release  
83 the findings of investigations into allegations of abuse within  
84 licensed day care centers made under the provisions of Section  
85 43-21-353(8) to any parent of a child who is enrolled in the day  
86 care center at the time of the alleged abuse or at the time the  
87 request for information is made. The findings of any such  
88 investigation may also be released to parents who are considering  
89 placing children in the day care center. No information  
90 concerning those investigations may contain the names or  
91 identifying information of individual children.

92 The Department of Health shall not be held civilly liable for  
93 the release of information on any findings, recommendations or  
94 actions taken pursuant to investigations of abuse that have been  
95 conducted under Section 43-21-353(8).

96 **SECTION 2.** Section 43-21-353, Mississippi Code of 1972, is  
97 amended as follows:



43-21-353. (1) Any attorney, physician, dentist, intern, resident, nurse, psychologist, social worker, family protection worker, family protection specialist, child caregiver, minister, law enforcement officer, public or private school employee or any other person having reasonable cause to suspect that a child is a neglected child, an abused child, or a victim of commercial sexual exploitation or human trafficking shall cause an oral report to be made immediately by telephone or otherwise and followed as soon thereafter as possible by a report in writing to the Department of Child Protection Services, and immediately a referral shall be made by the Department of Child Protection Services to the youth court intake unit, which unit shall promptly comply with Section 43-21-357. In the course of an investigation, at the initial time of contact with the individual(s) about whom a report has been made under this Youth Court Act or with the individual(s) responsible for the health or welfare of a child about whom a report has been made under this chapter, the Department of Child Protection Services shall inform the individual of the specific complaints or allegations made against the individual. Consistent with subsection (4), the identity of the person who reported his or her suspicion shall not be disclosed at that point. Where appropriate, the Department of Child Protection Services shall additionally make a referral to the youth court prosecutor.

Upon receiving a report that a child has been sexually abused, is a victim of commercial sexual exploitation or human



123 trafficking or has been burned, tortured, mutilated or otherwise  
124 physically abused in such a manner as to cause serious bodily  
125 harm, or upon receiving any report of abuse that would be a felony  
126 under state or federal law, the Department of Child Protection  
127 Services shall immediately notify the law enforcement agency in  
128 whose jurisdiction the abuse occurred. Within forty-eight (48)  
129 hours, the department must notify the appropriate prosecutor and  
130 the Statewide Human Trafficking Coordinator. The department shall  
131 have the duty to provide the law enforcement agency all the names  
132 and facts known at the time of the report; this duty shall be of a  
133 continuing nature. The law enforcement agency and the department  
134 shall investigate the reported abuse immediately and shall file a  
135 preliminary report with the appropriate prosecutor's office within  
136 twenty-four (24) hours and shall make additional reports as new or  
137 additional information or evidence becomes available. The  
138 department shall advise the clerk of the youth court and the youth  
139 court prosecutor of all cases of abuse reported to the department  
140 within seventy-two (72) hours and shall update such report as  
141 information becomes available. In addition, if the Department of  
142 Child Protection Services determines that a parent or other person  
143 responsible for the care or welfare of an abused or neglected  
144 child maintains active duty status within the military, the  
145 department shall notify the applicable military installation  
146 family advocacy program that there is an allegation of abuse or  
147 neglect that relates to that child.



148           (2) Any report shall contain the name of the reporter, the  
149 names and addresses of the child and his parents or other persons  
150 responsible for his care, if known, the child's age, the nature  
151 and extent of the child's injuries, including any evidence of  
152 previous injuries, any other information that might be helpful in  
153 establishing the cause of the injury, and the identity of the  
154 perpetrator.

155           (3) The Department of Child Protection Services shall  
156 maintain a statewide incoming wide-area telephone service or  
157 similar service for the purpose of receiving reports of suspected  
158 cases of child abuse, commercial sexual exploitation or human  
159 trafficking; provided that any attorney, physician, dentist,  
160 intern, resident, nurse, psychologist, social worker, family  
161 protection worker, family protection specialist, child caregiver,  
162 minister, law enforcement officer or public or private school  
163 employee who is required to report under subsection (1) of this  
164 section shall report in the manner required in subsection (1).

165           (4) Reports of abuse, neglect and commercial sexual  
166 exploitation or human trafficking made under this chapter and the  
167 identity of the reporter are confidential except when the court in  
168 which the investigation report is filed, in its discretion,  
169 determines the testimony of the person reporting to be material to  
170 a judicial proceeding or when the identity of the reporter is  
171 released to law enforcement agencies and the appropriate  
172 prosecutor pursuant to subsection (1). Reports made under this



section to any law enforcement agency or prosecutorial officer are for the purpose of criminal investigation and prosecution only and no information from these reports may be released to the public except as provided by Section 43-21-261. Disclosure of any information by the prosecutor shall be according to the Mississippi Uniform Rules of Circuit and County Court Procedure. The identity of the reporting party shall not be disclosed to anyone other than law enforcement officers or prosecutors without an order from the appropriate youth court. Any person disclosing any reports made under this section in a manner not expressly provided for in this section or Section 43-21-261 shall be guilty of a misdemeanor and subject to the penalties prescribed by Section 43-21-267.

(5) (a) Notwithstanding the confidentiality of the reporter's identity under this section, the Department of Child Protection Services \* \* \* shall disclose \* \* \* the reporter's identity to the appropriate law enforcement agency or prosecutor if the department has reason to suspect the reporter has made a fraudulent report, and the Department of Child Protection Services must provide to the subject of the alleged fraudulent report written notification of the disclosure. If the reporter is determined to have made a false report knowingly, the Department of Child Protection Services shall disclose the identity of the reporter to the person who was alleged to have been the perpetrator in the false report and purge any reference to the





identity of the alleged perpetrator from its records, and any  
court in which the report was filed shall strike the report and  
purge any reference to the identity of the alleged perpetrator  
from its records.

(b) A civil cause of action for injunctive relief and  
compensatory damages is created in favor of any person who was  
alleged to have been the perpetrator in a false report under this  
section. This cause of action shall be in addition to any other  
civil or criminal proceeding authorized by the laws of this state  
or by federal law.

(c) Any person is entitled to the rights created under  
Section 43-21-257(3) and this subsection (5) from and after  
January 1, 2018.

( \* \* \*6) All final dispositions of law enforcement  
investigations described in subsection (1) of this section shall  
be determined only by the appropriate prosecutor or court. All  
final dispositions of investigations by the Department of Child  
Protection Services as described in subsection (1) of this section  
shall be determined only by the youth court. Reports made under  
subsection (1) of this section by the Department of Child  
Protection Services to the law enforcement agency and to the  
district attorney's office shall include the following, if known  
to the department:

(a) The name and address of the child;

(b) The names and addresses of the parents;



223 (c) The name and address of the suspected perpetrator;  
224 (d) The names and addresses of all witnesses, including  
225 the reporting party if a material witness to the abuse;  
226 (e) A brief statement of the facts indicating that the  
227 child has been abused, including whether the child experienced  
228 commercial sexual exploitation or human trafficking, and any other  
229 information from the agency files or known to the family  
230 protection worker or family protection specialist making the  
231 investigation, including medical records or other records, which  
232 may assist law enforcement or the district attorney in  
233 investigating and/or prosecuting the case; and  
234 (f) What, if any, action is being taken by the  
235 Department of Child Protection Services.

236 ( \* \* \*7) In any investigation of a report made under this  
237 chapter of the abuse or neglect of a child as defined in Section  
238 43-21-105(1) or (m), the Department of Child Protection Services  
239 may request the appropriate law enforcement officer with  
240 jurisdiction to accompany the department in its investigation, and  
241 in such cases the law enforcement officer shall comply with such  
242 request.

243 ( \* \* \*8) Anyone who willfully violates any provision of  
244 this section shall be, upon being found guilty, punished by a fine  
245 not to exceed Five Thousand Dollars (\$5,000.00), or by  
246 imprisonment in jail not to exceed one (1) year, or both.



247 ( \* \* \*9) If a report is made directly to the Department of  
248 Child Protection Services that a child has been abused or  
249 neglected or experienced commercial sexual exploitation or human  
250 trafficking in an out-of-home setting, a referral shall be made  
251 immediately to the law enforcement agency in whose jurisdiction  
252 the abuse occurred, and the department shall notify the district  
253 attorney's office and the Statewide Human Trafficking Coordinator  
254 within forty-eight (48) hours of such report. The Department of  
255 Child Protection Services shall investigate the out-of-home  
256 setting report of abuse or neglect to determine whether the child  
257 who is the subject of the report, or other children in the same  
258 environment, \* \* \* come within the jurisdiction of the youth court  
259 and shall report to the youth court the department's findings and  
260 recommendation as to whether the child who is the subject of the  
261 report or other children in the same environment require the  
262 protection of the youth court. The law enforcement agency shall  
263 investigate the reported abuse immediately and shall file a  
264 preliminary report with the district attorney's office within  
265 forty-eight (48) hours and shall make additional reports as new  
266 information or evidence becomes available. If the out-of-home  
267 setting is a licensed facility, an additional referral shall be  
268 made by the Department of Child Protection Services to the  
269 licensing agency. The licensing agency shall investigate the  
270 report and shall provide the department, the law enforcement  
271 agency and the district attorney's office with their written



272 findings from such investigation as well as that licensing  
273 agency's recommendations and actions taken.

274 ( \* \* \*10) If a child protective investigation does not  
275 result in an out-of-home placement, a child protective  
276 investigator must provide information to the parent or guardians  
277 about community service programs that provide respite care,  
278 counseling and support for children who have experienced  
279 commercial sexual exploitation or human trafficking, voluntary  
280 guardianship or other support services for families in crisis.

281 **SECTION 3.** This act shall take effect and be in force from  
282 and after July 1, 2025.

