MISSISSIPPI LEGISLATURE FIRST EXTRAORDINARY SESSION 2025

By: Representatives Deweese, Bennett, Creekmore IV, Currie, McGee, Mickens, Read, Scott, Turner

To: Appropriations A

# HOUSE BILL NO. 29

AN ACT MAKING AN APPROPRIATION FOR THE PURPOSE OF DEFRAYING THE EXPENSES OF THE DEPARTMENT OF REHABILITATION SERVICES FOR FISCAL YEAR 2026.

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

**SECTION 1.** The following sum, or so much thereof as may be necessary, is appropriated out of any money in the State General Fund not otherwise appropriated, for the purposes of defraying the expenses of the Department of Rehabilitation Services for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2025, and ending June 30, 2026........................................................$ 33,684,645.00.

**SECTION 2.** The following sum, or so much thereof as may be necessary, is appropriated out of any money in any special fund in the State Treasury to the credit of the Department of Rehabilitation Services which is comprised of special source funds collected by or otherwise available to the department for the support of the various offices of the department, for the purpose of defraying the expenses of the department for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2025, and ending June 30, 2026.................

..............................................$ 227,773,395.00.

**SECTION 3.** Of the funds appropriated under the provisions of Section 2, Three Million Six Hundred Eighty-one Thousand Eight Hundred Two Dollars ($3,681,802.00) shall be derived from the Health Care Expendable Fund created in Section 43-13-407, Mississippi Code of 1972. The above funds shall be allocated as follows:

Fully match all available federal funds................................$ 2,826,899.00.

Independent Living Program which includes the State Attendant Care Program.........................$ 854,903.00.

**SECTION 4.** Of the funds appropriated under the provisions of this act, not more than the following amount of funds, with the exception of the provisions in this section, shall be expended only for "Personal Services," which includes "Vacancy Funding," for the following authorized number of employment headcount:

FUNDING:

| | |
|---|---|
| General Funds: | $ 11,415,018.00 |
| Special Funds: | $ 54,705,672.00 |
| Total Funds: | $ 66,120,690.00 |

PERSONAL SERVICES:

| | |
|---|---|
| Employee Salaries, Wages, and Fringe Benefits: | $ 63,314,655.00 |
| Progressions: | $ 0.00 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Vacancy Funding: | $ | 2,806,035.00 |
| Total Personal Services: | $ | 66,120,690.00 |
| AUTHORIZED HEADCOUNT: | | |
| Permanent: | | 875 |
| Time-Limited: | | 201 |

As used in this section, the term "Personal Services" shall mean funds provided under the major object of expenditure category Personal Services for Salaries, Wages, and Fringe Benefits. Funds in this category shall not be transferred to any other category.

It is the intention of the Legislature to ensure compliance with the Variable Compensation Plan, as outlined in Section 25-9-147, Mississippi Code of 1972. Payment from these funds shall be in accordance with the Variable Compensation Plan promulgated by the Mississippi State Personnel Board. It is the Legislature's intention that no employee's salary falls below the minimum salary established by the Mississippi State Personnel Board.

The State Personnel Board shall determine and publish the projected annual cost of "Personal Services" based on monthly and year-to-date payroll expenditures in compliance with the provisions of this act.

With the funds herein appropriated, it shall be the agency's responsibility to ensure that no single personnel action or combination of personnel actions, when annualized, exceeds the Fiscal Year 2026 appropriation for "Personal Services" with the exception of escalated funds. Further, it shall be the agency's responsibility to ensure that funds required to be appropriated for “Personal Services” for Fiscal Year 2027 do not exceed Fiscal Year 2026 funds appropriated for that purpose unless programs or positions are added to the agency’s Fiscal Year 2026 budget by the Mississippi Legislature.

If, at the time the agency takes any action to change “Personal Services,” the State Personnel Board determines that the agency has taken or will take an action that would cause the agency to exceed the funds appropriated in this act when annualized for Fiscal Year 2026 or increase the need for “Personal Services” for Fiscal Year 2027, when annualized, the State Personnel Board shall process no salary actions until such time as the requirements of the provisions of this section are met with the exception of new hires determined to be essential for the agency.

When used in this section, “Vacancy Funding” shall mean funds included in the Total Personal Services amount listed above and designated for approved vacancies in Fiscal Year 2026. These funds are to be utilized to increase the number of filled headcounts that were authorized but unfilled as of the last day of Fiscal Year 2025. If the agency fills additional headcounts after May 1, 2025, until the end of Fiscal Year 2025, the amount of available Vacancy Funding may be proportionally reduced to reflect the updated number of filled headcounts. The agency shall be responsible for ensuring that “Vacancy Funding” is used to increase headcounts and not for promotions, title changes, in-range salary adjustments, or any other mechanism for increasing salaries for current employees.

Any transfers or escalations shall be made in accordance with the terms, conditions, and procedures established by law or allowable under the terms set forth within this act. The State Personnel Board shall not escalate positions without written approval from the Department of Finance and Administration. The Department of Finance and Administration shall not provide written approval to escalate any funds for salaries and/or headcounts without proof of availability of new or additional funds above the appropriated level. Unless specifically noted, all Fiscal Year 2025 escalated headcounts have been accounted for and shall be converted to authorized time-limited headcounts.

No general funds authorized to be expended herein shall be used to replace federal funds and/or other special funds used for salaries authorized under the provisions of this act and which are withdrawn and no longer available.

None of the funds herein appropriated shall be used in violation of the Internal Revenue Service's Publication 15-A relating to the reporting of income paid to contract employees, as interpreted by the Office of the State Auditor.

If the agency's total authorized headcount decreases from Fiscal Year 2025 to Fiscal Year 2026, it will be the agency's discretion as to what headcounts are removed.

**SECTION 5.** It is the intention of the Legislature that the Department of Rehabilitation Services shall maintain complete accounting and personnel records related to the expenditure of all funds appropriated under this act and that such records shall be in the same format and level of detail as maintained for Fiscal Year 2025. It is further the intention of the Legislature that the agency's budget request for Fiscal Year 2027 shall be submitted to the Joint Legislative Budget Committee in a format and level of detail comparable to the format and level of detail provided during the Fiscal Year 2026 budget request process.

**SECTION 6.** The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind shall remain accredited by using not more than Five Hundred Dollars ($500.00) of the funds appropriated along with matching funds for payment of fees to an accreditation agency recommended by the Rehabilitation Services Administration.

**SECTION 7.** Of the funds appropriated herein, the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services through the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind is authorized to expend an amount not to exceed One Hundred Thousand Dollars ($100,000.00) for the National Federation for the Blind (NFB) News line service to allow blind and visually impaired persons to access newspapers through toll-free telephone calls.

**SECTION 8.** It is the intention of the Legislature that whenever two (2) or more bids are received by this agency for the purchase of commodities or equipment, and whenever all things stated in such received bids are equal with respect to price, quality and service, the Mississippi Industries for the Blind shall be given preference. A similar preference shall be given to the Mississippi Industries for the Blind whenever purchases are made without competitive bids.

**SECTION 9.** In compliance with the "Mississippi Performance Budget and Strategic Planning Act of 1994," it is the intent of the Legislature that the funds provided herein shall be utilized in the most efficient and effective manner possible to achieve the intended mission of this agency. Based on the funding authorized, this agency shall make every effort to attain the targeted performance measures provided below:

| Performance Measures | FY2026 Target |
|---|---|
| Disability Determination Services | |
| Number of Dispositions | 65,000 |
| Processing Time (Days) | 130 |
| Voc Rehabilitation For The Blind | |
| Number of Blind & Visually Impaired Persons Served | 2,075 |
| Number of Persons Rehabilitated | 305 |
| Number of Independent Living Persons Served | 630 |
| Percent Change in Persons Employed Compared to Persons Served | 13.00 |
| Vocational Rehabilitation | |

| | |
|---|---|
| Number of Clients Served | 15,075 |
| Number of Clients Rehabilitated | 2,555 |
| Percent Change of Persons Employed Compared to Persons Served | 16.00 |
| Persons Employed with Pay Rate Greater than Federal or State Minimum Wage | 2,555 |
| Persons with Significant Disabilities Leaving VR With Competitive, Self, or BEP Employment, Wage = or > Than Minimum | 1,594 |
| Spinal Cord & Head Injury Program | |
| Number of Clients Served | 1,050 |
| Percent Change in Number of Spinal Cord & Brain injuries per Year | 3.00 |
| Special Disability Programs | |
| Number of Clients Served | 3,100 |
| Percent Change in Persons Receiving HCBW Services Compared to Waiting List | 25.00 |
| Ratio of Cost to HCBW Services per Person Compared to an Institutional Setting | 38.00 |
| Support Services | |
| Percent of Total Budget | 2.00 |

A reporting of the degree to which the performance targets set above have been or are being achieved shall be provided in the agency's budget request submitted to the Joint Legislative Budget Committee for Fiscal Year 2027.

**SECTION 10.** Of the funds appropriated under the provisions of this act, Four Million Eight Hundred Fifty-six Thousand Nine Hundred Thirty-two Dollars ($4,856,932.00) is provided for increases in the hourly wage for Personal Care Assistants.

**SECTION 11.** Of the funds appropriated in Section 1, it is the intention of the Legislature that One Million Five Hundred Sixty-three Thousand Thirty-nine Dollars ($1,563,039.00) shall be allocated to the Spinal Cord & Head Injury Trust supported from General Fund court assessments.

**SECTION 12.** Of the funds appropriated in Section 1 and Section 2 of this act, it is the intention of the Legislature that continued funding at or above the Fiscal Year 2025 appropriated amount shall be provided for up to Four Thousand One Hundred (4,100) slots in the Home and Community Based Waiver programs for Independent Living and Spinal Cord/Traumatic Brain Injury Waiver programs.

**SECTION 13.** It is the intention of the Legislature that the funds herein appropriated shall be expended in compliance with Section 27-104-25, Mississippi Code of 1972, that no state agency shall incur obligations or indebtedness in excess of their appropriation and that the responsible officers, either personally or upon their official bonds, shall be held responsible for actions contrary to this provision.

**SECTION 14.** The money herein appropriated shall be paid by the State Treasurer out of any money in the State Treasury to the credit of the proper fund or funds as set forth in this act, upon warrants issued by the State Fiscal Officer; and the State Fiscal Officer shall issue his warrants upon requisitions signed by the proper person, officer or officers, in the manner provided by law.

**SECTION 15.** This act shall take effect and be in force from and after July 1, 2025.