

By: Senator(s) Nunnelee

To: Public Health and Welfare

SENATE BILL NO. 3121

1 AN ACT TO AMEND SECTION 43-17-5, MISSISSIPPI CODE OF 1972, TO
2 PROVIDE CERTAIN APPLICANT JOB SEARCH REQUIREMENTS FOR TANF
3 ELIGIBILITY; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES.

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

5 **SECTION 1.** Section 43-17-5, Mississippi Code of 1972, is
6 amended as follows:

7 43-17-5. (1) The amount of Temporary Assistance for Needy
8 Families (TANF) benefits which may be granted for any dependent
9 child and a needy caretaker relative shall be determined by the
10 county department with due regard to the resources and necessary
11 expenditures of the family and the conditions existing in each
12 case, and in accordance with the rules and regulations made by the
13 Department of Human Services which shall not be less than the
14 Standard of Need in effect for 1988, and shall be sufficient when
15 added to all other income (except that any income specified in the
16 federal Social Security Act, as amended, may be disregarded) and
17 support available to the child to provide such child with a
18 reasonable subsistence compatible with decency and health. The
19 first family member in the dependent child's budget may receive an
20 amount not to exceed One Hundred Ten Dollars (\$110.00) per month;
21 the second family member in the dependent child's budget may
22 receive an amount not to exceed Thirty-six Dollars (\$36.00) per
23 month; and each additional family member in the dependent child's
24 budget an amount not to exceed Twenty-four Dollars (\$24.00) per
25 month. The maximum for any individual family member in the
26 dependent child's budget may be exceeded for foster or medical
27 care or in cases of mentally retarded or physically handicapped

28 children. TANF benefits granted shall be specifically limited
29 only (a) to children existing or conceived at the time the
30 caretaker relative initially applies and qualifies for such
31 assistance, unless this limitation is specifically waived by the
32 department, or (b) to a child born following a twelve (12)
33 consecutive month period of discontinued benefits by the caretaker
34 relative.

35 (2) TANF cash benefits in Mississippi shall be provided by
36 monthly checks mailed to the recipient family until such time as
37 an on-line electronic benefits transfer system for TANF benefit
38 payments is implemented pursuant to Section 43-1-28.

39 (3) The Department of Human Services shall deny TANF
40 benefits to the following categories of individuals, except for
41 individuals and families specifically exempt or excluded for good
42 cause as allowed by federal statute or regulation:

43 (a) Families without a minor child residing with the
44 custodial parent or other adult caretaker relative of the child;

45 (b) Families which include an adult who has received
46 TANF assistance for sixty (60) months after the commencement of
47 the Mississippi TANF program, whether or not such period of time
48 is consecutive;

49 (c) Families not assigning to the state any rights a
50 family member may have, on behalf of the family member or of any
51 other person for whom the family member has applied for or is
52 receiving such assistance, to support from any other person, as
53 required by law;

54 (d) Families who fail to cooperate in establishing
55 paternity or obtaining child support, as required by law;

56 (e) Any individual who has not attained eighteen (18)
57 years of age, is not married to the head of household, has a minor
58 child at least twelve (12) weeks of age in his or her care, and
59 has not successfully completed a high school education or its
60 equivalent, if such individual does not participate in educational

61 activities directed toward the attainment of a high school diploma
62 or its equivalent, or an alternative educational or training
63 program approved by the department;

64 (f) Any individual who has not attained eighteen (18)
65 years of age, is not married, has a minor child in his or her
66 care, and does not reside in a place or residence maintained by a
67 parent, legal guardian or other adult relative or the individual
68 as such parent's, guardian's or adult relative's own home;

69 (g) Any minor child who has been, or is expected by a
70 parent or other caretaker relative of the child to be, absent from
71 the home for a period of more than thirty (30) days;

72 (h) Any individual who is a parent or other caretaker
73 relative of a minor child who fails to notify the department of
74 the absence of the minor child from the home for the thirty-day
75 period specified in paragraph (g), by the end of the five-day
76 period that begins with the date that it becomes clear to the
77 individual that the minor child will be absent for the thirty-day
78 period;

79 (i) Any individual who fails to comply with the
80 provisions of the Employability Development Plan signed by the
81 individual which prescribe those activities designed to help the
82 individual become and remain employed, or to participate
83 satisfactorily in the assigned work activity, as authorized under
84 subsection (6)(c) and (d), or who does not engage in applicant job
85 search prior to approval of the TANF case;

86 (j) A parent or caretaker relative who has not engaged
87 in an allowable work activity once the department determines the
88 parent or caretaker relative is ready to engage in work, or once
89 the parent or caretaker relative has received TANF assistance
90 under the program for twenty-four (24) months, whether or not
91 consecutive, whichever is earlier;

92 (k) Any individual who is fleeing to avoid prosecution,
93 or custody or confinement after conviction, under the laws of the

94 jurisdiction from which the individual flees, for a crime, or an
95 attempt to commit a crime, which is a felony under the laws of the
96 place from which the individual flees, or who is violating a
97 condition of probation or parole imposed under federal or state
98 law;

99 (l) Aliens who are not qualified under federal law;

100 (m) For a period of ten (10) years following
101 conviction, individuals convicted in federal or state court of
102 having made a fraudulent statement or representation with respect
103 to the individual's place of residence in order to receive TANF,
104 food stamps or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) assistance under
105 Title XVI or Title XIX simultaneously from two (2) or more states;
106 and

107 (n) Individuals who are recipients of federal
108 Supplemental Security Income (SSI) assistance.

109 (4) (a) Any person who is otherwise eligible for TANF
110 benefits, including custodial and noncustodial parents, shall be
111 required to attend school and meet the monthly attendance
112 requirement as provided in this subsection if all of the following
113 apply:

114 (i) The person is under age twenty (20);

115 (ii) The person has not graduated from a public or
116 private high school or obtained a GED equivalent;

117 (iii) The person is physically able to attend
118 school and is not excused from attending school; and

119 (iv) If the person is a parent or caretaker
120 relative with whom a dependent child is living, child care is
121 available for the child.

122 The monthly attendance requirement under this subsection
123 shall be attendance at the school in which the person is enrolled
124 for each day during a month that the school conducts classes in
125 which the person is enrolled, with not more than two (2) absences
126 during the month for reasons other than the reasons listed in

127 paragraph (e)(iv) of this subsection. Persons who fail to meet
128 participation requirements in this subsection shall be subject to
129 sanctions as provided in paragraph (f) of this subsection.

130 (b) As used in this subsection, "school" means any one
131 (1) of the following:

132 (i) A school as defined in Section 37-13-91(2);

133 (ii) A vocational, technical and adult education
134 program; or

135 (iii) A course of study meeting the standards
136 established by the State Department of Education for the granting
137 of a declaration of equivalency of high school graduation.

138 (c) If any compulsory-school-age child, as defined in
139 Section 37-13-91(2), to which TANF eligibility requirements apply
140 is not in compliance with the compulsory school attendance
141 requirements of Section 37-13-91(6), the superintendent of schools
142 of the school district in which the child is enrolled or eligible
143 to attend shall notify the county department of human services of
144 the child's noncompliance. The Department of Human Services shall
145 review school attendance information as provided under this
146 paragraph at all initial eligibility determinations and upon
147 subsequent report of unsatisfactory attendance.

148 (d) The signature of a person on an application for
149 TANF benefits constitutes permission for the release of school
150 attendance records for that person or for any child residing with
151 that person. The department shall request information from the
152 child's school district about the child's attendance in the school
153 district's most recently completed semester of attendance. If
154 information about the child's previous school attendance is not
155 available or cannot be verified, the department shall require the
156 child to meet the monthly attendance requirement for one (1)
157 semester or until the information is obtained. The department
158 shall use the attendance information provided by a school district
159 to verify attendance for a child. The department shall review

160 with the parent or caretaker relative a child's claim that he or
161 she has a good cause for not attending school.

162 A school district shall provide information to the department
163 about the attendance of a child who is enrolled in a public school
164 in the district within five (5) working days of the receipt of a
165 written request for such information from the department. The
166 school district shall define how many hours of attendance count as
167 a full day and shall provide that information, upon request, to
168 the department. In reporting attendance, the school district may
169 add partial days' absence together to constitute a full day's
170 absence.

171 (e) A child who is required to attend school to meet
172 the requirements under this subsection shall comply except when
173 there is good cause, which shall be demonstrated by any of the
174 following circumstances:

175 (i) The minor parent is the caretaker of a child
176 less than twelve (12) weeks old; or

177 (ii) The department determines that child care
178 services are necessary for the minor parent to attend school and
179 there is no child care available; or

180 (iii) The child is prohibited by the school
181 district from attending school and an expulsion is pending. This
182 exemption no longer applies once the teenager has been expelled;
183 however, a teenager who has been expelled and is making
184 satisfactory progress towards obtaining a GED equivalent shall be
185 eligible for TANF benefits; or

186 (iv) The child failed to attend school for one or
187 more of the following reasons:

188 1. Illness, injury or incapacity of the child
189 or the minor parent's child;

190 2. Court-required appearances or temporary
191 incarceration;

192 3. Medical or dental appointments for the
193 child or minor parent's child;
194 4. Death of a close relative;
195 5. Observance of a religious holiday;
196 6. Family emergency;
197 7. Breakdown in transportation;
198 8. Suspension; or
199 9. Any other circumstance beyond the control
200 of the child, as defined in regulations of the department.

201 (f) Upon determination that a child has failed without
202 good cause to attend school as required, the department shall
203 provide written notice to the parent or caretaker relative
204 (whoever is the primary recipient of the TANF benefits) that
205 specifies:

206 (i) That the family will be sanctioned in the next
207 possible payment month because the child who is required to attend
208 school has failed to meet the attendance requirement of this
209 subsection;

210 (ii) The beginning date of the sanction, and the
211 child to whom the sanction applies;

212 (iii) The right of the child's parents or
213 caretaker relative (whoever is the primary recipient of the TANF
214 benefits) to request a fair hearing under this subsection.

215 The child's parent or caretaker relative (whoever is the
216 primary recipient of the TANF benefits) may request a fair hearing
217 on the department's determination that the child has not been
218 attending school. If the child's parents or caretaker relative
219 does not request a fair hearing under this subsection, or if,
220 after a fair hearing has been held, the hearing officer finds that
221 the child without good cause has failed to meet the monthly
222 attendance requirement, the department shall discontinue or deny
223 TANF benefits to the child thirteen (13) years old, or older, in
224 the next possible payment month. The department shall discontinue

225 or deny twenty-five percent (25%) of the family grant when a child
226 six (6) through twelve (12) years of age without good cause has
227 failed to meet the monthly attendance requirement. Both the child
228 and family sanction may apply when children in both age groups
229 fail to meet the attendance requirement without good cause. A
230 sanction applied under this subsection shall be effective for one
231 (1) month for each month that the child failed to meet the monthly
232 attendance requirement. In the case of a dropout, the sanction
233 shall remain in force until the parent or caretaker relative
234 provides written proof from the school district that the child has
235 reenrolled and met the monthly attendance requirement for one (1)
236 calendar month. Any month in which school is in session for at
237 least ten (10) days during the month may be used to meet the
238 attendance requirement under this subsection. This includes
239 attendance at summer school. The sanction shall be removed the
240 next possible payment month.

241 (5) All parents or caretaker relatives shall have their
242 dependent children receive vaccinations and booster vaccinations
243 against those diseases specified by the State Health Officer
244 pursuant to Section 41-23-37 in accordance with the vaccination
245 and booster vaccination schedule prescribed by the State Health
246 Officer for children of that age, in order for the parents or
247 caretaker relatives to be eligible or remain eligible to receive
248 TANF benefits. Proof of having received such vaccinations and
249 booster vaccinations shall be given by presenting the certificates
250 of vaccination issued by any health care provider licensed to
251 administer vaccinations, and submitted on forms specified by the
252 State Board of Health. If the parents without good cause do not
253 have their dependent children receive the vaccinations and booster
254 vaccinations as required by this subsection and they fail to
255 comply after thirty (30) days' notice, the department shall
256 sanction the family's TANF benefits by twenty-five percent (25%)

257 for the next payment month and each subsequent payment month until
258 the requirements of this subsection are met.

259 (6) (a) If the parent or caretaker relative applying for
260 TANF assistance is an employable person, as determined by the
261 Department of Human Services, the person shall be required to
262 engage in an allowable work activity once the department
263 determines the parent or caretaker relative is ready to engage in
264 work, or once the parent or caretaker relative has received TANF
265 assistance under the program for twenty-four (24) months, whether
266 or not consecutive, whichever is earlier. No TANF benefits shall
267 be given to any person to whom this section applies who fails
268 without good cause to comply with the Employability Development
269 Plan prepared by the department for the person, or who has refused
270 to accept a referral or offer of employment, training or education
271 in which he or she is able to engage, subject to the penalties
272 prescribed in subsection (6)(e). A person shall be deemed to have
273 refused to accept a referral or offer of employment, training or
274 education if he or she:

275 (i) Willfully fails to report for an interview
276 with respect to employment when requested to do so by the
277 department; or

278 (ii) Willfully fails to report to the department
279 the result of a referral to employment; or

280 (iii) Willfully fails to report for allowable work
281 activities as prescribed in subsection (6)(c) and (d).

282 (b) The Department of Human Services shall operate a
283 statewide work program for TANF recipients to provide work
284 activities and supportive services to enable families to become
285 self-sufficient and improve their competitive position in the work
286 force in accordance with the requirements of the federal Personal
287 Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996
288 (Public Law 104-193), as amended, and the regulations promulgated
289 thereunder. All adults who are not specifically exempt shall be

290 referred by the department for allowable work activities. An
291 adult may be exempt from the mandatory work activity requirement
292 for the following reasons:

293 (i) Incapacity;

294 (ii) Temporary illness or injury, verified by
295 physician's certificate;

296 (iii) Is in the third trimester of pregnancy,
297 verified by physician's certificate;

298 (iv) Caretaker of a child under twelve (12)
299 months, for not more than twelve (12) months of the sixty-month
300 maximum benefit period;

301 (v) Caretaker of an ill or incapacitated person,
302 as verified by physician's certificate;

303 (vi) Age, if over sixty (60) or under eighteen
304 (18) years of age;

305 (vii) Receiving treatment for substance abuse, if
306 the person is in compliance with the substance abuse treatment
307 plan;

308 (viii) In a two-parent family, the caretaker of a
309 severely disabled child, as verified by a physician's certificate;

310 or

311 (ix) History of having been a victim of domestic
312 violence, which has been reported as required by state law and is
313 substantiated by police reports or court records, and being at
314 risk of further domestic violence, shall be exempt for a period as
315 deemed necessary by the department but not to exceed a total of
316 twelve (12) months, which need not be consecutive, in the
317 sixty-month maximum benefit period. For the purposes of this
318 subparagraph (ix), "domestic violence" means that an individual
319 has been subjected to:

320 1. Physical acts that resulted in, or
321 threatened to result in, physical injury to the individual;

322 2. Sexual abuse;

- 323 3. Sexual activity involving a dependent
324 child;
- 325 4. Being forced as the caretaker relative of
326 a dependent child to engage in nonconsensual sexual acts or
327 activities;
- 328 5. Threats of, or attempts at, physical or
329 sexual abuse;
- 330 6. Mental abuse; or
- 331 7. Neglect or deprivation of medical care.

332 (c) For all families, all adults who are not
333 specifically exempt shall be required to participate in work
334 activities for at least the minimum average number of hours per
335 week specified by federal law or regulation, not fewer than twenty
336 (20) hours per week (thirty-five (35) hours per week for
337 two-parent families) of which are attributable to the following
338 allowable work activities:

- 339 (i) Unsubsidized employment;
- 340 (ii) Subsidized private employment;
- 341 (iii) Subsidized public employment;
- 342 (iv) Work experience (including work associated
343 with the refurbishing of publicly assisted housing), if sufficient
344 private employment is not available;
- 345 (v) On-the-job training;
- 346 (vi) Job search and job readiness assistance
347 consistent with federal TANF regulations;
- 348 (vii) Community service programs;
- 349 (viii) Vocational educational training (not to
350 exceed twelve (12) months with respect to any individual);
- 351 (ix) The provision of child care services to an
352 individual who is participating in a community service program;
- 353 (x) Satisfactory attendance at high school or in a
354 course of study leading to a high school equivalency certificate,

355 for heads of household under age twenty (20) who have not
356 completed high school or received such certificate;

357 (xi) Education directly related to employment, for
358 heads of household under age twenty (20) who have not completed
359 high school or received such equivalency certificate.

360 (d) The following are allowable work activities which
361 may be attributable to hours in excess of the minimum specified in
362 subsection (6)(c):

363 (i) Job skills training directly related to
364 employment;

365 (ii) Education directly related to employment for
366 individuals who have not completed high school or received a high
367 school equivalency certificate;

368 (iii) Satisfactory attendance at high school or in
369 a course of study leading to a high school equivalency, for
370 individuals who have not completed high school or received such
371 equivalency certificate;

372 (iv) Job search and job readiness assistance
373 consistent with federal TANF regulations.

374 (e) If any adult or caretaker relative refuses to
375 participate in allowable work activity as required under this
376 subsection (6), the following full family TANF benefit penalty
377 will apply, subject to due process to include notification,
378 conciliation and a hearing if requested by the recipient:

379 (i) For the first violation, the department shall
380 terminate the TANF assistance otherwise payable to the family for
381 a two-month period or until the person has complied with the
382 required work activity, whichever is longer;

383 (ii) For the second violation, the department
384 shall terminate the TANF assistance otherwise payable to the
385 family for a six-month period or until the person has complied
386 with the required work activity, whichever is longer;

387 (iii) For the third violation, the department
388 shall terminate the TANF assistance otherwise payable to the
389 family for a twelve-month period or until the person has complied
390 with the required work activity, whichever is longer;

391 (iv) For the fourth violation, the person shall be
392 permanently disqualified.

393 For a two-parent family, unless prohibited by state or
394 federal law, Medicaid assistance shall be terminated only for the
395 person whose failure to participate in allowable work activity
396 caused the family's TANF assistance to be sanctioned under this
397 subsection (6)(e), unless an individual is pregnant, but shall not
398 be terminated for any other person in the family who is meeting
399 that person's applicable work requirement or who is not required
400 to work. Minor children shall continue to be eligible for
401 Medicaid benefits regardless of the disqualification of their
402 parent or caretaker relative for TANF assistance under this
403 subsection (6), unless prohibited by state or federal law.

404 (f) Any person enrolled in a two-year or four-year
405 college program who meets the eligibility requirements to receive
406 TANF benefits, and who is meeting the applicable work requirements
407 and all other applicable requirements of the TANF program, shall
408 continue to be eligible for TANF benefits while enrolled in the
409 college program for as long as the person meets the requirements
410 of the TANF program, unless prohibited by federal law.

411 (g) No adult in a work activity required under this
412 subsection (6) shall be employed or assigned (i) when any other
413 individual is on layoff from the same or any substantially
414 equivalent job within six (6) months before the date of the TANF
415 recipient's employment or assignment; or (ii) if the employer has
416 terminated the employment of any regular employee or otherwise
417 caused an involuntary reduction of its work force in order to fill
418 the vacancy so created with an adult receiving TANF assistance.
419 The Mississippi Department of Employment Security, established

420 under Section 71-5-101, shall appoint one or more impartial
421 hearing officers to hear and decide claims by employees of
422 violations of this paragraph (g). The hearing officer shall hear
423 all the evidence with respect to any claim made hereunder and such
424 additional evidence as he may require and shall make a
425 determination and the reason therefor. The claimant shall be
426 promptly notified of the decision of the hearing officer and the
427 reason therefor. Within ten (10) days after the decision of the
428 hearing officer has become final, any party aggrieved thereby may
429 secure judicial review thereof by commencing an action, in the
430 circuit court of the county in which the claimant resides, against
431 the department for the review of such decision, in which action
432 any other party to the proceeding before the hearing officer shall
433 be made a defendant. Any such appeal shall be on the record which
434 shall be certified to the court by the department in the manner
435 provided in Section 71-5-531, and the jurisdiction of the court
436 shall be confined to questions of law which shall render its
437 decision as provided in that section.

438 (7) The Department of Human Services may provide child care
439 for eligible participants who require such care so that they may
440 accept employment or remain employed. The department may also
441 provide child care for those participating in the TANF program
442 when it is determined that they are satisfactorily involved in
443 education, training or other allowable work activities. The
444 department may contract with Head Start agencies to provide child
445 care services to TANF recipients. The department may also arrange
446 for child care by use of contract or vouchers, provide vouchers in
447 advance to a caretaker relative, reimburse a child care provider,
448 or use any other arrangement deemed appropriate by the department,
449 and may establish different reimbursement rates for child care
450 services depending on the category of the facility or home. Any
451 center-based or group home child care facility under this
452 paragraph shall be licensed by the State Department of Health

453 pursuant to law. When child care is being provided in the child's
454 own home, in the home of a relative of the child, or in any other
455 unlicensed setting, the provision of such child care may be
456 monitored on a random basis by the Department of Human Services or
457 the State Department of Health. Transitional child care
458 assistance may be continued if it is necessary for parents to
459 maintain employment once support has ended, unless prohibited
460 under state or federal law. Transitional child care assistance
461 may be provided for up to twenty-four (24) months after the last
462 month during which the family was eligible for TANF assistance, if
463 federal funds are available for such child care assistance.

464 (8) The Department of Human Services may provide
465 transportation or provide reasonable reimbursement for
466 transportation expenses that are necessary for individuals to be
467 able to participate in allowable work activity under the TANF
468 program.

469 (9) Medicaid assistance shall be provided to a family of
470 TANF program participants for up to twenty-four (24) consecutive
471 calendar months following the month in which the participating
472 family would be ineligible for TANF benefits because of increased
473 income, expiration of earned income disregards, or increased hours
474 of employment of the caretaker relative; however, Medicaid
475 assistance for more than twelve (12) months may be provided only
476 if a federal waiver is obtained to provide such assistance for
477 more than twelve (12) months and federal and state funds are
478 available to provide such assistance.

479 (10) The department shall require applicants for and
480 recipients of public assistance from the department to sign a
481 personal responsibility contract that will require the applicant
482 or recipient to acknowledge his or her responsibilities to the
483 state.

484 (11) The department shall enter into an agreement with the
485 State Personnel Board and other state agencies that will allow

486 those TANF participants who qualify for vacant jobs within state
487 agencies to be placed in state jobs. State agencies participating
488 in the TANF work program shall receive any and all benefits
489 received by employers in the private sector for hiring TANF
490 recipients. This subsection (11) shall be effective only if the
491 state obtains any necessary federal waiver or approval and if
492 federal funds are available therefor.

493 (12) No new TANF program requirement or restriction
494 affecting a person's eligibility for TANF assistance, or allowable
495 work activity, which is not mandated by federal law or regulation
496 may be implemented by the Department of Human Services after July
497 1, 2004, unless such is specifically authorized by an amendment to
498 this section by the Legislature.

499 **SECTION 2.** This act shall take effect and be in force from
500 and after July 1, 2006.