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To: Universities and
Colleges

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE
FOR
SENATE BILL NO. 2515

1 AN ACT TO ENACT THE "REQUIRING EFFICIENCY FOR OUR COLLEGES
2 AND UNIVERSITIES SYSTEM (REFOCUS) ACT"; TO ESTABLISH THE
3 "MISSISSIPPI UNIVERSITY SYSTEM EFFICIENCY TASK FORCE" TO EXAMINE
4 THE EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PUBLIC UNIVERSITY SYSTEM
5 IN MISSISSIPPI, AS IT RELATES TO THE UNIVERSITIES' COLLECTIVE
6 MISSION OF ENROLLING AND GRADUATING MORE DEGREED MISSISSIPPIANS
7 AND RETAINING THEM IN THE STATE, AND ANTICIPATED NATIONWIDE
8 CHALLENGES WITH REGARD TO DEMOGRAPHIC SHIFTS AND A PROJECTED
9 OVERALL DECLINE IN ENROLLMENT; TO REQUIRE THE TASK FORCE TO
10 DEVELOP RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE LEGISLATURE ON CHANGES TO POLICY
11 AND LAWS IN MISSISSIPPI WITH A GOAL OF INCREASING THE EFFICIENCY
12 OF THE PUBLIC UNIVERSITY SYSTEM IN THE STATE; TO SET THE
13 MEMBERSHIP OF THE TASK FORCE; TO PROVIDE FOR OTHER PROVISIONS
14 RELATED THERETO, INCLUDING PER DIEM AND VOTING; TO ESTABLISH THE
15 PURPOSE OF SECTION 4 OF THIS ACT; TO DEFINE TERMS; TO REQUIRE
16 PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING AND COMMUNITY COLLEGES TO
17 ENSURE THAT EACH UNIT DOES NOT ESTABLISH OR MAINTAIN A DIVERSITY,
18 EQUITY AND INCLUSION OFFICE; TO ENSURE UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES
19 TREAT EACH STUDENT, FACULTY, AND STAFF MEMBER FAIRLY; TO REQUIRE
20 UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES TO MAKE A REPORT TO THEIR RESPECTIVE
21 GOVERNING BOARDS; TO REQUIRE THE GOVERNING BOARDS TO MAKE REPORTS
22 TO THE LEGISLATURE; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES.

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

24 **SECTION 1.** This act shall be known and may be cited as the
25 "Requiring Efficiency For Our Colleges and Universities System
26 (REFOCUS) Act."

27 **SECTION 2.** (1) There is hereby established the "Mississippi
28 University System Efficiency Task Force" created to examine the



29 efficiency and effectiveness of the public university system in
30 Mississippi, as it relates to the universities' collective mission
31 of enrolling and graduating more degreed Mississippians and
32 retaining them in the state, and anticipated nationwide challenges
33 with regard to demographic shifts and a projected overall decline
34 in enrollment. The task force shall develop recommendations to
35 the Legislature on changes to policy and laws in Mississippi with
36 a goal of increasing the efficiency of the public university
37 system in Mississippi, planning for future demographic shifts and
38 possible enrollment declines at all institutions and the state
39 level, and continuing progression toward the goal of increasing
40 the post-secondary education attainment level in the state.

41 (2) The members of the task force shall be as follows:

42 (a) The Chairmen of the Universities and Colleges
43 Committees of the Mississippi Senate and Mississippi House of
44 Representatives, or their designees from their respective
45 committee membership;

46 (b) The Chairmen of the Appropriation Committees of the
47 Mississippi Senate and the Mississippi House of Representatives,
48 or their designees from their respective committee membership;

49 (c) The Chairmen of the Finance Committee of the
50 Mississippi Senate and the Ways and Means Committee of the
51 Mississippi House of Representatives, or their designees from
52 their respective committee membership;



53 (d) The Director of the University Research Center and
54 State Economist, or his or her designee;

55 (e) One (1) designee who holds an undergraduate degree
56 from one (1) of the four (4) public regional universities in
57 Mississippi appointed by the Speaker of the House. Such designee
58 shall have significant business or other professional experience
59 and shall be a resident of the State of Mississippi;

60 (f) One (1) designee who holds an undergraduate degree
61 from one (1) of the three (3) public historically black
62 universities in Mississippi appointed by the Governor. Such
63 designee shall have significant business or other professional
64 experience and shall be a resident of the State of Mississippi;

65 (g) One (1) designee who holds an undergraduate degree
66 from one (1) of the four (4) public research universities in
67 Mississippi appointed by the Lieutenant Governor. Such designee
68 shall have significant business or other professional experience
69 and shall be a resident of the State of Mississippi;

70 (h) One (1) member of the Board of Trustees of the
71 Mississippi State Institutions of Higher Learning appointed by the
72 Speaker of the House;

73 (i) One (1) member of the Board of Trustees of the
74 Mississippi State Institutions of Higher Learning appointed by the
75 Lieutenant Governor; and



76 (j) One (1) member of the Board of Trustees of the
77 Mississippi State Institutions of Higher Learning appointed by the
78 Governor.

79 (3) The task force shall meet within forty-five (45) days of
80 the effective date of this act and shall evaluate the current
81 data, resources, laws and policies of the State of Mississippi.
82 Specifically, the task force shall:

83 (a) Evaluate the current funding formula and
84 appropriations process for the Mississippi public university
85 system, particularly as it relates to enrollment and graduation
86 rates;

87 (b) Evaluate the process of developing physical plant
88 plans for Mississippi's public universities, including the use of
89 enrollment data and projections in such plans and the Mississippi
90 Institution of Higher Learning's role in determining collective
91 system needs requiring additional state resources;

92 (c) Collect and analyze publicly available data and
93 statistics related to enrollment and graduation rates and
94 projections, with particular focus on the enrollment and
95 graduation rates of Mississippi residents, as well as other data
96 relating to shifting demographics, at all of Mississippi's public
97 universities;

98 (d) Examine employment, postgraduation life based on
99 degrees, employability, salary and location;



100 (e) Examine staffing levels for teaching faculty by
101 program and degrees;

102 (f) Examine any existing or developing plans, both on
103 an individual public university and university system basis, to
104 address projected demographic shifts and enrollment declines;

105 (g) Evaluate successful strategies for addressing
106 challenges in efficiency and enrollment in the Mississippi
107 university system and across the nation, including current
108 partnerships across the system; and

109 (h) Review any other matters related to the above
110 issues or the efficiency and effectiveness of the public
111 university system in Mississippi.

112 (4) The task force may request the assistance of the
113 Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning and any other related
114 agency, entity or organization with expertise in higher education,
115 demographic, enrollment and other issues.

116 (5) The Chairmen of the Universities and Colleges Committees
117 in the Mississippi Senate and Mississippi House of Representatives
118 shall call the first meeting. The members of the task force shall
119 elect a Chair or co-Chairs from among the members at its first
120 meeting. The task force shall develop and report its findings and
121 recommendations to the Mississippi Legislature on or before
122 December 1, 2025. A majority of the membership shall be required
123 to approve any final report and recommendation. Meetings of the
124 task force shall be held at the State Capitol; however, if it is



125 not feasible for the task force to hold an in-person meeting, the
126 task force may convene utilizing an online meeting platform that
127 is accessible for viewing by the public.

128 (6) The Joint Legislative Committee on Performance
129 Evaluation and Expenditure Review shall provide necessary clerical
130 support for the meetings of the task force and the preparation of
131 the report.

132 **SECTION 3.** The purpose of Section 4 of this act is to
133 prohibit institutions of higher learning and community colleges
134 from taking certain actions and engaging in discriminatory
135 practices. This act seeks to ensure that employment, academic
136 opportunities and student engagement are based solely on
137 individual merit, qualifications and academic performance, without
138 consideration of an individual's views on diversity, equity an
139 inclusion.

140 **SECTION 4.** (1) For the purposes of this section, the
141 following words shall have the meanings ascribed herein unless the
142 context clearly requires otherwise:

143 (a) "Diversity, equity and inclusion" includes:

144 (i) Any effort to select or influence the
145 composition of the faculty or student body with reference to race,
146 sex, color, or ethnicity, apart from ensuring colorblind and
147 sex-neutral admissions and hiring in accordance with state and
148 federal anti-discrimination laws;



149 (ii) Any effort to promote differential treatment
150 of or provide special benefits to individuals in employment or
151 admissions on the basis of race, color, or ethnicity.

152 (iii) Any effort to promote or promulgate policies
153 and procedures designed or implemented to favor individuals with
154 reference to race, color or ethnicity, except as otherwise
155 permitted in state and federal law.

156 (iv) Any effort to require trainings, programming,
157 or activities designed and\or implemented to change participants'
158 beliefs with reference to race, color, ethnicity, gender identity,
159 or sexual orientation; and

160 (v) Any effort to promote as the official position
161 of the administration, the college, the university, or any
162 administrative unit thereof, a position that:

163 1. One race, sex, color, ethnicity, gender
164 identity or sexual orientation is inherently superior to another,
165 sex, color, ethnicity, gender identity or sexual orientation;

166 2. An individual by virtue of his or her
167 race, sex, color, ethnicity, gender identity or sexual orientation
168 is inherently oppressive to others whether consciously or
169 unconsciously;

170 3. An individual should be discriminated
171 against or treated adversely solely because of his or her race,
172 sex, color, ethnicity, gender identity or sexual orientation;



173 4. An individual by virtue of his or her
174 race, sex, color, ethnicity, gender identity or sexual orientation
175 bears responsibility for actions committed in the past by like
176 individuals; or

177 5. Promotes social construction and
178 malleability of sex and gender, gender-neutral pronouns,
179 deconstruction of heteronormativity and sexual privilege.

180 (b) "Diversity, equity and inclusion office" means an
181 office, division or other unit of an institution of higher
182 learning established for the purpose of:

183 (i) Influencing hiring decisions or employment
184 practices at the institution with respect to race, sex, color,
185 ethnicity, gender identity or sexual orientation other than
186 through the use of color-blind and sex-neutral hiring processes in
187 accordance with any applicable state and federal
188 antidiscrimination laws;

189 (ii) Promoting differential treatment of or
190 providing special benefits to individuals in admissions and hiring
191 on the basis of race, sex, color, ethnicity, gender identity or
192 sexual orientation;

193 (iii) Promoting policies or procedures designed or
194 implemented to favor individuals based on race, sex, color,
195 ethnicity, gender identity or sexual orientation, other than
196 policies or procedures approved by the institution's general



197 counsel for the sole purpose of ensuring compliance with any
198 applicable court order or state or federal law; or

199 (iv) Conducting trainings, programs or activities
200 designed or implemented to favor individuals based on race, color,
201 sex, ethnicity, gender identity or sexual orientation, other than
202 trainings, programs or activities developed by an attorney and
203 approved in writing by the institution's general counsel and the
204 Board of the respective institution which includes the Board of
205 Trustees of the Mississippi State Institutions of Higher Learning
206 or the Mississippi Community College Board, as applicable, for the
207 sole purpose of ensuring compliance with any applicable court
208 order or state or federal law.

209 (c) "Institution of higher learning" or "institution"
210 means any one of the following, as stipulated in Section 37-101-1:

211 (i) The University of Mississippi;

212 (ii) Mississippi State University of Agriculture
213 and Applied Science;

214 (iii) Mississippi University for Women;

215 (iv) The University of Southern Mississippi;

216 (v) Delta State University;

217 (vi) Alcorn State University;

218 (vii) Jackson State University;

219 (viii) Mississippi Valley State University; and

220 (ix) Any other of like kind which may be hereafter
221 established by the state.



222 (d) "Community college" or "college" means any one of
223 the following:

- 224 (i) Coahoma Community College;
- 225 (ii) Copiah-Lincoln Community College;
- 226 (iii) East Central Community College;
- 227 (iv) East Mississippi Community College;
- 228 (v) Hinds Community College;
- 229 (vi) Holmes Community College;
- 230 (vii) Itawamba Community College;
- 231 (viii) Jones College;
- 232 (ix) Meridian Community College;
- 233 (x) Mississippi Delta Community College;
- 234 (xi) Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College;
- 235 (xii) Northeast Mississippi Community College;
- 236 (xiii) Northwest Mississippi Community College;
- 237 (xiv) Pearl River Community College; and
- 238 (xv) Southwest Mississippi Community College.

239 (e) "Board" or "boards" means either the Board of
240 Trustees of the Mississippi State Institutions of Higher Learning
241 or the Mississippi Community College Board, or both, as
242 applicable.

243 (2) The Board of Trustees of the State Institutions of
244 Higher Learning and the Mississippi Community College Board shall
245 ensure that each institution and college:



246 (a) Does not expend any funds derived from government
247 appropriations, deposits, donations, endowments, fees, grants,
248 gifts, income, receipts, tuition or any other source, except as
249 required by federal law to:

250 (i) Establish or maintain a diversity, equity and
251 inclusion office;

252 (ii) Hire or assign an employee of the institution
253 or college or contract with a third party to perform the duties of
254 a diversity, equity and inclusion office;

255 (iii) Compel, require, induce or solicit any
256 person to provide a diversity, equity and inclusion statement or
257 give preferential consideration in hiring or admission to any
258 person based on the provision of a diversity, equity and inclusion
259 statement;

260 (iv) Give preference on the basis of race, sex,
261 color, ethnicity, gender identity or sexual orientation to an
262 applicant for employment, or awarding a contract at the
263 institution or college;

264 (v) Require as a condition of enrolling at the
265 institution or college or performing any institution or college
266 function any person to participate in diversity, equity and
267 inclusion training, which:

268 1. Includes a training, program or activity
269 designed or implemented in reference to race, color, ethnicity,
270 gender identity or sexual orientation; and



271 2. Does not include a training, program or
272 activity developed by an attorney and approved in writing by the
273 institution or college's general counsel and either the Board of
274 Trustees of the Mississippi State Institutions of Higher Learning
275 or the Mississippi Community College Board, as applicable, for the
276 sole purpose of ensuring compliance with any applicable court
277 order or state or federal law; and

278 (vi) Penalize or discriminate against a student
279 employee or contractor and the basis of their refusal to support,
280 believe, endorse, embrace, confess, act upon or otherwise assent
281 to a diversity equity or inclusion concept.

282 (b) Within one hundred twenty (120) days of the
283 effective date of this act, The Board of Trustees of the
284 Mississippi State Institutions of Higher Learning and the
285 Mississippi Community College Board shall adopt a complaint
286 process, investigative procedures, and all other policies,
287 procedures and penalties for appropriately investigating and
288 disciplining an employee or contractor of the institution or
289 college who engages in conduct in violation of paragraph (a).

290 (3) (a) A person may notify the Board of Trustees of
291 Mississippi State Institutions of Higher Learning or Mississippi
292 Community College Board of a violation or potential violation of
293 this section by an institution or college under the boards'
294 purview.



295 (b) The respective board shall investigate the reported
296 violation or potential violation under the board's procedures as
297 established in subsection (2) (b) and make a finding within
298 forty-five (45) days reported to the person making the complaint.

299 (4) (a) If any person making a complaint under subsection
300 (3) of this section is aggrieved by the action or inaction of the
301 respective board, he or she may notify the attorney general of a
302 violation or potential violation of this section by an institution
303 or college by forwarding the attorney general the complaint filed
304 with the respective board along with the decision of the board and
305 any supporting documentation.

306 (b) The attorney general may file suit for a writ of
307 mandamus compelling an institution or college to comply with this
308 subsection if the attorney general finds substantial and
309 compelling evidence the violation occurred or is occurring.

310 (5) A person filing a complaint with either board is limited
311 to any student enrolled in a degree program at an institution or
312 college, any faculty member of an institution or college, or any
313 contractor of an institution or college.

314 (6) Within one hundred twenty (120) days of the effective
315 date of this act, the above listed boards shall transmit a copy of
316 all requirements adopted in subsection (2) (b) of this section to
317 the Lieutenant Governor and the Speaker of the House.
318 Additionally, the boards shall include a plan detailing the



319 methods they will use to provide notification of the policy to
320 students and employees.

321 (7) Beginning in 2026, by July 30th of each year, each
322 institution shall submit to the Board of Trustees of the
323 Mississippi State Institutions of Higher Learning and each college
324 shall submit to the Mississippi Community College Board an annual
325 report summarizing all reported incidents and the disposition of
326 those investigations and violations. By October 30th of each
327 year, each board shall prepare a report that compiles the reports
328 from each institution and college and makes recommendations for
329 any proposed changes to this act and submit it to the Legislature.
330 The Legislature may call a representative of each board to testify
331 before the standing legislative committees with primary
332 jurisdiction over higher education at a public hearing of the
333 committee regarding the boards' compliance with this section.

334 (8) Nothing in this section may be construed to limit or
335 prohibit an institution or college, or an employee of such, from
336 submitting to the grantor or accrediting agency a statement that
337 certifies compliance with state and federal antidiscrimination
338 laws for purposes of applying for a grant or complying with the
339 terms of accreditation by an accrediting agency.

340 (9) Subsection (2) (a) of this section may not be construed
341 to apply to and/or prohibit:



342 (a) Programs for Military Veterans, students with
343 disabilities or students presently or formerly under a child
344 protective service order;

345 (b) Scholarly research or a creative work by an
346 institution or college students, faculty or staff or the
347 dissemination of that work;

348 (c) An activity of a registered student organization at
349 an institution or college;

350 (d) A policy, practice, procedure, program or activity
351 to enhance student academic achievement, academic coursework or
352 postgraduate outcomes that is designed and implemented without
353 regard to race, sex, color, ethnicity, gender identity or sexual
354 orientation;

355 (e) Data collection;

356 (f) Student recruitment;

357 (g) Programs, campus activities or certifications for
358 compliance with state and federal laws or applicable court order;

359 (h) Prohibiting an institution or college from
360 requiring or taking action against a student, employee or
361 contractor for failing to comply with federal or state law;

362 (i) To discuss pathological approaches or experience
363 with students with mental or physical disabilities; or

364 (j) To affirm fidelity to and provide an oath to uphold
365 the constitution and the laws of the State of Mississippi and the
366 United States.



367 **SECTION 5.** This act shall take effect and be in force from
368 and after passage.

