



# **Mississippi Commission on The Status of Women**

**ANNUAL REPORT FY2010**

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## **UNEVEN PROGRESS FOR MISSISSIPPI WOMEN**

**Jackson, Mississippi**

**January 2011**

Email comments to: [mscomstatusofwomen@gmail.com](mailto:mscomstatusofwomen@gmail.com)

## **Executive Summary of Key Recommendations**

The Mississippi Commission on the Status of Women urges that the following steps be taken to advance the interests and well-being of women in the state. The Commission recommends:

1. **That state agencies keep statistics on how their work impacts women specifically, and also on the number of women they employ: total and percentage in higher positions. That this information be provided to the Commission annually.**
2. **That pay gaps between men and women be reduced.** To that end, have the State Personnel Board report regularly on the percentage of women filling the top positions in the different states agencies and also provide an overview of the number of women relative to men by job category and the average wage of women versus men in each category.
3. **That current child support guidelines be re-evaluated and revised as part of the goal of reducing the poverty rate among women.**
4. **That women's representation on boards and commissions be improved.** To increase the number of women who are considered for appointment, officials making such appointments should solicit and keep on file resumes of women qualified to serve on their boards or Commissions.
5. **That the Secretary of State's office regularly update its data on women holding elected office across the state.**



# Mississippi Commission on the Status of Women

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## A Message from the Chair

The Mississippi Commission on the Status of Women is comprised of 13 appointed volunteer members, assisted by a paid Executive Director. We are assigned the duty of encouraging, promoting and fostering the success and well-being of Mississippi's women and their families. There is much to be done.

According to a legislative mandate, the Mississippi Commission on the Status of Women prepares an annual report to the Governor and Legislature on the issues and challenges facing women and their families in Mississippi. This report also covers Commission activities in FY2010, and provides a summary of information that the Commission gathered from state agencies in the Interagency Council regarding the impact of their programs on the lives of women here.

The Commission wishes to thank the State Legislature for its support. Legislative appropriations have provided funding to the Commission since 2007, making it possible to hire an Executive Director. We also wish to thank the women of the state, who have been enthusiastic in their support of our initiatives to advance the well-being of women and their families.

We hope that this Annual Report will be useful to the Governor, the Legislature, State Agencies, and other entities making decisions and providing services that impact the lives of Mississippi women. While progress has been made in Mississippi, many challenges remain!

Marianne T. Hill, Chair

Available on-line at  
[www.msstatusofwomen.org](http://www.msstatusofwomen.org)

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## Contents

- 1 Executive Summary and Recommendations
- 3 Introduction and Contents
- 4 Commission Members
- 5 History and Purpose
- 6 Status of Women in Mississippi
- 11 How Mississippi Ranks on Key Indicators
- 12 Activities in FY 2010
- 13 Women Legal Issues Seminar
- 14 Interagency Council: State Agency Programs Serving Women
- 22 Closing Thoughts from the Chair

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Draft prepared by Marianne Hill, Ph.D.  
The final version approved by the  
Commission January 2011

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## **Commission Members, Executive Director**

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### **Commission Members**

Commissioners serving during FY2010 and the dates their terms expire are given below. In some cases, appointments were made mid-term to fill open positions.

Appointed by the Governor

1. Beth Bryant, Brandon, 6/2010
2. Kay B. Cobb, Oxford, 6/2011
3. Hallie K. Duckworth, Madison, 6/2012
4. Donna Yowell, Madison, 6/2012

Appointed by the Lieutenant Governor

1. Mazie Smith, Jackson, 6/2011
2. La'Wana Hailey, Biloxi, 6/2012
3. Vacant

Appointed by the Speaker of the House

1. Marianne Hill, Madison, 6/2013
2. Beverly Hogan, Jackson, 6/2013
3. Vacant

Appointed by the Attorney General

1. Patti Marshall, Jackson, 6/2011
2. Regina Quinn, Jackson, 6/2012
3. Gloria Williamson, Philadelphia, 5/2012

### **Executive Directors**

Deanne Mosley, Esq. (portions of FY2009 and FY 2010)  
Linda Ross Aldy (FY 2010)

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## Commission History and Purpose

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*It is declared to be the public policy of this state to encourage, promote and foster the success and well-being of its citizens and to offer unobstructed access to such opportunities as exist in order that all Mississippians may realize the quality of life for their families to which they aspire. It is a higher public purpose of state government to ensure that no individual is denied the opportunity to succeed and make positive contributions to Mississippi's quality of life because of gender...*

*--From the Preamble of House Bill No. 797 (Reg. Sess. 2001) establishing the Mississippi Commission on the Status of Women.*

### History

The Mississippi Legislature created the Mississippi Commission on the Status of Women in 2001 as a nonpartisan body composed of thirteen appointed members. The Governor appoints four Commissioners, including a current or former food stamps recipient and a single mother. The Lieutenant Governor appoints three Commissioners, including a current or former college educator with expertise in women's issues. The Speaker of the House appoints three Commissioners including a health care professional knowledgeable in women's health issues. The Attorney General appoints three Commissioners including a law professor or lawyer with expertise in women's issues. All Commissioners serve in a voluntary capacity and are active in other groups that address issues of concern to women.

### Vision Statement

The vision of the Mississippi Commission on the Status of Women is the improvement of the overall quality of life of women, specifically in the areas of education, health, economics, political participation, and race relations.

### Mission Statement

The mission of the Mississippi Commission on the Status of Women is to assess and influence policies and practices that affect women through an inclusive, collaborative process. This mission is undergirded by the beliefs that:

\*All people regardless of gender should have unobstructed access to opportunities to realize the quality of life to which they and their families aspire, and

\*No person should be denied the opportunity to succeed and make positive contributions to society.

### Duties

- Research and publish periodic reports documenting the status and concerns of women
- Advise and consult with the executive and legislative branches of state government
- Serve as a liaison between government, private interest groups, and the general public concerned with services for women
- Educate the state regarding the status of women
- Make recommendations to public and private groups and persons concerned with any issue related to improving the status of women
- Promote consideration of qualified women in positions at all levels of government
- Report annually to the governor and the legislature on the Commission's activities and findings

## Uneven Progress for Mississippi Women in 2010

*Women have made significant progress in the state of Mississippi in the past fifty years. We are holding more elected offices, educational levels are rising and earnings have increased. But progress has been uneven and much remains to be done. Reducing the high levels of poverty among women is one of the long-term priorities adopted by the Commission. To this end, the Commission is circulating a working paper on child support examining the current child support situation in the state and its relationship to the high poverty levels among women and children. The Commission is also working with state agencies and other organizations to develop strategies for improving the status of women and their families in several areas. A brief overview of current trends informing the Commission's work is provided below.*

### The Status of Women in Mississippi

The status of women in Mississippi has improved remarkably over the past fifty years. In the labor market and in the political arena, in business and in education, the gaps between men and women have been narrowed. But it remains the case that Mississippi is one of only two states that have never elected a woman either as governor or as a member of Congress. Also, data on poverty, on violence against women and on women's access to health care are among indicators showing that much remain to be accomplished before women and their families can reach the quality of life to which they aspire. Data show progress is slow and uneven:

- 24% of women lived in poverty in 2009, the highest rate among the states. This is a higher percentage than in 2000, when the rate was 22%.<sup>1</sup>
- 22% of women aged 19 to 64 lacked health insurance, placing Mississippi ninth in the nation in 2008-09. Again, this is a higher percentage than in 2001, when it was 20%.<sup>2</sup>
- Until 2007, Mississippi ranked among the worst for violence against women, as measured by the homicide rate for women killed by men.<sup>3</sup> However, in 2008 Mississippi ranked 30<sup>th</sup> in the nation in terms of women killed by men. In contrast, Mississippi ranked first in 2000 and fifth in 2005. The rate fluctuates significantly from year to year.
- Women's median earnings were only 72% that of men's among full-time, year-round workers, according to the American Community Survey 2006-2008. In 2005, the ratio was 74%.<sup>4</sup>
- Women comprised only 14% of the state legislature in 2009, compared to the national average of 24% in 2010,

or 47<sup>th</sup> among state legislatures (see Table 1). There are no women serving in a statewide elected office.<sup>5</sup>

The impetus to establish the Mississippi Commission on the Status of Women came from numbers such as these. A report on the status of women in the states, published by the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) in 1998, collected and compared a broad range of statistics on women in the different states and the District of Columbia. Mississippi ranked near the bottom in each of the indexes calculated: political participation, employment and earnings, economic autonomy, health & well-being, and reproductive rights (see Chart 1). Despite progress in some areas since then, subsequent reports by the IWPR continue to rank Mississippi 50<sup>th</sup> overall in the nation among the states.



**Table 1. MISSISSIPPI ELECTED OFFICIALS, SELECTED OFFICES, BY GENDER**

	2003		1998		1988	
	Total	Percent Female	Total	Percent Female	Total	Percent Female
Statewide Offices <sup>1</sup>	19	5	19	0	19	0
State Supreme Court Justices	9	11	9	11	9	11
Appellate Court Judges <sup>2</sup>	10	0	10	10	N.A.	N.A.
Chancery Court Judges	45	24	45	16	39	0
Circuit Court Judges	49	16	48	17	40	0
District Attorneys	20	5	22	5	20	0
State Senators <sup>3</sup>	52	12	52	8	52	6
State Representatives <sup>4</sup>	122	13	122	16	122	6
Mayors <sup>5</sup>	296	15	297	14	293	10

<sup>1</sup>Only two women have ever served in a major statewide elected office. The offices include: Governor, Lieutenant Governor, U. S. Senators (2), U. W. Representatives (4), Secretary of State, State Auditor, Attorney General, Treasurer, Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce, Insurance Commissioner, Public Service Commissioners (3), Transportation Commissioners (3). The late Evelyn Gandy served as Commissioner of Public Welfare 1964-67, Insurance Commissioner 1972-76 and as Lieutenant Governor from 1976-80. Amy Tuck was Lieutenant Governor from 2000 to 2008.

<sup>2</sup>The Appellate Court was created in 1992.

<sup>3</sup>In 2010, 4 women were serving in the State Senate, or 7.6 percent.

<sup>4</sup>In 2010, 21 women were serving in the House of Representatives, or 17 percent.

<sup>5</sup>At least 35 mayors were women, based on names of those elected.

SOURCE: Mississippi Secretary of State's Office. These numbers are estimates in some cases since officials were not asked to return forms with information regarding gender until 1997.

### **Women's Priorities from Commission Hearings**

The priorities of women in Mississippi, as determined by a series of hearings held across the state in 2002 to 2003, are the following:

- reducing poverty
- improving access to quality and affordable child care
- providing access to quality health care
- ending violence against women
- ensuring pay equity for women
- securing a healthy environment
- reducing teen pregnancy
- ending sexual harassment in schools and at workplaces

Since then, the Commission has also addressed more specifically the obstacles that adversely affect women's income, safety and health. While progress has been made in some of these areas, tremendous challenges

remain. The Commission examined the problem of poverty among women in 2009 and 2010, with a particular focus on changes needed in the current child support system.

### **Women and Poverty: A Long-Term Priority of the Commission**

Poverty is a major problem confronting Mississippi, where 1 out of every 5 persons lives in poverty. Women are much more likely than men to be poor, and the poverty rate among children is even higher.

The wage gap between men and women accounts for a significant proportion of the higher poverty rate among women than men in the state. The Institute for Women's Policy Research (1999) estimates that closing the wage gap between men and women in Mississippi would cut the poverty rate in half for women and their families, in both single-parent and two-parent homes.



The troubling poverty rate among the state's children is due in large part to the fact that about 42% of these children are living with one parent, most often the mother (85% of the time). Most single parents are in the workforce, but caring for children makes it difficult for these parents to work full-time. The relatively lower wages paid women are particularly hard on female-headed households. Women who are heads of household caring for children have a very high poverty rate: fully half of these women and their families are poor. The poverty rate for men who are single parents is also high at 31%.<sup>6</sup>



The percentage of single-parent families living in poverty would be even greater if expenditures on child care were taken into account by the federal definition of poverty or if a self-sufficiency standard were used for the measure of poverty.<sup>7</sup> The current poverty threshold is based on the assumption that the cost of nonfood necessities is twice that of food, so that only the family's cost of food is used in estimating the poverty line. While there is general agreement that this assumption needs to be updated, that has yet to occur.

Single-parent families constituted only 11% of all families in 2006, but they accounted for 65% of families living in poverty. Figure 1 shows that of all poor families, 58% were headed by a female single parent, 7% by a male single parent, and 16% were married couple families with children.

Single parents, then, whether divorced, widowed or unmarried, who are caring for children, are at a high risk of poverty --- and this is true despite the child support they receive. (Child support payments are included as income in these poverty estimates.)

### Child Support: A Priority of the Commission in FY2009

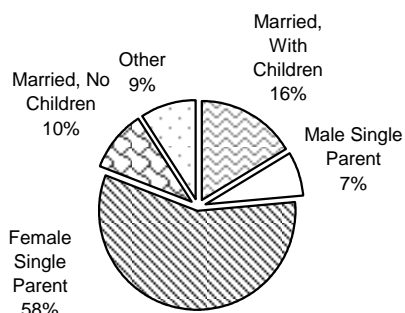
Given the high poverty rates of single parents, the question must be raised of whether the financial responsibilities of caring for children are being borne in proportion to the ability of each parent to pay. The Women's Commission has been circulating a working paper on child support, seeking input from the community and government agencies. The average support payment per child was less than \$600 per year in 2009, and support payments, once set, are fixed and not tied to the rate of inflation. The full report is available on the Commission website.

### Concluding Remarks

In measures of economic well-being, the state's near-bottom ranking is not unexpected, given the high poverty levels and low educational achievement in Mississippi relative to the rest of the country. It comes as a surprise, however, that the state ranks near the bottom of the nation in such areas as women in elected office (rank 49 in 2004) and in women's business ownership (rank 41 in 2002). Nonetheless, that women have made significant progress in the state is undeniable, as data on elected officials show.

Much remains to be done before women in Mississippi attain a status in business, politics and other areas comparable to that enjoyed by men in the state or to that attained

**Figure 1. FAMILIES IN POVERTY BY MARITAL STATUS, PRESENCE OF OWN CHILDREN MISSISSIPPI 2006**



SOURCE: American Community Survey, 2006.

by women nationally. Critical to improving women's status is the advancement of women as leaders. Strengthening institutional resources for women also goes hand-in-hand with progress in areas such as pay, health insurance, and educational achievement. The

goal of the Commission is to expedite improvements by working with state agencies and other organizations to devise a strategy that will combine collaboration, legislative action and education in addressing these urgent issues.

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### Footnotes

1. U.S. Bureau of the Census.

[www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)

2. This percentage would have been much higher, except that high poverty rates enabled 15% of women to qualify for Medicaid. ([www.statehealthfacts.org](http://www.statehealthfacts.org)).

3. Violence Policy Center, "When Men Murder Women", various years. [www.vpc.org](http://www.vpc.org). Among the statistics cited on this page, progress may have been greatest in the reduction of domestic violence. The Domestic Violence Division was established in the Attorney General's office in 2007. In addition, several pieces of legislation have been passed during the past decade that increase the protections available to women and improve the training of law officers in cases of domestic abuse. Most recently, the Commission for the Study of Domestic Abuse, appointed by the Mississippi Supreme Court, issued a report in December 2008 that made several recommendations. This provided impetus for the passage of three laws in 2009 – House Bills 883 and 989 and Senate Bill 2925. Among changes under the new legislation, a fee will now be imposed on convicted abusers that will go to help fund domestic violence shelters combating violence against women. Under Senate Bill 2925, victims of stalking and sexual assault are now exempt from the payment of any fees related to filing for protection by the courts.

In 2000, 40 women in Mississippi were killed by men, yielding a homicide rate of 2.72 per

100,000. In 2008, the number was down to 17 women or 1.1 per 100,000.

4. U.S. Census data. Also, see reports on the status of women in the states at [www.iwpr.org](http://www.iwpr.org).

5. See Table 1 above and fact sheets for the states at Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University. [www.cawp.rutgers.edu](http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu).

6. American Community Survey, U.S. Census 2006..

7. A living wage is not only higher than a poverty-level wage, it provides self-sufficiency for the family, with no dependence on federal transfer programs such as food stamps. A good definition is that provided by Six Strategies research, discussed below. The federal poverty line is based on the assumption that the cost of nonfood necessities is twice that of food – an estimate that no longer holds, according to the National Research Council, which has recommended another way of measuring poverty (their alternative measure has the net effect of increasing the poverty rate). The definition, however, has yet to be changed. Under the current definition, the cost of necessities such as health care has no effect on the poverty threshold. See the June 1999 *Mississippi Economic Review and Outlook*, p. 17-18, for more information, at the following website: [www.mississippi.edu/URC.html](http://www.mississippi.edu/URC.html).

The Center for Women's Welfare has calculated self-sufficiency standards for most states. This standard takes into account the cost of childcare and actual living expenses by county for each state. Using this measure, a mother with a preschool child in Hinds County, Mississippi, would require an income of \$29,349 (2009) to cover necessary expenses without any public assistance. By contrast,

the federal poverty threshold for such a household was \$14,787 in 2009. The full report “The Self-Sufficiency Standard for

Mississippi 2009” by Diana Pearce, Ph.D., is available at [www.mepconline.org](http://www.mepconline.org), the website of the Mississippi Economic Policy Center.

Chart 1. **HOW MISSISSIPPI\* RANKS ON KEY INDICATORS 2004**

<b>Indicators</b>	<b>National Rank**</b>
<b>Composite Political Participation Index</b>	44
Women's Voter Registration, 1998-2000. 74.8%	7
Women's Voter Turnout, 1998-2000. 52.5%	23
Women in Elected Office Composite Index, 2004. 0.78	49
Women's Institutional Resources, 2004. 1.25	22
<b>Composite Employment and Earnings Index</b>	47
Women's Median Annual Earnings, 2002. \$25,600	42
Ratio of Women's to Men's Earnings, 2002. 77.1%	16
Women's Labor Force Participation, 2002, 54.0%	49
Women in Managerial & Professional Occupations, 2001. 29.2%	48
<b>Composite Economic Autonomy Index</b>	51
Nonelderly Women with Health Insurance, 2001-02. 79.5%	43
Women with 4 or more years of college, 2000. 16.6%	48
Women's Business Ownership, 1997. 22.8%	47
Women above the Poverty Level, 2001-02. 79.8%	51
<b>Composite Health and Well-Being Index (1.49)</b>	49
<b>Composite Reproductive Rights Index (0.27)</b>	51
<p>See Appendix II in <i>The Status of Women in the States</i> for a detailed description of the methodology and sources used for the indices presented here.</p> <p>25.1% of businesses were women-owned in 2002, ranking MS 41st, up from 22.8% in 1997 when MS ranked 47th.</p> <p>The national rankings are of a possible 51, referring to the 50 states and the District of Columbia except for the Political Participation indicators, which do not include the District of Columbia.</p> <p>Calculated by the Institute for Women's Policy Research, the website is: <a href="http://www.iwpr.org">http://www.iwpr.org</a>.</p>	

## **ACTIVITIES OF THE MISSISSIPPI COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN, FY2010**

The Commission moved forward on several fronts during FY2010. Two major initiatives of the Commission this year were a Legal Seminar for Women and a convening of the Interagency Council.

- The Commission planned and held a Women's Legal Issues Seminar in January in Meridian, for service providers and women, addressing topics including child support, child custody, divorce and domestic violence issues. Free copies of the Mississippi Bar's publication "A Guide to Women's Legal Rights in Mississippi" were donated by the Bar.
- The Commission held the first meeting of the Interagency Council in May, at which representatives of 12 state agencies reported on how their programs have impacted women in the state. They also reported on the employment of women within their agencies, and made recommendations regarding issues that need to be addressed to further improve the status of women.



- Legislative Days were held at the State Capitol, acquainting legislators with the work of the Commission and thanking them for their work in support of women (2/10).
- The Commission hosted a Women's Networking Luncheon in February to involve more women in the work of the Commission. Suggestions and ideas from women's organizations and other groups were sought for future projects and initiatives.
- The Commission began the process of planning for a 2011 statewide women's conference as a result of the networking luncheon.
- Commission's website was updated and improved; the Commission's FY2009 Annual Report and its Working Paper on Child Support were posted.
- The Commission finished preparation of materials for establishing a non-profit in order to pursue grants to support its work; this non-profit will later seek 501(c)(3) status.
- The Commission researched and submitted requests for funds from various foundations and other funding sources to continue the Women's Legal Issues Seminars in the months ahead.
- The Executive Director attended several meetings and conferences representing the Commission and building networks within the state.
- At the February Commission meeting, Kathryn Cariglino, executive director of the Women's Business Center, Inc., in Mobile, AL discussed the founding of the Center, its mission and the funding routes the Center has used to become successful.
- Commissioner Marshall attended the conference of the National Association of Commissions for Women (7/09).
- The Commission continues to work with the Secretary of State's office on updating information on women elected to public office in the state.

On-going initiatives, including the Interagency Council, Child Support, Legal Issues Seminars for Women, and the 2011 Statewide Women's Conference are discussed elsewhere in this report in more detail.

## **REPORT ON WOMEN'S LEGAL ISSUES SEMINAR**

**T**he Commission spotlighted legal issues affecting women in Mississippi in a seminar that it organized under the leadership of Commissioner Gloria Williamson.

On January 12, 2010, the Commission hosted its first-ever Women's Legal Issues Seminar in Meridian for service providers and women. The Seminar addressed topics including child support, child custody, divorce and domestic violence issues.

Entitled "Legal Issues Impacting Women: Divorce, Child Support, Child Custody & Domestic Violence," the event drew 60 participants from across the state and was free and open to the public. The seminar was presented with the support of the Governor's Office for the State of Mississippi, the Attorney General's Office, Jackson State University, Mississippi State University and Friends of The W.

Presenters included Gloria Williamson (Chair), Justice Kay B. Cobb (Ret.), Honorable Amy Tuck, Leigh Ann Keys, Constance Slaughter Harvey, Joy Hartness,

Honorable Max Kilpatrick, and attorneys Edward Williamson, Heather Wagner, Leslie Payne, David Love, Rob Wells and Veldore Young.



The Commission thanks the Mississippi Bar for providing, at no cost, copies of its 2009 publication "A Guide to Women's Rights in Mississippi".

The Commission plans to hold further seminars in other locations in the state.

## REPORT ON RESULTS OF SURVEY OF STATE AGENCIES

The act which established the Commission provides for an Interagency Council, including but not limited to representatives of eleven of the largest state agencies. For the second year, the Commission includes in its annual report the data and information from these agencies on how their programs affect women in the state. The presence or absence of women in the leadership of these agencies is also considered.

Each agency named in the legislation was contacted and invited to attend the May 2010 Commission meeting. Additionally, the Department of Finance and Administration, also attended. Some of the agencies reporting to the Commission, including the Department of Health, have programs geared specifically to women. Some provide detailed data on women in the state and/or within their own agencies. The Institutions of Higher Learning, for example, provides data annually on student enrollment, graduation rates, faculty and administrative personnel broken down by gender and race. In other cases, information broken down by gender may be available periodically: the Secretary of State's Office, for example, published data on women in elected office in 2003, but more recent data have not been compiled, although this Office has agreed to do so at the Commission's request. The Mississippi State Department of Health, under the leadership of Dr. Mary Currier, State Health Officer, was the only state agency in the Interagency Council led by a woman.



The 12 agencies attending the Interagency Council meeting and their presenters were:

Mississippi Attorney General's Office  
Onetta Whitley

Mississippi Board of Trustees of State  
Institutions of Higher Learning  
Dr. Hank Bounds

Mississippi Department of  
Corrections  
Lora Cole

Mississippi Department of Education  
Trecina Green

Mississippi Department of Finance  
and Administration  
Rita Wray

Mississippi Department of Health  
Dr. Mary Currier – State Health  
Officer

Mississippi Department of Human  
Services  
Jill Dent  
Martha Benjamin

Mississippi Department of Mental  
Health  
Cary Walt  
Trisha Hinson

Mississippi Department of Public  
Safety  
Amy Carruth  
Natalie Holmes

Mississippi Development Authority  
Jan Sims

Mississippi Secretary of State's Office  
Carla Thornhill

Mississippi State Board for  
Community and Junior Colleges  
Debra West

## Department of Health

This department provides several health statistics by sex, which is essential for its comprehensive health care plan for the state, and offers many services specifically for women. For example, the department provides maternity services to women through county health departments and served more than 29,000 high-risk mothers and infants in FY2009. The department oversees the WIC program for the state, which provides special supplemental food for pregnant, breastfeeding and post-partum women, infants and children under age 5. The program served more than 24,000 women during FY2009. The Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System provides comprehensive data relating to maternal experiences before, during and after pregnancy through a 70-question survey.



In addition to health care services, educational programs are offered in such areas as preventive health care and family planning. The department provides funding to 13 domestic violence shelter programs and 9 rape crisis centers across the state. These shelters and centers not only provide services, but are very active in programs to reduce domestic and sexual violence. In FY2008, domestic violence shelters reported that information/referral calls related to domestic abuse totaled 22,618 and that over 1,000 women were provided shelter services. In addition, shelters were involved in over 1,500 educational activities, which had a total attendance of 69,435.

The number of female doctors by specialty is published in the annual report of the department: in 2006, 18.3% of medical doctors were women. Whereas most male doctors were (non-primary care) specialists, most women were not specialists.

The Office of Women's Health focuses on ensuring that the health needs of women at or below 185% of the poverty level are met. Services include early cancer detection, domestic violence prevention and intervention, family planning (reproductive health), and prenatal services to include Perinatal High Risk Management and Infant Service Systems to at risk pregnant women and infants.

Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System data collected in 2008 revealed that 28.6% of women in Mississippi have not had a mammogram in the last two years – the highest proportion in the country and very strongly associated with below-average household income. Through the Mississippi Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program, the department provided screenings for breast and cervical cancer to more than 5,800 women. With federal and matching funds, the department also offers Pap exam screening services at selected locations.

*Recommendations put forward by the Department in 2009 include:* Because of the rural nature of the state, key health conditions, diseases and causes of death faced by women must be addressed. Evidence-based research indicates that the more access women have to health insurance, the more likely they are to seek appropriate care.

In Mississippi funding is needed to focus on the research that has been identified regarding women's health. To achieve healthy women, Mississippi must address the economic disparities impacting women.

In addition, there must be more focus placed on education to enhance reproductive health, perinatal health, mental health and the violence against women in our state. There is also a need to collect more concise data and enhance data systems to focus on emerging



issues affecting women's health to meet the needs without barriers.

Mary Currier is the State Health Officer; three of the Mississippi State Board of Health's 13 current board members are women.

*Recommendation:* The Commission recommends that the Department of Health make the data it compiles by gender available on its website. It also requests data on what percentage of employees are women.

## Department of Mental Health

This department did not provide data by gender in its FY2009 annual report. For example, a breakdown by gender of persons treated at Crisis Intervention Centers, at psychiatric hospitals and other facilities would be useful. Such information is needed to assess the extent to which women's needs are being met. Data on adolescents engaged in risky behavior or with developmental disabilities, broken down by sex, for example, would be very useful in planning programs to reduce long-term mental health programs.

Edwin LeGrand is the Executive Director; two of the eight board members are women.

*Recommendation:* The Commission recommends that Department of Mental Health compile data by gender and make that data available on its website. It also requests data on what percentage of employees are women.

## Department of Human Services

Many of the services of this department disproportionately benefit women and their children. The majority of adults receiving assistance under the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families are women, as

are the recipients of child support payments. Child care services also are especially important to women, as are the recipients of child support payments. Child care services also are especially important to women, as are meals for the aging. However, the data provided by DHS are not broken down by sex in its annual report.

Mississippi's public assistance rolls under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) decreased in FY2009, despite the recession. Follow-up data on those leaving the TANF program would be useful in determining if these families have fallen further into poverty or if their incomes have improved and their basic needs are being met.

The department expanded the Quality Rating System (QRS) for child care statewide and launched a pilot project to implement QRS in pre-K classrooms in Mississippi school districts. It also initiated a parent education program about identifying quality childcare and a children and nutritional activity program for all licensed child care centers. DHS is partnering with the Department of Mental Health to provide training at the centers.



The Division of Child Support and Enforcement collected nearly \$286.7 million for FY2009 for families and children, an increase of \$22 million over the previous year, and is currently serving 364,731 cases statewide with a staff of 510 persons. The caseload per worker is high compared with the national average of 250 to 300 cases per worker.

Don Thompson is Executive Director of DHS; his deputy executive director and one of his three deputy administrators is a woman.

*Recommendation:* The Commission recommends that Department of Human Services compile data by gender and make that data available on its website. It also requests data on what percentage of employees are women.

## State Department of Education

While teachers account for most of school employees in the state, and most of these are women, data broken down by sex are not available, either through the department's website or through the annual report, on the number of teachers, principals, and other personnel who are female. Some data on students by sex is available – for example, for test scores. The Department of Education states it is committed to reducing the drop-out rate and as a part of this effort is working



to reduce teen pregnancy, primarily through programs stressing abstinence. Legislation supporting comprehensive sex education was proposed but was not enacted during the 2010 legislative session. It is not clear whether or not there are other programs aimed at helping young women learn skills to cope with the obstacles that they may face after they leave school, such as sexual harassment, domestic violence, and job discrimination.

Dr. Tom Burnham is the State Superintendent of Education; two of his four deputies are women. Four of the nine board members are women.

*Recommendation:* The Commission recommends that Department of Education compile data on students and employees by gender and make that data available on its website.

## Department of Public Safety (DPS)

This department has several divisions including the Highway Patrol, the Mississippi Bureau of Investigation, the Bureau of Narcotics, Mississippi Homeland Security, the Crime Lab, Crime Stoppers, the State Medical Examiner's Office, the Law Enforcement Officer's Training Academy, Public Safety Planning Motor Carrier Safety Division and the Office of Administrative Operations. The DPS website links to each of these divisions, but at this point annual reports are not available through the websites. Some of these offices surely collect information by gender, and forward it to the U.S. Department of Justice, which compiles data related to crime from a wide variety of state sources, with some data broken down by gender.

DPS provided the Commission with statistics on total employees and on supervisory/management employees by gender. Of a total of 1,311 employees, 463 are female, or 35%. Only two divisions include no women in supervisory or management roles: Driver Services and Administrative (249 female employees) and the Training Academy (5 female employees).

About 10% of applicants to the Mississippi Highway Patrol are female, and each class numbers from 75 to 100. Currently, MHP employs nine female officers, all of whom are in promotional ranks.

The Commissioner is Stephen Simpson and both the Deputy Director and Assistant Commissioner are men. The executive staff is comprised of eight men and one woman (director of Support Services). The Crime Stoppers division is also led by a woman.

*Recommendation:* The Commission thanks DPS for its work in compiling data on employees by gender for this report. It also recommends that data that it has collected

broken down by gender be published on its website.

## **Mississippi Development Authority (MDA)**

The MDA has three main divisions: economic development, asset development and administrative and financial services. It offers a special program for minority and women-owned businesses, helping to facilitate networking with key industry partners from public and private sectors.

The MDA provided the Commission with the following data for this report. The Minority/Small Business Development division serves minority- and women-owned businesses, offering Woman-owned Business Enterprise certification for economically disadvantaged applicants. The MDA reported approximately \$3 million in minority loans was provided to certified minority businesses in 2009, with 45% of the total going to women-owned businesses. Approximately 800 certified minority businesses are listed in the MDA Supplier Directory, and nearly half are women-owned.

The Existing Industry and Business division, or EIB, helps women become operators of their own businesses by providing management and technical services free of charge to improve profitability, increase jobs and payroll, and foster investment in state business and industry. Examples of women-owned businesses assisted by MDA in 2009 included The Potter's House, a day-care center which grew in capacity after its EIB consultation; and Jazzy Nails, which received assistance to expand its operations with market research analysis, a loan application and a business plan.

The MDA works with community colleges to develop appropriate workforce training programs benefit women in preparing

for high-tech, high-paying jobs that locate in Mississippi. In FY2009, participants in community college workforce classes were 48.6% female. In the same time period, participants in classes offered through WIN Job Centers were 51.7% female.

The MDA also tracks data about women and tourism. The Mississippi Visitor Profile Study for FY2009 reported that 58% of the estimated total visitors to the state were female. Mediapost.com reports that women age 50 to 75 are predicted to be the fastest growing demographic among travel consumers over the next 10 years. Eighteen of the 25 convention and visitors bureaus and tourism offices in Mississippi are led by female directors. (These are not affiliated with MDA but are industry partners.)

MDA's workforce is 69% female. Of 55 front-line supervisory positions, 64% are held by women. Six of 14 division directors are women, while two of five executive team members are women. The Executive Director is Gray Swoope.



*Recommendation:* The Commission thanks MDA for its work in compiling data by gender for this report. It also recommends that this and other data that it has collected broken down by gender be published on its website.

## **Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL)**

The IHL, which oversees the state university system, provides comprehensive statistics by sex on students, faculty, technical staff, administrators, clerical staff, and service/maintenance in each of the eight state universities. Information is given on average

pay for full-time employees in different categories of employment by sex; also the percentage of full-time faculty who are female, and similarly for administrators. Retention rates and degrees awarded by ethnicity and gender by institution are available. Even the number of female and black attorneys issued payment, and total paid, are provided in information on legal expenses. Contracts awarded are also broken down by race and gender.



Hank Bounds is Commissioner, and the Deputy Commissioner for Finance and Administration is Linda McFall; one-third of the 12 board members are women, including the president and vice president.

*Recommendation:* The Commission notes that the IHL provides comprehensive data by gender and race in an annual report, and recommends that this report be made available through its website.

## **State Board for Community and Junior Colleges**

The State Board for Community and Junior Colleges oversees Mississippi's 15 community and junior colleges and tracks data for each college on enrollment and degrees granted by gender, though data on faculty by gender are not collected.

Mississippi's percentage of female enrollees is 64% while nationally, 58% of community college enrollees are women. Participants enrolled in short-term workforce training programs were 44.9% female, while ABE and GED enrollment was 55% female. The CJC report to the Commission noted that an October 2009 study published in *Contemporary Economic Policy* found that women who graduate from community college with two-year degrees earn 45.8% more annually

than women with only a high school education.

Eric Clark is Executive Director, three of the six division deputy executive directors are women, and two of the eight board members are women.

*Recommendation:* The Commission thanks the CJC Board for its work in compiling data by gender for this report and recommends that this data be published on its website. It also requests data on what percentage of faculty and other employees are women.

## **Attorney General's Office**

The Mississippi Attorney General's Office oversees several divisions having significant impact on issues that predominantly impact women. The Youth Services Division, Victim Compensation & Victim Services, the Child Desertion Unit, the Cyber Crime Unit, and the new Domestic Violence Unit all reported achievements that are having positive impact on the lives of women and their families. . The Commission on the Status of Women is also under the purview of the Attorney General's Office. Data by gender do not appear to be readily available, however.

The work of the Attorney General's Office, whether with the Department of Human Services, the Department of Health, the Department of Mental Health, the Department of Rehabilitation Services, and others, as well as the work of the Consumer Protection Division, Civil Litigation Division, Criminal Litigation Division, and other divisions, also impact women and their families.

The Office has taken a leadership role in combating domestic violence. It directly sponsored or participated in 198 different training events related to domestic violence.

This included special training for 1,231 court personnel, 712 private attorneys, 79 sexual assault nurse examiners, and 23 members of the Batterers Intervention Group staff. In addition, the AGO trained more than 500 individuals during the 2009 Domestic Violence Conference in Choctaw, MS. The conference was co-sponsored by the Mississippi Coalition Against Domestic Violence and the Mississippi Coalition Against Sexual Assault.

Jim Hood is the Attorney General. His two deputy attorneys general are women.

*Recommendation:* The Commission recommends that data compiled on persons relating to domestic violence, victim compensation, officer training, and in other such areas be reported by gender and made available on its website. It also requests data on what percentage of employees are women.

## **Secretary of State's Office**

The Secretary of State's Office oversees the state's electoral processes and has responsibilities in the regulation of businesses, charities and more. It publishes several reports that document persons serving the public through elected office, boards and other bodies, including the Commission on the Status of Women. The most comprehensive report, issued every four years, is the Mississippi Official and Statistical Register. In 2003, it also published data on women in elected office, and there are plans to provide more recent data. Other than this report, there does not appear to be any compilation of information or data that references women in particular.

Delbert Hosemann is Secretary of State, his Deputy Chief and Communications Director are female, and directors of all four administrative divisions are female, including the chief information officer.

*Recommendation:* The Commission recommends that this office regularly publish data on women in elected office. It also recommends that the office compile data on board appointees and business ownership by gender, and that this data be made available on its website. It also requests data on what percentage of its employees are women.

## **Department of Corrections**

Corrections provides data on the number of inmates by gender, age, race and offense. According to their FY2008 report, for example, 9.9% of inmates were female, or 2,538 persons (with 50% black and 50% not black, and 61% aged 20 to 39 years old). 22% of women were serving sentences of over 10 years; 14% were incarcerated due to possession or sale of drugs.

This year, the Department of Corrections provided the Commission with data on employees by gender. In April 2010, female employees numbered 1,761, or 59.7% of all employees. That figure is down slightly from 60.7% recorded in 2008. Executive staff, excluding the Commissioner, is 50% female out of a total of 10 positions. Women comprise 35.7 % of upper-level management positions, which generally consists of employees with 20 or more years of tenure; and 41.2 % of mid-level management positions, most of whom have worked at the department between five and ten years. First-line supervisors are 42 % female, and line staff are 63 % female.

Christopher Epps is the Commissioner; one of his three deputy commissioners is a woman. The Department's Office of Communications and Medical Division are led by women.

*Recommendation:* The Commission thanks DOC for its work in compiling data on employees by gender for this report. It also recommends that data on inmates be

compiled by gender and published on its website – for example, data on the percentage of women incarcerated who are enrolled in training classes.

## **Closing Thoughts**

by Marianne Hill, Ph.D.,

Chair, Mississippi Commission on the Status of Women

Invest in women! It's a sure-fire way to improve family well-being in the state. It's also an idea whose time has come.

These days, we are not surprised to hear women speaking on talk shows or testifying before Congress as scientists, CEOs or politicians. Most of us recognize that the fuller participation of women in society makes us a stronger nation. We enjoy having women at home and on the stage, in the fields and in the boardrooms. We want women to be able to follow their interests, passions and concerns, and not be constrained by arbitrary rules and customs.

### **The fuller participation of women in society makes us a stronger nation.**

Our economy is also the better for not shutting women out of careers that they have a passion to pursue. The reason Europe and the U.S. dominated the world economy for more than 100 years was because those societies fostered competition, allowing persons to move between jobs and to innovate and sell new products. In contrast, in other countries rigid hierarchies prevented persons from advancing based on merit because tradition determined at birth the kind of job a person could hold.

#### **Closing the wage gap in Mississippi would cut the poverty rate in half for women**

Too often being of a particular gender is still a job requirement when it should not be. Opening more jobs to women would increase the quality of work performance. Consider orchestras. Before 1970, just 10 percent of new hires were women. But then most U.S. orchestras began blind auditions, in which musicians audition behind a screen, his or her identity unknown. The number of women hired skyrocketed and by 1996, women made up 45 percent of orchestra players. The quality of performances improved.

Women are still concentrated in women's jobs -- more so in Mississippi than elsewhere. The pay gap between men and women of the same education level persists. In the case of lone mothers, lower wages translate into high poverty rates. A 1999 study found that closing the wage gap in Mississippi would cut the poverty rate here in half for women and their families, both in single-parent and in two-parent households. Opening nontraditional occupations to women would help close this gap. Pay equity across job categories would as well, and so would subsidized child care.

At a meeting convened by the Mississippi Commission on the Status of Women on May 11, 2010, representatives of 12 state agencies presented their takes on how well women in the state are doing. The facts presented were encouraging, but at the same time, more information was needed. Data broken down by gender were often not available.

#### **The work of the Commission remains much needed**

The work of the Commission remains much needed. Reports studying the status of women in the U.S. consistently rank

Mississippi near the bottom. The wage gap here is at about the national average, but we fair poorly in other areas. For example, Mississippi ranks 41<sup>st</sup> in women's business ownership and 47th in the percentage of women elected to the state legislature. As Hillary Clinton so infamously noted, only Mississippi and Iowa have never elected a woman to the U.S. Congress or to the governorship of the state.

A quarter of women and girls live in poverty. Violence against women is widespread: Mississippi has ranked at or near the top of the list in terms of the number of women killed by men for many years. (I am pleased to note, however, that Mississippi's

ranking here appears to be improving as recent efforts to combat violence against women appear to be having an effect.) Economic, health and other indicators all show that much remains to be done.

With the work of the Commission, Mississippi is taking step forward — we are putting our heads and, I believe, our hearts together to achieve the goal of improving the lives of women and their families in our state. Investing in women, in short, would pay off handsomely for the state.

*The original version of this column was published as an op-ed piece in The Clarion-Ledger on May 17, 2010.*