



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

**ANNUAL REPORT FY2008 and FY2009**

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## **WOMEN OF MISSISSIPPI: MOVING FORWARD**

**Jackson, Mississippi  
August 2009**

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



## **Executive Summary of Key Conclusions and 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 current child support guidelines be re-evaluated and revised as part of the goal of reducing the poverty rate among women.**
2. **That state agencies keep statistics on how their work impacts women specifically.**
3. **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.
4. **That women's representation on boards and commissions be improved.** To increase the number of women who are considered for appointment, solicit resumes of women qualified to serve on the board of a state agency or commission and make available to officials making such appointments.
5. **That the Secretary of State's office update its data on women holding elected office across the state.**



# Mississippi Commission on the Status of Women

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## Introduction

This Annual Report covers FY2008 and FY2009. Besides summarizing the Commission's activities, it provides a brief overview of recent trends impacting women in the state, and the challenges facing women and their families. There is an emphasis on women and poverty, with an overview of the current situation with respect to child support. Also, for the first time, the Commission surveyed state agencies regarding how their programs impact the lives of women. The eleven agencies surveyed are the members of the Interagency Council established by the legislation that created the Commission on the Status of Women.

Recommendations of the Commission are provided in the Executive Summary. This report is available at our website, [www.msstatusofwomen.org](http://www.msstatusofwomen.org).

Available on-line at

[www.msstatusofwomen.org](http://www.msstatusofwomen.org)

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Draft prepared by Marianne Hill, Ph.D.  
The final version approved by the  
Commission July 23, 2009

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## Commission Members, Executive Director and Advisory Committee

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### Commission Members

The Commission members and the date their term expires, are given below (as of 6/09). 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, 6/2009

#### Appointed by the Lieutenant Governor

1. Frances Coleman, Mississippi State, 6/2009
2. Mazie Smith, Jackson, 6/2011
3. La'Wana Hailey, Biloxi, 6/2012

#### Appointed by the Speaker of the House

1. Marianne Hill, Madison, 6/2013
2. Beverly Hogan, Tougaloo, 6/2009
3. Vacant

#### Appointed by the Attorney General

1. Patti Marshall, Jackson, 6/2008
2. Regina Quinn, Jackson, 6/2012
3. Gloria Williamson, Philadelphia, 5/2012

### Executive Director

Deanne Mosley, Esq. (FY2009)

RoAnn Redlin (FY2008)

### Advisory Committee

Dr. Anne Balazs, Dr. Mary Carruth, Kathy Fletcher, Dr. Laura Franey and Leigh Tapley served on the Advisory Committee during FY2009. Hallie Duckworth, La'Wana Hailey and Marianne Hill served as members of the Advisory Committee until their appointment to the Commission.

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## Commission History and Purpose

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### 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





## Women of Mississippi: Moving Forward

**Summary:** *Women have made significant progress in the state of Mississippi. We are holding more elected offices than ever before, educational levels are rising and our earnings have increased. But progress has been uneven and much remains to be done. Reducing the high levels of poverty among women has been identified by the Commission as a long-term priority. This past year the Commission circulated 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 here. The Commission encouraged passage of proposed legislation that would specifically allow judges to take child care expenses into account, above and beyond the percentage formula. It failed on the final deadline day.*

### 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:

- 26% of women lived in poverty in 2007, the highest rate among the states. This is a higher percentage than in 2000.<sup>1</sup>
- 24% of women aged 18 to 64 lacked health insurance, placing Mississippi fourth in the nation. Again, this is a higher percentage than in 2001, when it was 20%.<sup>2</sup>
- The state still ranks among the worst for violence against women despite recent improvements in legislation and educational outreach.<sup>3</sup> Mississippi ranked 5<sup>th</sup> in the nation in terms of women killed by men in 2005. This was an improvement over 2000, when Mississippi ranked first.

- Women's median earnings were only 73% that of men's among full-time, year-round workers in 2007. In 2002, the figure was a higher 77%. (The last time rankings were calculated, using 2005 data, Mississippi ranked 33<sup>rd</sup> in the nation, with a ratio of 74%.)<sup>4</sup>
- Women in 2003 accounted for 13% of members of the Mississippi House and 12% of the Mississippi Senate, an increase in the Senate and a slight decrease in the House since 1998 (see Table 1). The state ranked only 49<sup>th</sup> among the states in women in elected office in 2004.<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 Appendix Chart 1). As a result, a coalition of women's organizations began meeting and worked together with the Legislature

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	52	12	52	8	52	6
State Representatives	122	13	122	16	122	6
Mayors <sup>3</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.S. Representatives (5), Secretary of State, State Auditor, Attorney General, Treasurer, Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce, Insurance Commissioner, Public Service Commissioners (3), Transportation Commissioners (3).

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> At least 35 mayors were women in 2008, 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.

to pass House Bill 797 establishing the Commission on the Status of Women in 2001. 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.

### **Women's Priorities from Commission Hearings 2002-2003**

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

These priorities address the obstacles that adversely affect women's income, safety and health. They emerged from the results of five hearings held, in Jackson, Columbus, Biloxi, Greenville, and Hattiesburg, with the assistance of a grant from the Women's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Labor. While progress has been made in some of these areas, tremendous challenges remain. The Commission has recently examined the problem of poverty among women, 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.<sup>6</sup> Women are much more likely than men to be poor, and the poverty rate among children is even higher.

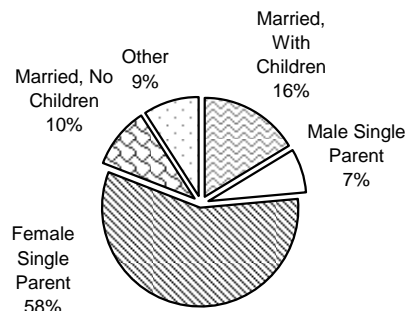
The wage gap between men and women accounts for a significant proportion of the higher poverty rate among women than men in the state. The Institute for Women's Policy Research (1999) estimates that closing the wage gap between men and women in Mississippi would cut the poverty rate in half for women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

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



SOURCE: U.S. Census 2000 PUMS dataset, Mississippi.

tion needs to be updated, that has yet to occur.

Single-parent families constitute only 11% of all families, but they account for 65% of families living in poverty. Figure 1 shows that of all poor families, 58% are headed by a female single parent, 7% by a male single parent, and 16% are 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 this year has circulated a working paper on child support, seeking input from the community and government agencies. An excerpt from the executive summary for this report follows and the full paper is available from the Commission.

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**Excerpt: Women and Child Support in Mississippi: Time for a Change**  
*(Full working paper available at [www.msstatusofwomen.org](http://www.msstatusofwomen.org).)*

Too many single parents in the state are receiving child support payments that are far below even half of the costs they incur in raising a child. The average support payment per child is less than \$600 per year. Part of the problem with low child support payments lies in the area of enforcement, although substantial progress has been made. In addition, and our focus here, Mississippi's current child support formula yields support obligations that are low in relation to the actual costs of child-rearing. Low child support payments contribute to the high poverty rates among children in the state.

**Just over half of all children in the state are eligible for child support**, based on figures from the Mississippi Department of Human Services (DHS). The total number of active children's files in households receiving child support numbered 407,910 in 2007, according to DHS, while the total number of children in Mississippi was 759,651, according to the 2006 U.S. Census. Child support collections for State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2007 totaled \$242,768,697; this amounts to an average of about \$595 per child (\$242.8 million/407,910). The low average support payment indicates that enforcement of child support orders remains a major challenge, despite recent improvements. The level of support required of noncustodial parents is also problematic.

**Current Child Support Guidelines in Mississippi are based on fixed percentage guidelines.** These do not explicitly take into account many of the basic expenses involved in providing for a child, such as child care and health care expenditures. And the initial support obligation, once fixed, is not adjusted periodically for inflation or for changes in the income of the noncustodial (or custodial) parent, or for other reasons, without a return to court. After a few years, then, the purchasing power of the child support payment is considerably lower than it was originally.

**Mississippi's fixed percentage formula calls for percentages lower than in most other states relying on fixed percentages.** After allowing for certain deductions from income, the rate applied to net income to determine the child support payment of the noncustodial parent is 14% for 1 child, 20% for 2 children, 22% for 3 children, 24 % for 4 children and 26% for 5 children or more. Mississippi does not take into account the total income of both parents in calculating the child support obligations of the noncustodial and custodial parent, as is done in most states, which apply income share formulas instead of fixed percentages.

**There are several ways to bring child support obligations more into line with the actual expenses of childrearing.**

1. Under current formulas, annual adjustments for inflation could be reflected in child support orders without the need for subsequent court hearings or court orders, as is the case at present.
2. Current formulas could be modified to clarify that the child support award may be higher than the guidelines to take into account medical costs, child care and other extraordinary expenses.
3. An income share formula could be established that would recognize the actual cost of child-rearing and provide for automatic adjustment for inflation.
4. Payments could be administratively re-examined regularly to allow for changed circumstances, including income and/or medical and child care expenses.
5. The percentages in the formulas could be raised to that prevailing in other states. The fixed percentages could vary by income bracket.

Other changes are also needed. See full paper for more detail. More study is needed to determine which changes in child support payment guidelines are both feasible and desirable. Whatever formula is chosen, however, it will not cover all situations. The introduction of a Child Support Referee System would be a useful addition that would increase the flexibility of the system and expedite access to the courts where necessary.

Improving the state's system of child support has the potential to lift many families in Mississippi out of poverty and to raise both the short-term and long-term well-being of Mississippi's children. It is time that custodial parents, who are largely women, receive a more reasonable and equitable level of support in their critical work of preparing the next generation for the tasks that lie ahead. While improved enforcement of child support orders is also needed, a revision of current child support guidelines, providing for regular adjustments over time, is critical to the future of our children.

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### **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 and in women's business ownership. Nonetheless, that women have made significant progress in the state is undeniable, as data on elected officials show. For example, women accounted for 15 percent of elected judges in the state in 1998, versus just one percent in 1988.

Nonetheless, 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 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.

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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 20% of women to qualify for Medicaid. ([www.statehealthfacts.org](http://www.statehealthfacts.org)) This 2006 rate is higher than that prevailing in 2001-02, 20%.

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.

The number of women killed by men has exceeded 20 annually; in 2000, 40 women in Mississippi were killed by men. The resulting homicide rate (2.72 per 100,000) was the highest in the nation. New laws aimed at curbing domestic violence appear to be having some effect; the rate fell below 2 per 100,000 in 2006, when 20 women were killed.

4. U.S. Census data. 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).

Six Strategies 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 \$22,866 (2003) to cover necessary expenses without any public assistance. By contrast, the federal poverty threshold for such a household was \$12,682 in 2003 and \$14,291 in 2007. The full report “The Self-Sufficiency Standard for Mississippi 2003” by Diana Pearce, Ph.D., with Jennifer Brooks is available at [www.sixstrategies.org](http://www.sixstrategies.org)

Appendix 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>*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, FY2008 AND FY2009**

The Commission moved forward on several fronts during FY2008 and FY2009:

- The Commission's website was updated and improved.
- Papers of incorporation were prepared for the creation of a non-profit to support the work of the Commission and work continues in this area (12/07 to present).
- 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 (1/08 and 3/09).
- The Commission was a sponsor of the Attorney General's statewide domestic violence conference, helping with funding of the keynote speaker. Choctaw, MS, May 13-14, 2008.
- Commission held Strategic Planning Retreat (10/08).
- The Executive Director attended several meetings and conferences representing the Commission and building networks within the state.
- The Commission participated in the Legislative Reception organized by the Coalition Against Domestic Violence (1/09).
- Commissioner Marshall attended the conference of the National Association of Commissions for Women (7/09).
- The Commission approved a letter offering sympathy to the Jackson State University community after the killing of a female student and supporting the re-naming of the JSU Mental Health Center after the slain student.
- The Commission requested the Secretary of State update the 2003 publication which provides informa-

tion on women elected to public office in the state (3/09).

### **On-going Initiatives: Interagency Council, Child Support and Legal Education for Women**

- The Commission is drawing together information from various state agencies regarding how the programs they offer impact the well-being of women specifically. Chair Kay Cobb sent a letter to members of the Interagency Council, as created by legislation establishing the Commission, requesting meetings and information regarding how their work is impacting the status of women.
- The Commission is planning a series of legal seminars open to all women in the state, addressing the legal issues facing women. The Legal Seminar Committee has met with Mississippi College School of Law, University of Mississippi School of Law, and the Mississippi Bar regarding a pilot seminar.
- A working paper on child support in Mississippi, written by the Commission, continues to circulate, seeking feedback on the issue (6/08 to present).

Chair Kay Cobb has taken a leadership role the area of child support. She has discussed child support needs in Mississippi with attorneys, Chancery Clerks, Chancery Judges and Legislative contacts, and has kept up with developments in child support legislation in both 2008 and 2009. Groundwork has begun for the 2010 Legislative session.



## **REPORT ON RESULTS OF SURVEY OF STATE AGENCIES**

The act which established the Commission provides for an Interagency Council, comprised of representatives of eleven of the largest state agencies. This year in its annual report, the Commission has decided to include the data available from these agencies and how their programs affect women in the state. The presence or absence of women in the leadership of these agencies was also noted. In order to do this, the Chair of the Commission contacted each of these agencies in January 2009, and asked them to send relevant materials, including any suggestions they had regarding how to improve the status of women. Most agencies responded, including an overview letter and an annual report. In some cases, more detailed information was provided. In addition, the Chair Kay Cobb personally met with the representatives of some of these agencies. **Information is as of May 2009.**

Some agencies, 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 agency. 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 is not available.

The agencies discussed below in terms of the information they provide which relates specifically to women are: the State Department of Health, State Department of Mental Health, Department of Human Services, State Department of Education, Department of Public Safety, Mississippi Development Authority, Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning, State Board for Community and Junior Colleges, Attorney General's Office, Secretary of State's Office and Mississippi Department of Corrections.

None of the heads of these 11 state agencies is a woman.

### **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. 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. These shelters and centers not only provide services, but are very active in programs to reduce domestic and sexual violence. The Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System provides comprehensive data relating to maternal experiences before, during, and after pregnancy through a 70-question survey.

There is an Office of Women's Health, which responded to our letter of inquiry by summarizing its work for women, providing reports on other health programs affecting women, and offering recommendations regarding how to improve women's health. A synopsis of the work of this office is provided in Appendix A, along with its recommendations. This office focuses on ensuring that the health needs of women at or below 185% of the poverty level are met.

Ed Thompson is the State Health Officer; about 30% of members of the State Board of Health are women.

### **Department of Mental Health**

This department does not provide much data by gender. It does report, however, that

39.9% of persons treated at Crisis Intervention Centers were female. (These centers provide stabilization and services to individuals who are in psychiatric crisis who have been committed to a psychiatric hospital and for whom a bed is not available. If individuals are stabilized while there, they may no longer require admission to a hospital.) No breakdown by gender is available for the psychiatric hospitals.

One of the state-run facilities for persons with mental retardation/developmental disabilities provided data by gender: the Meadow View West, in Senatobia, serves 10 females and 20 males with intellectual and related developmental disabilities from Tate and surrounding counties.



Additional information by gender 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 problems.

Edwin LeGrand is the Executive Director; three of the nine board members are women.

### **Department of Human Services (DHS)**

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 meals for the aging. However, the data provided by DHS are not broken down by sex in its 2008 annual report. The only reference to women or females in that report was in the discussion of Columbia

Training Center, which is a facility for young women.

Don Thompson is Executive Director of DHS; his deputy executive director and two of his three deputy administrators are men.

Note: Data show that 27,443 children received some child care services in January 2009; that about \$21 million was collected that month on about 350,000 child support cases; that about 11,232 families received an average grant of \$138 each that same month; and that 204,431 received food benefits of an average of \$245 in January. Programs promoting abstinence and awareness of HIV/AIDS were given. Some assessment of the effectiveness of these programs would be a useful addition to the annual report.

### **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

**The Department of Education 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.**

personnel who are female. Some data on students by sex is available. The Department of Education 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. It is not clear whether or not there are other programs aimed at helping young women with the obstacles that they may face after they leave school, such as sexual harassment, domestic violence, and job discrimination.

Hank Bounds is the State Superintendent of Education; his chief deputy and three of his four other deputies are men. Three of the nine board members are women.

### **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 sex, 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.



The Commissioner is Stephen Simpson and both the Deputy Director and Assistant Commissioner are men, as are the division heads except that the head of Crime Stoppers is a woman.

### **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. "We can help you find joint ventures and subcontracting opportunities, as well as technical and financial assistance to help you better compete for federal, state, local government and commercial contracts," states the MDA website. Data on the extent to which women and minorities make use of this service is not

accessible through the website or through its annual report.

Gray Swoope is the Executive Director of the Mississippi Development Authority and there are two men serving as Deputy Directors. Three of nine directors listed on their website are women, with a woman also serving as a Bureau Manager.

### **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 fulltime employees in different categories of employment by sex; also the percentage of fulltime faculty that are female, and similarly for administrators. Retention rates and degrees awarded by ethnicity and gender by institutions 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.



Dr. Aubrey Lucas is the Interim Commissioner and the Deputy Commissioner is a woman; one-third of the 12 board members are women.

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

This board oversees Mississippi's 15 community and junior colleges. While not issued in a report by the board, data is available for each college on enrollment and degrees granted by gender. Data on faculty by gender is not collected.

Eric Clark is Executive Director; two of the ten board members are women.

### Attorney General's Office

This office provided the Commission with a compilation of accomplishments impacting issues of special concern to women, which is attached as Appendix B. 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. Data by gender do not appear to be readily available, however.

Jim Hood is Attorney General and one of his two deputy attorneys general is a woman.

### Secretary of State's Office

This 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; one of the five assistant secretaries of state is a woman.

### Department of Corrections

Corrections provides data on the number of inmates by gender, age, race and offense.<sup>1</sup> According to their FY2008 report, for example, 9.9% of inmates are female, or 2,538 persons (with 50% black and 50% not black, and 61% aged 20 to 39 years old). 22% of women are serving sentences of over 10 years; 14% are incarcerated due to possession or sale of drugs.

Additional data by gender are available at their website. Corrections employs over 3,000 persons, largely in security-related positions; a breakdown by gender is not available.

Christopher Epps is the Commissioner; one of his three deputy commissioners is a woman.

**Central Mississippi Correctional Facility is the only state prison housing female inmates, and women are not held at DOC regional correctional facilities.**

1. The data provided by gender are largely related to crimes committed. Information related to attendance at programs is broken down by facility, not by gender, except for alcohol and drug programs. Central Mississippi Correctional Facility is the only state prison housing female inmates, however, and women are not held at regional correctional facilities. CMCF has a capacity of 3,665 and houses men with disabilities or other special needs, as well as women. Of the approximately 1,485 women at CMCF, 393 were enrolled in an alcohol and drug program. Up to 200 can enroll in adult basic education (200 person capacity). Training in job skills is offered, with classes in business technology, apparel & textile workers, cosmetology, computer repair and upholstery (total capacity 80 persons --- all areas), as well as a class in balancing work and family (capacity 15).

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## Appendix A

### Mississippi State Department of Health Office of Women's Health

This office provides and ensures access to comprehensive health services that affect positive outcomes for women, including 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. These services are designed for all women and their families at or below 185 percent of the Federal Poverty Level.

*Recommendations:* 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 key disparities in women's health such as gaps in economic security and educational attainment.

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.

*Data on domestic 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.

*Data on women physicians:* 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.

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## **Appendix B**

### **Report from the Mississippi Office of the Attorney General**

The Office of the Attorney General is committed to helping protect the most

vulnerable Mississippians, in particular, the children, the poor, and the elderly. The dedicated career prosecutors and staff in the Office of the Attorney General work to protect Mississippi families. The investigators and prosecutors work to track down cyber criminals, child predators, fraudulent contractors, and others who take advantage of the citizens of Mississippi. The Attorney General's Office works to recover funds due to Mississippi.

Many of the accomplishments of the Attorney General's Office impact women's issues. Some of those include work specifically of the following divisions/units: Youth Services, Victim Compensation, Victim Services, Domestic Violence, Cyber Crime, and Child Desertion.

Through Youth Services, the Office of the Attorney General worked with Boys and Girls Clubs and the Cal Ripken, Sr. Foundation's Badges for Baseball Program. The Office also provided training on school safety to law enforcement officials and administrators, entered into a grant with the Annie E. Casey Foundation to replicate the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative in three pilot sites, and worked with the National Rifle Association to train regional counselors for the Refuse To Be A Victim Program, worked with the Hinds County Sheriff's Office and others to sponsor a Crime Prevention Conference, launched a Teen Victim Initiative with the National Center for Victims of Crime along with participating in a Teen Action Partnership for Teen Victims Program, and published a "Guide to Child Safety - A Parent's Plan" which was distributed across the state. The Youth Services Division also collaborated with other state agencies and organizations on youth suicide prevention, juvenile drug courts, youth access to alcohol, school safety, Mississippi Kids Count, Shared Youth Vision, Champions for Children, Child Death Review Board, MDHS' State Level

**Among the many projects of the Cyber Crime Unit was the work with Facebook to make changes to better protect children from predators and inappropriate content.**

Case Review Team, MDHS' Citizen Review Board, MS Commission on the Status of Women, and more.

The Crime Victim Compensation Division, which includes Victim Services, provides financial assistance and support services to victims of crime and their family members. The goal of the Division is to relieve the hardships of victims and to assist in their recovery whenever possible. In 2007, the Division expanded its eligible expenses to include domestic violence relocation assistance, domestic violence temporary housing assistance, crime scene cleanup, court related travel, repair and replacement costs and execution travel. Numerous trainings are provided each year by the Division as well as events such as the Annual Crime Victims' Rights Week Events, the annual retreat for homicide survivors, and the annual Tree Lighting Ceremony.

The Domestic Violence Unit trained numerous law enforcement officers, medical providers, court clerks, and others. The staff worked to create a Statewide Uniform Domestic Violence Offense Report which is web-based and better enables law enforcement, prosecutors and judges to track offenders. The Unit was also instrumental in the creation of the Mississippi Supreme Court's Commission on the Study of Domestic Abuse Proceedings, established pursuant to an administrative order of the Supreme Court. This commission was created to perform a thorough review of Mississippi's domestic violence laws and to make recommendations to the Legislature for

modifications to make the system more efficient, to ease access to the courts by victims, and to enhance victim safety.

The Attorney General partnered with the F.B.I., the Secret Service, the U.S. Attorney's Office, the U.S. Postal Inspectors, the Mississippi State University Forensics Training Center, the University of Mississippi's National Center for Justice and the Rule of Law, and local law enforcement to form a Cyber Crime Task Force. The agencies share resources and support each other in the investigation and prosecution of all types of cyber crimes. The Cyber Crime investigators train law enforcement officers as well as provide presentations for children, teachers, and parents about internet safety. The Cyber Crime Center has an active forensics laboratory. Many of the cases involve child exploitation or the possession, production, and receipt of child pornography. Among the many projects of the Cyber Crime Unit, was the work with Facebook to make changes to better protect children from predators and inappropriate content.

The Child Desertion Unit of the Office of the Attorney General works some of the most serious felony non-support of a child cases. For the fiscal year 2008, there were convictions and indictments which totaled \$372,000.00 in back child support.

These are only a few of the highlights from some of the division/units within the Office of the Attorney General which impact women's issues. Of course, all of 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, etc. to the Consumer Protection Division, Civil Litigation Division, Criminal Litigation Division, or other divisions, impact women's issues.