

Juvenile Justice Legislative Reform

April 17, 2006, Mississippi Gov. Haley Barbour signed the Mississippi Juvenile Delinquency Prevention Act into law. Sponsored by Rep. George Flaggs, Jr, Cecil Brown, Alyce G. Clarke, Kelvin Buck and John W. Hines, Sr., the Act was created to amend many segments of the Mississippi Code of 1972.

Some amendments include the following: significant funding for community-based incarceration alternatives, reducing training school and detention placement; training requirements for court-appointed juvenile public defenders; comprehensive standards for juvenile detention centers and community-based alternatives to incarceration; prohibition of the detention of juveniles guilty of offences not considered crimes if committed by adults; and transitional planning for youth leaving training schools and detention centers.

The Act also mandates the use of statewide teams comprised of school counselors, mental health professionals, social service workers, youth court counselors, and parents of children formerly in the juvenile justice system to counsel nonviolent offenders as an alternative to incarceration. Another change was the addition of a study committee to determine what entity should be responsible for providing the educational services within detention centers to ensure that detained youth receive adequate educational services.

In addition, the Act expands upon the duties of the Adolescent Offender Program (AOP), noting: "Each AOP must incorporate evidence-based practices and positive behavioral intervention that includes two (2) or more of the following elements: academic, tutoring, literacy, mentoring, vocational training, substance abuse treatment, family counseling and anger management. Programs may include, but shall not be limited to, after school and weekend programs, job readiness programs, home detention programs, community service conflict resolution programs, restitution and community service."¹

Rep. Flaggs has made numerous attempts to bring about reforms to improve the welfare of youth in Mississippi. He championed the creation of the Indigent Juvenile Appeals Resource Council to make a position within the Mississippi Office of Indigent Appeals that received the Governor's approval on April 20, 2006. Another successful bill presented by Flaggs pertained to the procurement of county funding for various community-oriented organizations like the Boys and Girls Club of Vicksburg. He has also co-signed many bills addressing disaster relief.

Rep. George Flaggs is Chairman of the Juvenile Justice Committee. He also serves on the Appropriations; Gaming; Investigate State Offices; Legislative Budget Committee, Public Health & Human Services and Medicaid committees.

¹ Section 43-27-201, Mississippi Code of 1972, Section 6, 4:
<http://billstatus.ls.state.ms.us/documents/2006/html/HB/0100-0199/HB0199SG.htm>