MISSISSIPPI LEGISLATURE REGULAR SESSION 2021

By: Representative Scott

To: Corrections; Judiciary B

HOUSE BILL NO. 892

AN ACT TO CREATE A TASK FORCE TO ADDRESS THE DISPARITY OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALES IN THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM; TO SPECIFY THE DUTIES OF THE TASK FORCE; TO PROVIDE FOR THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE TASK FORCE; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES.

WHEREAS, more than one (1) in every four (4) black men, twenty-eight and five-tenths percent (28.5%), is expected to be incarcerated in a federal or state prison at some point in his lifetime; and

WHEREAS, African-American males between eighteen (18) and twenty-four (24) years of age are eight (8) times more likely than white males to be murdered; and

WHEREAS, African-American males make up nearly seventy-five percent (75%) of the total prison population and due to either present or past incarceration are the most socially disenfranchised group of American citizens in the country today; and

WHEREAS, a black male born in 1991 has a twenty-nine percent (29%) chance of spending time in prison at some point in his life,

but the figure for white males is four percent (4%) and for Hispanics it is sixteen percent (16%); and

WHEREAS, in 1954, at the time of the historic *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, African Americans constituted about thirty percent (30%) of individuals admitted to federal and state prisons, and that number has increased to over fifty percent (50%); and

WHEREAS, there are presently more African-American males in prison than in college, and African-American males make up less than two percent (2%) of our elementary school teachers; and

WHEREAS, the number of African-American men in prison must decrease and the number of African-American men in college must increase, and the issue of African-American males dropping out of elementary and high schools must be addressed; NOW, THEREFORE,

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

SECTION 1. (1) There is created a task force to address the disparity of African-American males in the judicial system, and the duties of the task force shall be as follows:

(a) Review data regarding the current number of African-American males who are incarcerated in this state and the education level and dropout rate of those males;

(b) Evaluate current methods that are used by the Department of Education to assist African-American males who are at risk of dropping out of school;

(c) Review data regarding early guidance and counseling that is given to young African-American males in regard to obtaining future occupations;

(d) Develop best practices for future job skills for African-American males;

(e) Review data regarding drug rehabilitation for African-American males;

(f) Develop best practices and current methods utilized for drug rehabilitation for African-American males;

(g) Develop a program that is dedicated to ensuring college preparation, leadership development, community responsibility and successful life planning for African-American males that will enable them to become certified elementary school teachers in Mississippi's public schools and serve as role models to economically and socially disadvantaged youths; and

(h) Evaluate current methods that the state's training school is utilizing to prevent young African-American males who have been adjudicated to the training school from becoming a part of the adult prison system in the future.

The task force shall make a report of its findings and recommendations to the Legislature by December 1, 2021, including any recommended legislation.

(2) The task force shall be composed of nine (9) members, as follows:

(a) Three (3) members of the House of Representatives to be appointed by the Speaker of the House;

(b) Three (3) members of the Senate to be appointed by the Lieutenant Governor;

(c) The State Superintendent of Public Education or his designee;

(d) The Executive Director of the Department of Human Services or his designee; and

(e) The Commissioner of the Department of Corrections or his designee.

(3) Legislative appointments shall be made within thirty (30) days after the effective date of this act. Within fifteen (15) days thereafter on a day to be designated jointly by the Speaker of the House and the Lieutenant Governor, the task force shall meet and organize by selecting from its membership a chairman and a vice chairman. The vice chairman shall also serve as secretary and shall be responsible for keeping all records of the task force. A majority of the members of the task force shall constitute a quorum. In the selection of its officers and the adoption of rules, resolutions and reports, an affirmative vote of a majority of the task force shall be required. All members shall be notified in writing of all meetings, and those notices shall be mailed at least fifteen (15) days before the date on which a meeting is to be held.

(4) The members of the task force who are not legislators shall be compensated at the per diem rate authorized by Section 25-3-69 and shall be reimbursed in accordance with Section 25-3-41 for mileage and actual expenses incurred in the performance of their duties. Legislative members of the task force shall be paid from the contingent expense funds of their respective houses in the same manner as provided for committee meetings when the Legislature is not in session. However, no per diem or expenses for attending meetings of the task force will be paid to legislative members of the task force while the Legislature is in session. No task force member may incur per diem, travel or other expenses unless previously authorized by vote, at a meeting of the task force, which action shall be recorded in the official minutes of the meeting. The nonlegislative members shall be paid from any funds made available to the task force for that purpose.

SECTION 2. This act shall take effect and be in force from and after July 1, 2021.