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SENATE BILL NO. 2958

Originated in Senate

Lij Welch

Secretary

SENATE BILL NO. 2958

AN ACT TO AMEND SECTIONS 71-5-353 AND 71-5-355, MISSISSIPPI CODE OF 1972, TO PROVIDE FOR A REDUCTION IN THE NEWLY SUBJECT EMPLOYER RATE FOR UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION INSURANCE FOR ONE YEAR; TO PROVIDE FOR THE DISTRIBUTION OF MISSISSIPPI WORKFORCE ENHANCEMENT TRAINING CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE STATE WORKFORCE ENHANCEMENT TRAINING FUND AND STATE WORKFORCE INVESTMENT CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE STATE WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARD BANK ACCOUNT; TO PROVIDE THAT MONEY IN STATE WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARD BANK ACCOUNT SHALL BE USED FOR ADMINISTRATION OF STATE WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARD BUSINESS, GRANTS RELATED TO TRAINING, AND OTHER PROJECTS AS DETERMINED APPROPRIATE BY THE STATE WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARD; TO REQUIRE THE MANAGEMENT OF FUNDS IN THE STATE WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARD BANK ACCOUNT; TO PROVIDE FOR AN ANALYSIS OF THE MISSISSIPPI WORKFORCE TRAINING NEEDS; TO PROVIDE FOR THE TRANSFER OF CERTAIN COLLECTIONS TO THE WORKFORCE INVESTMENT AND TRAINING FUND HOLDING ACCOUNT; TO PROVIDE THAT A PORTION OF THE FUNDS COLLECTED FOR THE MISSISSIPPI WORKFORCE ENHANCEMENT TRAINING FUND SHALL BE USED FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF CERTAIN PERFORMANCE MEASURES TO MEASURE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE USE OF THE FUND; TO PROVIDE FOR THE CONTRIBUTION RATE FOR MISSISSIPPI WORKFORCE ENHANCEMENT TRAINING CONTRIBUTIONS AND STATE WORKFORCE INVESTMENT CONTRIBUTIONS; TO PROVIDE THAT ALL MISSISSIPPI WORKFORCE ENHANCEMENT TRAINING CONTRIBUTIONS AND STATE WORKFORCE INVESTMENT CONTRIBUTIONS COLLECTED SHALL BE TRANSFERRED TO THE WORKFORCE INVESTMENT AND TRAINING HOLDING ACCOUNT; TO PROVIDE FOR A GENERAL EXPERIENCE RATE FOR UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE CONTRIBUTIONS OF .2% TO WHICH WILL BE ADDED THE EMPLOYER'S INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCE RATE; TO PROVIDE THAT AN EMPLOYER'S TOTAL RATE FOR UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE CONTRIBUTIONS SHALL NOT EXCEED 5.4%; TO AMEND SECTION 71-5-453, MISSISSIPPI CODE OF 1972, TO

PROVIDE THE MANNER IN WHICH STATE WORKFORCE ENHANCEMENT TRAINING AND STATE WORKFORCE INVESTMENT CONTRIBUTIONS SHALL BE HANDLED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF EMPLOYMENT SECURITY; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES.

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

SECTION 1. Section 71-5-353, Mississippi Code of 1972, is amended as follows:

71-5-353. (1) (a) Each employer shall pay unemployment insurance contributions equal to five and four-tenths percent ~~(5.4%) of taxable wages paid by him each calendar year, except as~~ may be otherwise provided in Section 71-5-361 and except that each newly subject employer shall pay unemployment insurance contributions at the rate of * * * one percent (1%) of taxable wages, for his first year of liability, one and one-tenth percent (1.1%) of taxable wages for his second year of liability, and one and two-tenths percent (1.2%) of taxable wages for his third and subsequent years of liability unless the employer's experience-rating record has been chargeable throughout at least the twelve (12) consecutive calendar months ending on the most recent computation date at the time the rate for a year is determined; thereafter the employer's contribution rate shall be determined in accordance with the provisions of Section 71-5-355.

(b) Notwithstanding the newly subject employer contribution rate provided for in paragraph (a) of this subsection, * * * the contribution rate of all newly subject employers shall be reduced by seven one-hundredths of one percent (.07%) for calendar year 2013 only. * * * The contribution rate of all newly subject employers shall be reduced by three

one-hundredths of one percent (.03%) for calendar year 2014 only.

For purposes of this * * * chapter, "newly subject employers" means employers whose unemployment insurance experience-rating record has not been chargeable throughout at least the twelve (12) consecutive calendar months ending on the most recent computation date at the time the contribution rate for a year is determined.

* * *

(2) (* * * a) (i) There is hereby created in the Treasury of the State of Mississippi a special fund to be known as the "Mississippi Workforce Enhancement Training Fund," which consists of funds collected pursuant to * * * subsection (3) * * * of this section.

(ii) Funds collected shall initially be deposited into the Mississippi Department of Employment Security * * * bank account for clearing contribution collections and subsequently appropriate amounts shall be transferred to the Mississippi Workforce * * * Investment and Training Fund Holding Account described in Section 71-5-453. In the event any employer pays an amount insufficient to cover the total contributions due, the amounts due shall be satisfied in the following order:

* * * 1. Unemployment contributions;

* * * 2. Mississippi Workforce Enhancement Training Fund contributions for calendar year 2013 and prior years;

3. Mississippi Workforce Enhancement Training contributions and State Workforce Investment contributions after calendar year 2013, on a pro rata basis;

* * *4. Interest and damages; then

* * *5. Legal and processing costs.

The amount of unemployment insurance contributions due for any period will be the amount due according to the actual computations unless the employer is participating in the MLPP. In that event, the amount due is the MLPP amount computed by the department.

Cost of collection and administration of the Mississippi Workforce Enhancement Training Fund contribution and the State Workforce Investment contribution shall be allocated based on a plan approved by the United States Department of Labor (USDOL) and shall be paid to the Mississippi Department of Employment Security semiannually by the Mississippi Community College Board and the State Workforce Investment Board with the cost allocated to each based on a USDOL approved plan on a pro rata basis, for periods ending in December and June of each year. Payment shall be made to the department no later than sixty (60) days after the billing date. Cost shall be allocated to the Mississippi Workforce Enhancement Training Fund and the State Workforce Investment Board bank account on the same basis as the distribution of funds collected as described in paragraph (b) of this subsection.

(b) Mississippi Workforce Enhancement Training contributions and State Workforce Investment contributions shall be distributed as follows:

(i) For calendar year 2014, ninety-four and seventy-five one-hundredths percent (94.75%) shall be distributed to the Mississippi Workforce Enhancement Training Fund and the remainder shall be distributed to the State Workforce Investment Board bank account;

(ii) For calendar years subsequent to calendar year 2014, ninety-three and seventy-five one-hundredths percent (93.75%) shall be distributed to the Mississippi Workforce Enhancement Training Fund and the remainder shall be distributed to the State Workforce Investment Board bank account.

(c) All monies collected will be initially deposited into the Mississippi Department of Employment Security bank account for clearing contribution collections and subsequently transferred to the * * * Workforce * * * Investment and Training * * * Holding Account and will be held by the Mississippi Department of Employment Security in such account for a period of not less than * * * thirty (30) days. After such period, * * * the Mississippi Workforce Enhancement Training Fund monies shall be transferred to the Mississippi Community College Board Treasury Account, and the State Workforce Investment Board bank account monies shall be transferred to the State Workforce Investment Board bank account, in * * * the manner described in paragraph (b)

of this subsection and within the time frame determined by the department; however, except in cases of extraordinary circumstances, these funds shall be transferred within fifteen (15) days. Interest earnings or interest credits on deposit amounts in the Workforce Investment and Training bank account shall be retained in the * * * account to pay the banking costs of the account. If after the period of twelve (12) months interest earnings less banking costs exceeds Ten Thousand Dollars (\$10,000.00), such excess amounts shall be transferred to the * * * respective accounts within thirty (30) days * * * following the end of each calendar year on the basis described in paragraph (b) of this subsection.

(d) All enforcement procedures for the collection of delinquent unemployment contributions contained in Sections 71-5-363 through 71-5-383 shall be applicable in all respects for collections of delinquent unemployment insurance contributions designated for the Unemployment Compensation Fund * * *, the Mississippi Workforce Enhancement Training Fund and the State Workforce Investment Board bank account.

(e) (i) Except as otherwise provided for in this subparagraph (i), all monies deposited into the Mississippi Workforce Enhancement Training Fund treasury account shall be utilized exclusively by the Mississippi Community College Board in accordance with the Workforce Training Act of 1994 (Section 37-153-1 et seq.) and the annual plan developed by the State

Workforce Investment Board for the following purposes: to provide training at no charge to employers and employees in order to enhance employee productivity. Such training may be subject to a minimal administrative fee to be paid from the Mississippi Workforce Enhancement Training Fund as established by the State Workforce Investment Board subject to the advice of the Mississippi Community College Board. The initial priority of these funds shall be for the benefit of existing businesses located within the state. Employers may request training for existing employees and/or newly hired employees from the Mississippi Community College Board. The Mississippi Community College Board will be responsible for approving the training. A portion of the funds collected for the Mississippi Workforce Enhancement Training Fund shall be used for the development of performance measures to measure the effectiveness of the use of the Mississippi Workforce Enhancement Training Fund dollars. These performance measures shall be uniform for all community colleges and shall be reported to the Governor, Lieutenant Governor and members of the Legislature. Nothing in this act or elsewhere in law shall be interpreted as giving the State Workforce Investment Board authority to direct the Mississippi Community College Board or individual community or junior colleges on how to expend money for workforce training, whether such money comes from the Mississippi Workforce Enhancement Training Fund, is appropriated by the Legislature to the Mississippi Community

College Board for workforce training or comes from other sources. The Mississippi Community College Board, individual community or junior colleges and the State Workforce Investment Board shall cooperate with each other and with other state agencies to promote effective workforce training in Mississippi. Any subsequent changes to these performance measures shall also be reported to the Governor, Lieutenant Governor and members of the Legislature. A performance report for each community college, based upon these measures, shall be submitted annually to the Governor, Lieutenant Governor and members of the Legislature.

(ii) All funds deposited into the State Workforce Investment Board bank account shall be used for administration of State Workforce Investment Board business, grants related to training, and other projects as determined appropriate by the State Workforce Investment Board and shall be nonexpiring. Policies for grants and other projects shall be approved through a majority vote of the State Workforce Investment Board.

(iii) 1. The Department of Employment Security shall be the fiscal agent for the receipt and disbursement of all funds in the State Workforce Investment Board bank account.

2. In managing the State Workforce Investment Board bank account, the department shall ensure that any funds expended for contractual services rendered to the State Workforce Investment Board shall be paid only to service providers who have been selected on a competitive basis. Any contract for services

entered into using funds from the Workforce Investment Fund bank account shall contain the deliverables stated in terms that allow for the assessment of work performance against measurable performance standards and shall include milestones for completion of each deliverable under the contract. For each contract for services entered into by the State Workforce Investment Board, the board shall develop a quality assurance surveillance plan that specifies quality control obligations of the contractor as well as measurable inspection and acceptance criteria corresponding to the performance standards contained in the contract's statement of work.

3. Any commodities procured for the board shall be procured in accordance with the provisions of Section 31-7-13.

(iv) In addition to other expenditures, the department shall expend from the State Workforce Investment Board bank account for the use and benefit of the State Workforce Investment Board, such funds as are necessary to prepare and develop a study of workforce development needs that will consist of the following:

1. An identification of the state's workforce development needs through a well-documented quantitative and qualitative analysis of:

a. The current and projected workforce training needs of existing and identified potential Mississippi

industries, with priority given to assessing the needs of existing in-state industry and business. Where possible, the analysis should include a verification and expansion of existing information previously developed by workforce training and service providers, as well as analysis of existing workforce data, such as the data collected through the Statewide Longitudinal Data System.

b. The needs of the state's workers and residents requiring additional workforce training to improve their work skills in order to compete for better employment opportunities, including a priority-based analysis of the critical factors currently limiting the state's ability to provide a trained and ready workforce.

c. The needs of workforce service and training providers in improving their ability to offer industry-relevant training, including an assessment of the practical limits of keeping training programs on the leading edge and eliminating those programs with marginal workforce relevance.

2. An assessment of Mississippi's current workforce development service delivery structure relative to the needs quantified in this subparagraph, including:

a. Development of a list of strengths/weaknesses/opportunities/threats (SWOT) of the current workforce development delivery system relative to the identified needs;

b. Identification of strategic options for workforce development services based on the results of the SWOT analysis; and

c. Development of results-oriented measures for each option that can be baselined and, if implemented, tracked over time, with quantifiable milestones and goals.

3. Preparation of a report presenting all subjects set out in this subparagraph to be delivered to the Lieutenant Governor, Speaker of the House of Representatives, Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee and Chairman of the House Appropriations Committee no later than February 1, 2015.

4. Following the preparation of the report, the State Workforce Investment Board shall make a recommendation to the House and Senate Appropriations Committees on future uses of funds deposited to the State Workforce Investment Fund account. Such future uses may include:

a. The development of promotion strategies for workforce development programs;

b. Initiatives designed to reduce the state's dropout rate including the development of a statewide career awareness program.

c. The long-term monitoring of the state's workforce development programs to determine whether they

are addressing the needs of business, industry, and the workers of the state; and

d. The study of the potential restructuring of the state's workforce programs and delivery systems.

* * *

(3) (a) (i) * * * Mississippi Workforce Enhancement Training contributions and State Workforce Investment contributions shall be collected at the following rates:

1. For calendar year 2014 only, the rate of nineteen one-hundredths of one percent (.19%) based upon taxable wages; and

2. For calendar years subsequent to calendar year 2014, at a rate of * * * sixteen one-hundredths of one percent (.16%), based upon taxable wages.

(ii) * * * The contribution rate to the Mississippi Workforce Enhancement Training Fund for calendar year 2013 only shall be twenty-two one-hundredths of one percent (.22%). * * *

(iii) * * * The Mississippi Workforce Enhancement Training Fund contribution and the State Workforce Investment contribution shall be in addition to the general experience rate plus the individual experience rate of all employers but shall not be charged to reimbursing or rate-paying political subdivisions or

institutions of higher learning, or reimbursing nonprofit organizations, as described in Sections 71-5-357 and 71-5-359.

(b) All Mississippi Workforce Enhancement Training contributions and State Workforce Investment contributions collected shall be deposited initially into the Mississippi Department of Employment Security bank account for clearing contribution collections and shall within two (2) business days be transferred to the Workforce * * * Investment and Training * * * Holding Account. Any Mississippi Workforce Enhancement Training * * * Fund and/or State Workforce Investment Board bank account transactions from the Mississippi Department of Employment Security bank account for clearing contribution collections that are deposited into the Workforce * * * Investment and Training Fund Holding Account and are not honored by a financial institution will be transferred back to the Mississippi Department of Employment Security bank account for clearing contribution collections out of funds in the Mississippi Workforce * * * Investment and Training Fund Holding Account.

(c) * * * Suspension of the Workforce Enhancement Training Fund contributions required pursuant to this * * * chapter shall occur if the insured unemployment rate exceeds an average of five and five-tenths percent (5.5%) for the three (3) consecutive months immediately preceding the effective date of the new rate year and shall remain suspended throughout the duration of that rate year. Such suspension shall continue until such time

as the three (3) consecutive months immediately preceding the effective date of any subsequent rate year has an insured unemployment rate of less than an average of four and five-tenths percent (4.5%).

(* * *4) All collections due or accrued prior to any suspension of the Mississippi Workforce Enhancement Training Fund will be collected based upon the law at the time the contributions accrued, regardless of when they are actually * * * collected.

SECTION 2. Section 71-5-355, Mississippi Code of 1972, is amended as follows:

71-5-355. (1) As used in this section, the following words and phrases shall have the following meanings, unless the context clearly requires otherwise:

(a) "Tax year" means any period beginning on January 1 and ending on December 31 of a year.

(b) "Computation date" means June 30 of any calendar year immediately preceding the tax year during which the particular contribution rates are effective.

(c) "Effective date" means January 1 of the tax year.

(d) Except as hereinafter provided, "payroll" means the total of all wages paid for employment by an employer as defined in Section 71-5-11, subsection H, plus the total of all remuneration paid by such employer excluded from the definition of wages by Section 71-5-351. For the computation of modified rates,

"payroll" means the total of all wages paid for employment by an employer as defined in Section 71-5-11, subsection H.

(e) For the computation of modified rates, "eligible employer" means an employer whose experience-rating record has been chargeable with benefits throughout the thirty-six (36) consecutive calendar-month period ending on the computation date, except that any employer who has not been subject to the Mississippi Employment Security Law for a period of time sufficient to meet the thirty-six (36) consecutive calendar-month requirement shall be an eligible employer if his experience-rating record has been chargeable throughout not less than the twelve (12) consecutive calendar-month period ending on the computation date. No employer shall be considered eligible for a contribution rate less than five and four-tenths percent (5.4%) with respect to any tax year, who has failed to file any two (2) quarterly reports within the qualifying period by September 30 following the computation date. No employer or employing unit shall be eligible for a contribution rate of less than five and four-tenths percent (5.4%) for the tax year in which the employing unit is found by the department to be in violation of Section 71-5-19(2) or (3) and for the next two (2) succeeding tax years. No representative of such employing unit who was a party to a violation as described in Section 71-5-19(2) or (3), if such representative was or is an employing unit in this state, shall be eligible for a contribution rate of less than five and four-tenths percent (5.4%) for the tax

year in which such violation was detected by the department and for the next two (2) succeeding tax years.

(f) With respect to any tax year, "reserve ratio" means the ratio which the total amount available for the payment of benefits in the Unemployment Compensation Fund, excluding any amount which has been credited to the account of this state under Section 903 of the Social Security Act, as amended, and which has been appropriated for the expenses of administration pursuant to Section 71-5-457 whether or not withdrawn from such account, on October 31 (close of business) of each calendar year bears to the aggregate of the taxable payrolls of all employers for the twelve (12) calendar months ending on June 30 next preceding.

(g) "Modified rates" means the rates of employer unemployment insurance contributions determined under the provisions of this chapter and the rates of newly subject employers, as provided in Section 71-5-353.

(h) For the computation of modified rates, "qualifying period" means a period of not less than the thirty-six (36) consecutive calendar months ending on the computation date throughout which an employer's experience-rating record has been chargeable with benefits; except that with respect to any eligible employer who has not been subject to this article for a period of time sufficient to meet the thirty-six (36) consecutive calendar-month requirement, "qualifying period" means the period ending on the computation date throughout which his

experience-rating record has been chargeable with benefits, but in no event less than the twelve (12) consecutive calendar-month period ending on the computation date throughout which his experience-rating record has been so chargeable.

(i) The "exposure criterion" (EC) is defined as the cash balance of the Unemployment Compensation Fund which is available for the payment of benefits as of November 16 of each calendar year or the next working day if November 16 falls on a holiday or a weekend, divided by the total wages, exclusive of wages paid by all state agencies, all political subdivisions, reimbursable nonprofit corporations, and tax-exempt public service employment, for the twelve-month period ending June 30 immediately preceding such date. The EC shall be computed to four (4) decimal places and rounded up if any fraction remains.

(j) The "cost rate criterion" (CRC) is defined as follows: Beginning with January 1974, the benefits paid for the twelve-month period ending December 1974 are summed and divided by the total wages for the twelve-month period ending on June 30, 1975. Similar ratios are computed by subtracting the earliest month's benefit payments and adding the benefits of the next month in the sequence and dividing each sum of twelve (12) months' benefits by the total wages for the twelve-month period ending on the June 30 which is nearest to the final month of the period used to compute the numerator. If December is the final month of the period used to compute the numerator, then the twelve-month period

ending the following June 30 will be used for the denominator. Benefits and total wages used in the computation of the cost rate criterion shall exclude all benefits and total wages applicable to state agencies, political subdivisions, reimbursable nonprofit corporations, and tax-exempt PSE employment.

The CRC shall be computed as the average for the highest monthly value of the cost rate criterion computations during each of the economic cycles since the calendar year 1974 as defined by the National Bureau of Economic Research. The CRC shall be computed to four (4) decimal places and any remainder shall be rounded up.

The CRC shall be adjusted only through annual computations and additions of future economic cycles.

(k) "Size of fund index" (SOFI) is defined as the ratio of the exposure criterion (EC) to the cost rate criterion (CRC). * * * The target size of fund index will be fixed at 1.0. If the insured unemployment rate (IUR) exceeds a four and five-tenths percent (4.5%) average for the most recent completed July to June period, the target SOFI will be .8 and will remain at that level until the computed SOFI (the average exposure criterion of the current year and the preceding year divided by the average cost rate criterion) equals 1.0 or the average IUR falls to four and five-tenths percent (4.5%) or less for any period July to June. However, if the IUR falls below two and five-tenths percent (2.5%) for any period July to June the target

SOFI shall be 1.2 until such time as the computed SOFI is equal to or greater than 1.0 or the IUR is equal to or greater than two and five-tenths percent (2.5%), at which point the target SOFI shall return to 1.0.

(1) No employer's unemployment contribution rate shall exceed five and four-tenths percent (5.4%), nor be less than * * * two-tenths of one percent (.2%). * * * For any year the general experience rate computes as an amount less than two-tenths of one percent (.2%) the general experience rate shall be established at two-tenths of one percent (.2%). * * * Accrual rules shall apply for purposes of computing contribution rates including associated functions.

(m) The term "general experience rate" has the same meaning as the minimum tax rate.

(2) Modified rates:

(a) For any tax year, when the reserve ratio on the preceding November 16, in the case of any tax year, equals or exceeds three percent (3%), the modified rates, as hereinafter prescribed, shall be in effect. In computation of this reserve ratio, any remainder shall be rounded down.

(b) Modified rates shall be determined for the tax year for each eligible employer on the basis of his experience-rating record in the following manner:

(i) The department shall maintain an experience-rating record for each employer. Nothing in this

chapter shall be construed to grant any employer or individuals performing services for him any prior claim or rights to the amounts paid by the employer into the fund.

(ii) Benefits paid to an eligible individual shall be charged against the experience-rating record of his base period employers in the proportion to which the wages paid by each base period employer bears to the total wages paid to the individual by all the base period employers, provided that benefits shall not be charged to an employer's experience-rating record if the department finds that the individual:

1. Voluntarily left the employ of such employer without good cause attributable to the employer;
2. Was discharged by such employer for misconduct connected with his work;
3. Refused an offer of suitable work by such employer without good cause, and the department further finds that such benefits are based on wages for employment for such employer prior to such voluntary leaving, discharge or refusal of suitable work, as the case may be;
4. Had base period wages which included wages for previously uncovered services as defined in Section 71-5-511(e) to the extent that the Unemployment Compensation Fund is reimbursed for such benefits pursuant to Section 121 of Public Law 94-566;

5. Extended benefits paid under the provisions of Section 71-5-541 which are not reimbursable from federal funds shall be charged to the experience-rating record of base period employers;

6. Is still working for such employer on a regular part-time basis under the same employment conditions as hired. Provided, however, that benefits shall be charged against an employer if an eligible individual is paid benefits who is still working for such employer on a part-time "as-needed" basis;

7. Was hired to replace a United States serviceman or servicewoman called into active duty and was laid off upon the return to work by that serviceman or servicewoman, unless such employer is a state agency or other political subdivision or instrumentality of the state;

8. Was paid benefits during any week while in training with the approval of the department, under the provisions of Section 71-5-513B, or for any week while in training approved under Section 236(a)(1) of the Trade Act of 1974, under the provisions of Section 71-5-513C; or

9. Is not required to serve the one-week waiting period as described in Section 71-5-505(2). In that event, only the benefits paid in lieu of the waiting period week may be noncharged.

(iii) Notwithstanding any other provision contained herein, an employer shall not be noncharged when the

department finds that the employer or the employer's agent of record was at fault for failing to respond timely or adequately to the request of the department for information relating to an unemployment claim that was subsequently determined to be improperly paid, unless the employer or the employer's agent of record shows good cause for having failed to respond timely or adequately to the request of the department for information. For purposes of this subparagraph "good cause" means an event that prevents the employer or employer's agent of record from timely responding, and includes a natural disaster, emergency or similar event, or an illness on the part of the employer, the employer's agent of record, or their staff charged with responding to such inquiries when there is no other individual who has the knowledge or ability to respond. Any agency error that resulted in a delay in, or the failure to deliver notice to, the employer or the employer's agent of record shall also be considered good cause for purposes of this subparagraph.

(iv) The department shall compute a benefit ratio for each eligible employer, which shall be the quotient obtained by dividing the total benefits charged to his experience-rating record during the period his experience-rating record has been chargeable, but not less than the twelve (12) consecutive calendar-month period nor more than the thirty-six (36) consecutive calendar-month period ending on the computation date, by his total taxable payroll for the same period on which all

unemployment insurance contributions due have been paid on or before the September 30 immediately following the computation date. Such benefit ratio shall be computed to the tenth of a percent (.1%), rounding any remainder to the next higher tenth.

* * *

(v) 1. The unemployment insurance contribution rate for each eligible employer shall be the sum of two (2) rates: his individual experience rate in the range from zero percent (0%) to five and four-tenths percent (5.4%), plus a general experience rate. In no event shall the resulting unemployment insurance rate be in excess of five and four-tenths percent (5.4%), however, it is the intent of this section to provide the ability for employers to have a tax rate, the general experience rate plus the individual experience rate, of up to five and four-tenths percent (5.4%).

2. The employer's individual experience rate shall be equal to his benefit ratio as computed under subsection (2)(b)(iv) above.

3. The general experience rate shall be determined in the following manner: The department shall determine annually, for the thirty-six (36) consecutive calendar-month period ending on the computation date, the amount of benefits which were not charged to the record of any employer and of benefits which were ineffectively charged to the employer's

experience-rating record. For the purposes of this item 3, the term "ineffectively charged benefits" shall include:

a. The total of the amounts of benefits charged to the experience-rating records of all eligible employers which caused their benefit ratios to exceed five and four-tenths percent (5.4%);

b. The total of the amounts of benefits charged to the experience-rating records of all ineligible employers which would cause their benefit ratios to exceed five and four-tenths percent (5.4%) if they were eligible employers; and

c. The total of the amounts of benefits charged or chargeable to the experience-rating record of any employer who has discontinued his business or whose coverage has been terminated within such period; provided, that solely for the purposes of determining the amounts of ineffectively charged benefits as herein defined, a "benefit ratio" shall be computed for each ineligible employer, which shall be the quotient obtained by dividing the total benefits charged to his experience-rating record throughout the period ending on the computation date, during which his experience-rating record has been chargeable with benefits, by his total taxable payroll for the same period on which all unemployment insurance contributions due have been paid on or before the September 30 immediately following the computation date; and provided further, that such benefit ratio

shall be computed to the tenth of one percent (.1%) and any remainder shall be rounded to the next higher tenth.

The ratio of the sum of these amounts (subsection (2)(b)(v)3a, b and c) to the taxable wages paid during the same period divided by all eligible employers whose benefit ratio did not exceed five and four-tenths percent (5.4%), computed to the next higher tenth of one percent (.1%), shall be the general experience rate; however, the general experience rate for rate year 2014 shall be two tenths of one percent (.2%) and to that will be added the employer's individual experience rate for the total unemployment insurance rate.

4. a. Except as otherwise provided in this item 4, the general experience rate shall be adjusted by use of the size of fund index factor. This factor may be positive or negative, and shall be determined as follows: From the target SOFI, as defined in subsection (1)(k) of this section, subtract the simple average of the current and preceding years' exposure criterions divided by the cost rate criterion, as defined in subsection (1)(j) of this section. The result is then multiplied by the product of the CRC, as defined in subsection (1)(j) of this section, and total wages for the twelve-month period ending June 30 divided by the taxable wages for the twelve-month period ending June 30. This is the percentage positive or negative added to the general experience rate. The sum of the general experience rate and the trust fund adjustment factor shall be multiplied by fifty

percent (50%) and this product shall be computed to one (1) decimal place, and rounded to the next higher tenth.

b. Notwithstanding the minimum rate provisions as set forth in * * * subsection (1)(1) of this subsection, * * * the general experience rate of all employers shall be reduced by seven one-hundredths of one percent (.07%) for calendar year 2013 only. * * *

5. Notwithstanding any other provisions of subsection (2)(b)(v), if the general experience rate for any tax year as computed and adjusted on the basis of the size of fund index is a negative percentage, it shall be disregarded and the general experience rate for the year shall be two-tenths of one percent (.2%). In no year shall the general experience rate be less than two-tenths of one percent (.2%), and in all cases the employer's total rate for unemployment insurance contributions shall be the sum of the general experience rate plus the employer's individual tax rate. However, the total contribution rate (including Workforce Enhancement Training and State Workforce Investment contribution rate) shall not exceed five and four-tenths percent (5.4%) for the rate year 2014. In order to achieve the maximum tax rate of five and four-tenths percent (5.4%) for the rate year 2014, the Workforce Enhancement Training and State Workforce Investment contribution rate shall be reduced in the amounts necessary to achieve the maximum rate of five and four-tenths percent (5.4%). If the total rate still exceeds five

and four tenths percent (5.4%), the individual experience rate is the component of the total tax rate that will then be reduced to achieve the maximum unemployment contribution rate of five and four-tenths percent (5.4%). For rate years subsequent to 2014, the individual experience rate is the only component of the total unemployment tax rate that will be reduced to achieve the maximum unemployment contribution rate of five and four-tenths percent (5.4%). For rate years subsequent to 2014, Mississippi Workforce Enhancement Training Fund contribution rate and State Workforce Investment contribution rate shall be added to the unemployment contribution rate, regardless of whether the addition of this contribution rate causes the total contribution rate for the employer to exceed five and four-tenths percent (5.4%).

6. The department shall include in its annual rate notice to employers a brief explanation of the elements of the general experience rate, and shall include in its regular publications an annual analysis of benefits not charged to the record of any employer, and of the benefit experience of employers by industry group whose benefit ratio exceeds four percent (4%), and of any other factors which may affect the size of the general experience rate.

(vi) When any employing unit in any manner succeeds to or acquires the organization, trade, business or substantially all the assets thereof of an employer, excepting any assets retained by such employer incident to the liquidation of

his obligations, whether or not such acquiring employing unit was an employer within the meaning of Section 71-5-11, subsection H, prior to such acquisition, and continues such organization, trade or business, the experience-rating and payroll records of the predecessor employer shall be transferred as of the date of acquisition to the successor employer for the purpose of rate determination.

(vii) When any employing unit succeeds to or acquires a distinct and severable portion of an organization, trade or business, the experience-rating and payroll records of such portion, if separately identifiable, shall be transferred to the successor upon:

1. The mutual consent of the predecessor and the successor;

2. Approval of the department;

3. Continued operation of the transferred portion by the successor after transfer; and

4. The execution and the filing with the department by the predecessor employer of a waiver relinquishing all rights to have the experience-rating and payroll records of the transferred portion used for the purpose of determining modified rates of contribution for such predecessor.

(viii) If the successor was an employer subject to this chapter prior to the date of acquisition, it shall continue to pay unemployment insurance contributions at the rate applicable

to it from the date the acquisition occurred until the end of the then current tax year. If the successor was not an employer prior to the date of acquisition, it shall pay unemployment insurance contributions at the rate applicable to the predecessor or, if more than one (1) predecessor and the same rate is applicable to both, the rate applicable to the predecessor or predecessors, from the date the acquisition occurred until the end of the then current tax year. If the successor was not an employer prior to the date the acquisition occurred and simultaneously acquires the businesses of two (2) or more employers to whom different rates of unemployment insurance contributions are applicable, it shall pay unemployment insurance contributions from the date of the acquisition until the end of the current tax year at a rate computed on the basis of the combined experience-rating and payroll records of the predecessors as of the computation date for such tax year. In all cases the rate of unemployment insurance contributions applicable to such successor for each succeeding tax year shall be computed on the basis of the combined experience-rating and payroll records of the successor and the predecessor or predecessors.

(ix) The department shall notify each employer quarterly of the benefits paid and charged to his experience-rating record; and such notification, in the absence of an application for redetermination filed within thirty (30) days after the date of such notice, shall be final, conclusive and

binding upon the employer for all purposes. A redetermination, made after notice and opportunity for a fair hearing, by a hearing officer designated by the department who shall consider and decide these and related applications and protests; and the finding of fact in connection therewith may be introduced into any subsequent administrative or judicial proceedings involving the determination of the rate of unemployment insurance contributions of any employer for any tax year, and shall be entitled to the same finality as is provided in this subsection with respect to the findings of fact in proceedings to redetermine the contribution rate of an employer.

(x) The department shall notify each employer of his rate of contribution as determined for any tax year as soon as reasonably possible after September 1 of the preceding year. Such determination shall be final, conclusive and binding upon such employer unless, within thirty (30) days after the date of such notice to his last-known address, the employer files with the department an application for review and redetermination of his contribution rate, setting forth his reasons therefor. If the department grants such review, the employer shall be promptly notified thereof and shall be afforded an opportunity for a fair hearing by a hearing officer designated by the department who shall consider and decide these and related applications and protests; but no employer shall be allowed, in any proceeding involving his rate of unemployment insurance contributions or

contribution liability, to contest the chargeability to his account of any benefits paid in accordance with a determination, redetermination or decision pursuant to Sections 71-5-515 through 71-5-533 except upon the ground that the services on the basis of which such benefits were found to be chargeable did not constitute services performed in employment for him, and then only in the event that he was not a party to such determination, redetermination, decision or to any other proceedings provided in this chapter in which the character of such services was determined. The employer shall be promptly notified of the denial of this application or of the redetermination, both of which shall become final unless, within ten (10) days after the date of notice thereof, there shall be an appeal to the department itself. Any such appeal shall be on the record before said designated hearing officer, and the decision of said department shall become final unless, within thirty (30) days after the date of notice thereof to the employer's last-known address, there shall be an appeal to the Circuit Court of the First Judicial District of Hinds County, Mississippi, in accordance with the provisions of law with respect to review of civil causes by certiorari.

(3) Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the following shall apply regarding assignment of rates and transfers of experience:

(a) (i) If an employer transfers its trade or business, or a portion thereof, to another employer and, at the

time of the transfer, there is substantially common ownership, management or control of the two (2) employers, then the unemployment experience attributable to the transferred trade or business shall be transferred to the employer to whom such business is so transferred. The rates of both employers shall be recalculated and made effective on January 1 of the year following the year the transfer occurred.

(ii) If, following a transfer of experience under subparagraph (i) of this paragraph (a), the department determines that a substantial purpose of the transfer of trade or business was to obtain a reduced liability of unemployment insurance contributions, then the experience-rating accounts of the employers involved shall be combined into a single account and a single rate assigned to such account.

(b) Whenever a person who is not an employer or an employing unit under this chapter at the time it acquires the trade or business of an employer, the unemployment experience of the acquired business shall not be transferred to such person if the department finds that such person acquired the business solely or primarily for the purpose of obtaining a lower rate of unemployment insurance contributions. Instead, such person shall be assigned the new employer rate under Section 71-5-353. In determining whether the business was acquired solely or primarily for the purpose of obtaining a lower rate of unemployment insurance contributions, the department shall use objective

factors which may include the cost of acquiring the business, whether the person continued the business enterprise of the acquired business, how long such business enterprise was continued, or whether a substantial number of new employees were hired for performance of duties unrelated to the business activity conducted prior to acquisition.

(c) (i) If a person knowingly violates or attempts to violate paragraph (a) or (b) of this subsection or any other provision of this chapter related to determining the assignment of a contribution rate, or if a person knowingly advises another person in a way that results in a violation of such provision, the person shall be subject to the following penalties:

1. If the person is an employer, then such employer shall be assigned the highest rate assignable under this chapter for the rate year during which such violation or attempted violation occurred and the three (3) rate years immediately following this rate year. However, if the person's business is already at such highest rate for any year, or if the amount of increase in the person's rate would be less than two percent (2%) for such year, then a penalty rate of unemployment insurance contributions of two percent (2%) of taxable wages shall be imposed for such year. The penalty rate will apply to the successor business as well as the related entity from which the employees were transferred in an effort to obtain a lower rate of unemployment insurance contributions.

2. If the person is not an employer, such person shall be subject to a civil money penalty of not more than Five Thousand Dollars (\$5,000.00). Each such transaction for which advice was given and each occurrence or reoccurrence after notification being given by the department shall be a separate offense and punishable by a separate penalty. Any such fine shall be deposited in the penalty and interest account established under Section 71-5-114.

(ii) For purposes of this paragraph (c), the term "knowingly" means having actual knowledge of or acting with deliberate ignorance or reckless disregard for the prohibition involved.

(iii) For purposes of this paragraph (c), the term "violates or attempts to violate" includes, but is not limited to, intent to evade, misrepresentation or willful nondisclosure.

(iv) In addition to the penalty imposed by subparagraph (i) of this paragraph (c), any violation of this subsection may be punishable by a fine of not more than Ten Thousand Dollars (\$10,000.00) or by imprisonment for not more than five (5) years, or by both such fine and imprisonment. This subsection shall prohibit prosecution under any other criminal statute of this state.

(d) The department shall establish procedures to identify the transfer or acquisition of a business for purposes of this subsection.

(e) For purposes of this subsection:

(i) "Person" has the meaning given such term by Section 7701(a) (1) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986; and

(ii) "Employing unit" has the meaning as set forth in Section 71-5-11.

(f) This subsection shall be interpreted and applied in such a manner as to meet the minimum requirements contained in any guidance or regulations issued by the United States Department of Labor.

SECTION 3. Section 71-5-453, Mississippi Code of 1972, is amended as follows:

71-5-453. The department shall be the treasurer and custodian of the fund, and shall administer such fund in accordance with the directions of the department, and shall issue its warrants upon it in accordance with such regulations as the department shall prescribe. The department shall maintain within the fund three (3) separate accounts: (a) a clearing account, (b) an unemployment trust fund account, and (c) a benefit payment account. All monies payable to the fund, upon receipt thereof by the department, shall be immediately deposited in the clearing account. Refunds payable pursuant to Section 71-5-383 may be paid from the clearing account by the department. Transfers pursuant to Section 71-5-114 of all interest, penalties and damages collected shall be made to the Special Employment Security Administration Fund as soon as practicable after the end of each

calendar quarter. Workforce * * * Enhancement Training and State Workforce Investment contributions shall be deposited into the Workforce * * * Investment and Training Holding * * * Account as described in this section. All other monies in the clearing account shall be immediately deposited with the Secretary of the Treasury of the United States of America to the Unemployment Trust Fund account for the State of Mississippi, established and maintained pursuant to Section 904 of the Social Security Act, as amended, any provisions of law in this state relating to the deposit, administration, release or disbursement of monies in the possession or custody of this state to the contrary notwithstanding. The benefit account shall consist of all monies requisitioned from this state's account in the Unemployment Trust Fund. Except as herein otherwise provided, monies in the clearing and benefit accounts may be deposited by the department, in any bank or public depository in which general funds of the state may be deposited, but no public deposit insurance charge or premium shall be paid out of the fund. The department shall be liable for the faithful performance of its duties in connection with the Unemployment Compensation Fund under this chapter. A * * * Workforce Investment and Training * * * Holding Account shall be established by and maintained under the control of the Mississippi Department of Employment Security. * * * Contributions collected pursuant to the provisions in this chapter for the Workforce Enhancement Training and State Workforce Investment funds shall be

transferred from the clearing account into the * * * Workforce
Investment and Training * * * Holding Account on the same schedule
and under the same conditions as funds transferred to the
Unemployment Compensation Fund. Such funds shall remain on
deposit in the * * * holding account for a period of * * * thirty
(30) days. After such period, Workforce Enhancement Training
contributions * * * shall be transferred to the * * * appropriate
Mississippi Community College Board treasury account by the
department. The State Workforce Investment contributions shall be
transferred to the State Workforce Investment Board bank account
established by the department, and the department shall have the
authority to deposit and disburse funds from the State Workforce
Investment Board bank account as directed by the State Workforce
Investment Board. Such transfers shall occur within fifteen (15)
days. One (1) such transfer shall be made monthly, but the
department, in its discretion, may make additional transfers in
any month. In the event such funds transferred are subsequently
determined to be erroneously paid or collected, or if deposit of
such funds is denied or rejected by the banking institution for
any reason, or deposits are unable to clear drawer's account for
any reason, the funds must be reimbursed by the recipient of such
funds within thirty (30) days of mailing of notice by the
department demanding such refund, unless funds are available in
the Workforce Investment and Training * * * Holding Account. In
that event such amounts shall be immediately withdrawn from the

Workforce * * * Investment and Training Holding * * * Account by the department and re-deposited into the clearing account.

SECTION 4. This act shall take effect and be in force from and after its passage.

PASSED BY THE SENATE
March 31, 2014



PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE

PASSED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
March 31, 2014



SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

APPROVED BY THE GOVERNOR



GOVERNOR

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