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Chapter No. 341
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HOUSE BILL NO. 949

Originated in House _____ Clerk

HOUSE BILL NO. 949

AN ACT TO AMEND SECTION 37-7-307, MISSISSIPPI CODE OF 1972, TO CREATE AN EXCEPTION TO THE PROHIBITION AGAINST LICENSED EMPLOYEES OF A SCHOOL DISTRICT USING PERSONAL LEAVE THE DAY BEFORE OR AFTER A HOLIDAY FOR CERTAIN EDUCATORS HAVING LONG-TERM EXPERIENCE; TO AUTHORIZE A LICENSED SCHOOL EMPLOYEE TO USE PERSONAL LEAVE ON THE FIRST AND LAST DAY OF THE SCHOOL TERM AND THE DAY BEFORE AND AFTER A HOLIDAY IF THE EMPLOYEE IS SUMMONED TO APPEAR FOR JURY DUTY OR AS A WITNESS IN COURT ON THOSE DAYS; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES.

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

SECTION 1. Section 37-7-307, Mississippi Code of 1972, is amended as follows:

37-7-307. (1) For purposes of this section, the term "licensed employee" means any employee of a public school district required to hold a valid license by the Commission on Teacher and Administrator Education, Certification and Licensure and Development.

(2) The school board of a school district shall establish by rules and regulations a policy of sick leave with pay for licensed employees and teacher assistants employed in the school district,

and such policy shall include the following minimum provisions for sick and emergency leave with pay:

(a) Each licensed employee and teacher assistant, at the beginning of each school year, shall be credited with a minimum sick leave allowance, with pay, of seven (7) days for absences caused by illness or physical disability of the employee during that school year.

(b) Any unused portion of the total sick leave allowance shall be carried over to the next school year and credited to such licensed employee and teacher assistant if the licensed employee or teacher assistant remains employed in the same school district. In the event any public school licensed employee or teacher assistant transfers from one public school district in Mississippi to another, any unused portion of the total sick leave allowance credited to such licensed employee or teacher assistant shall be credited to such licensed employee or teacher assistant in the computation of unused leave for retirement purposes under Section 25-11-109. Accumulation of sick leave allowed under this section shall be unlimited.

(c) No deduction from the pay of such licensed employee or teacher assistant may be made because of absence of such licensed employee or teacher assistant caused by illness or physical disability of the licensed employee or teacher assistant until after all sick leave allowance credited to such licensed employee or teacher assistant has been used.

(d) For the first ten (10) days of absence of a licensed employee because of illness or physical disability, in any school year, in excess of the sick leave allowance credited to such licensed employee, there shall be deducted from the pay of such licensed employee the established substitute amount of licensed employee compensation paid in that local school district, necessitated because of the absence of the licensed employee as a result of illness or physical disability. In lieu of deducting the established substitute amount from the pay of such licensed employee, the policy may allow the licensed employee to receive full pay for the first ten (10) days of absence because of illness or physical disability, in any school year, in excess of the sick leave allowance credited to such licensed employee. Thereafter, the regular pay of such absent licensed employee shall be suspended and withheld in its entirety for any period of absence because of illness or physical disability during that school year.

(3) (a) Beginning with the school year 1983-1984, each licensed employee at the beginning of each school year shall be credited with a minimum personal leave allowance, with pay, of two (2) days for absences caused by personal reasons during that school year. Effective for the 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 school years, licensed employees shall be credited with an additional one-half (1/2) day of personal leave for every day the licensed employee is furloughed without pay as provided in Section 37-7-308. Except as otherwise provided in paragraph (b) of this

subsection, such personal leave shall not be taken on the first day of the school term, the last day of the school term, on a day previous to a holiday or a day after a holiday * * *. Personal leave may be used for professional purposes, including absences caused by attendance of such licensed employee at a seminar, class, training program, professional association or other functions designed for educators. No deduction from the pay of such licensed employee may be made because of absence of such licensed employee caused by personal reasons until after all personal leave allowance credited to such licensed employee has been used. However, the superintendent of a school district, in his discretion, may allow a licensed employee personal leave in addition to any minimum personal leave allowance, under the condition that there shall be deducted from the salary of such licensed employee the actual amount of any compensation paid to any person as a substitute, necessitated because of the absence of the licensed employee. Any unused portion of the total personal leave allowance up to five (5) days shall be carried over to the next school year and credited to such licensed employee if the licensed employee remains employed in the same school district. Any personal leave allowed for a furlough day shall not be carried over to the next school year.

(b) Notwithstanding the restrictions on the use of personal leave prescribed under paragraph (a) of this subsection, a licensed employee may use personal leave as follows:

(i) Personal leave may be taken on the first day of the school term, the last day of the school term, on a day previous to a holiday or a day after a holiday if, on the applicable day, an immediate family member of the employee is being deployed for military service.

(ii) Personal leave may be taken on a day previous to a holiday or a day after a holiday if an employee of a school district has either a minimum of ten (10) years experience as an employee of that school district or a minimum of thirty (30) days of unused accumulated leave that has been earned while employed in that school district.

(iii) Personal leave may be taken on the first day of the school term, the last day of the school term, on a day previous to a holiday or a day after a holiday if, on the applicable day, the employee has been summoned to appear for jury duty or as a witness in court.

(4) Beginning with the school year 1992-1993, each licensed employee shall be credited with a professional leave allowance, with pay, for each day of absence caused by reason of such employee's statutorily required membership and attendance at a regular or special meeting held within the State of Mississippi of the State Board of Education, the Commission on Teacher and Administrator Education, Certification and Licensure and Development, the Commission on School Accreditation, the Mississippi Authority for Educational Television, the meetings of

the state textbook rating committees or other meetings authorized by local school board policy.

(5) Upon retirement from employment, each licensed and nonlicensed employee shall be paid for not more than thirty (30) days of unused accumulated leave earned while employed by the school district in which the employee is last employed. Such payment for licensed employees shall be made by the school district at a rate equal to the amount paid to substitute teachers and for nonlicensed employees, the payment shall be made by the school district at a rate equal to the federal minimum wage. The payment shall be treated in the same manner for retirement purposes as a lump-sum payment for personal leave as provided in Section 25-11-103(e). Any remaining lawfully credited unused leave, for which payment has not been made, shall be certified to the Public Employees' Retirement System in the same manner and subject to the same limitations as otherwise provided by law for unused leave. No payment for unused accumulated leave may be made to either a licensed or nonlicensed employee at termination or separation from service for any purpose other than for the purpose of retirement.

(6) The school board may adopt rules and regulations which will reasonably aid to implement the policy of sick and personal leave, including, but not limited to, rules and regulations having the following general effect:

(a) Requiring the absent employee to furnish the certificate of a physician or dentist or other medical practitioner as to the illness of the absent licensed employee, where the absence is for four (4) or more consecutive school days, or for two (2) consecutive school days immediately preceding or following a nonschool day;

(b) Providing penalties, by way of full deduction from salary, or entry on the work record of the employee, or other appropriate penalties, for any materially false statement by the employee as to the cause of absence;

(c) Forfeiture of accumulated or future sick leave, if the absence of the employee is caused by optional dental or medical treatment or surgery which could, without medical risk, have been provided, furnished or performed at a time when school was not in session;

(d) Enlarging, increasing or providing greater sick or personal leave allowances than the minimum standards established by this section in the discretion of the school board of each school district.

(7) School boards may include in their budgets provisions for the payment of substitute employees, necessitated because of the absence of regular licensed employees. All such substitute employees shall be paid wholly from district funds, except as otherwise provided for long-term substitute teachers in Section 37-19-20. Such school boards, in their discretion, also may pay,

from district funds other than adequate education program funds, the whole or any part of the salaries of all employees granted leaves for the purpose of special studies or training.

(8) The school board may further adopt rules and regulations which will reasonably implement such leave policies for all other nonlicensed and hourly paid school employees as the board deems appropriate. Effective for the 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 school years, nonlicensed employees shall be credited with an additional one-half (1/2) day of personal leave for every day the nonlicensed employee is furloughed without pay as provided in Section 37-7-308.

(9) Vacation leave granted to either licensed or nonlicensed employees shall be synonymous with personal leave. Unused vacation or personal leave accumulated by licensed employees in excess of the maximum five (5) days which may be carried over from one year to the next may be converted to sick leave. The annual conversion of unused vacation or personal leave to sick days for licensed or unlicensed employees shall not exceed the allowable number of personal leave days as provided in Section 25-3-93. The annual total number of converted unused vacation and/or personal days added to the annual unused sick days for any employee shall not exceed the combined allowable number of days per year provided in Sections 25-3-93 and 25-3-95. Local school board policies that provide for vacation, personal and sick leave for employees shall not exceed the provisions for leave as provided in Sections

25-3-93 and 25-3-95. Any personal or vacation leave previously converted to sick leave under a lawfully adopted policy before May 1, 2004, or such personal or vacation leave accumulated and available for use prior to May 1, 2004, under a lawfully adopted policy but converted to sick leave after May 1, 2004, shall be recognized as accrued leave by the local school district and available for use by the employee. The leave converted under a lawfully adopted policy prior to May 1, 2004, or such personal and vacation leave accumulated and available for use as of May 1, 2004, which was subsequently converted to sick leave may be certified to the Public Employees' Retirement System upon termination of employment and any such leave previously converted and certified to the Public Employees' Retirement System shall be recognized.

(10) (a) For the purposes of this subsection, the following words and phrases shall have the meaning ascribed in this paragraph unless the context requires otherwise:

(i) "Catastrophic injury or illness" means a life-threatening injury or illness of an employee or a member of an employee's immediate family that totally incapacitates the employee from work, as verified by a licensed physician, and forces the employee to exhaust all leave time earned by that employee, resulting in the loss of compensation from the local school district for the employee. Conditions that are short-term in nature, including, but not limited to, common illnesses such as

influenza and the measles, and common injuries, are not catastrophic. Chronic illnesses or injuries, such as cancer or major surgery, that result in intermittent absences from work and that are long-term in nature and require long recuperation periods may be considered catastrophic.

(ii) "Immediate family" means spouse, parent, stepparent, sibling, child or stepchild.

(b) Any school district employee may donate a portion of his or her unused accumulated personal leave or sick leave to another employee of the same school district who is suffering from a catastrophic injury or illness or who has a member of his or her immediate family suffering from a catastrophic injury or illness, in accordance with the following:

(i) The employee donating the leave (the "donor employee") shall designate the employee who is to receive the leave (the "recipient employee") and the amount of unused accumulated personal leave and sick leave that is to be donated, and shall notify the school district superintendent or his designee of his or her designation.

(ii) The maximum amount of unused accumulated personal leave that an employee may donate to any other employee may not exceed a number of days that would leave the donor employee with fewer than seven (7) days of personal leave remaining, and the maximum amount of unused accumulated sick leave that an employee may donate to any other employee may not exceed

fifty percent (50%) of the unused accumulated sick leave of the donor employee.

(iii) An employee must have exhausted all of his or her available leave before he or she will be eligible to receive any leave donated by another employee. Eligibility for donated leave shall be based upon review and approval by the donor employee's supervisor.

(iv) Before an employee may receive donated leave, he or she must provide the school district superintendent or his designee with a physician's statement that states that the illness meets the catastrophic criteria established under this section, the beginning date of the catastrophic injury or illness, a description of the injury or illness, and a prognosis for recovery and the anticipated date that the recipient employee will be able to return to work.

(v) Before an employee may receive donated leave, the superintendent of education of the school district shall appoint a review committee to approve or disapprove the said donations of leave, including the determination that the illness is catastrophic within the meaning of this section.

(vi) If the total amount of leave that is donated to any employee is not used by the recipient employee, the whole days of donated leave shall be returned to the donor employees on a pro rata basis, based on the ratio of the number of days of

leave donated by each donor employee to the total number of days of leave donated by all donor employees.

(vii) Donated leave shall not be used in lieu of disability retirement.

SECTION 2. This act shall take effect and be in force from and after July 1, 2015.

PASSED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
February 5, 2015

Philip Gunn
SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PASSED BY THE SENATE
March 5, 2015

Tate Reeves
PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE

APPROVED BY THE GOVERNOR

Phil Bryant
GOVERNOR

3/13/15
1:35 pm