

For Immediate Release

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Debit Card Takes Mississippi to Next Level with Public Assistance Programs

Jackson, MS –Governor Ronnie Musgrove today announced a new approach to addressing the financial needs of food stamp and TANF recipients in Mississippi. The Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) system will allow recipients the convenience of a debit card to obtain products and services. The program will be administered by the Mississippi Department of Human Services.

“The new EBT system translates into convenience, improved security, and greater efficiency and effectiveness in administering the program for the Department of Human Services,” stated Governor Ronnie Musgrove. “We will also be able to monitor and control fraudulent activity more effectively.”

The Mississippi Department of Human Services will initiate the pilot program for the Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) system in Rankin County starting March 2002. This new system will replace the current food stamp transaction with the swipe of a debit card. The plastic card and chosen PIN number will be issued to the recipient, who will use the card to obtain groceries and/or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits.

Mississippi Department of Human Services Executive Director Janice Broome Brooks feels the new card will increase the comfort level for recipients. “The EBT system removes the stigma that some recipients have expressed they face while making public transactions,” said Brooks.

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The U. S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, administers the food stamp program, and will assist Mississippi in the statewide implementation of EBT. The Mississippi Department of Human Services will facilitate EBT training as each county initiates the new system. Both large and small retailers are expected to have the equipment to accommodate cardholders.

Currently, 41 states have operational food stamp EBT systems. As of June 1, Mississippi joins the states of Indiana, Nevada and Virginia in having an approved contract for the statewide implementation of the program. Lockheed Martin IMS, a national leader in developing technology-based systems, was awarded a five-year base contract of \$26 million to develop the electronic delivery system for the State of Mississippi.