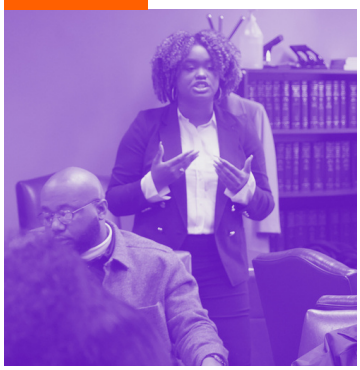
MS VOTES ACTION FUND

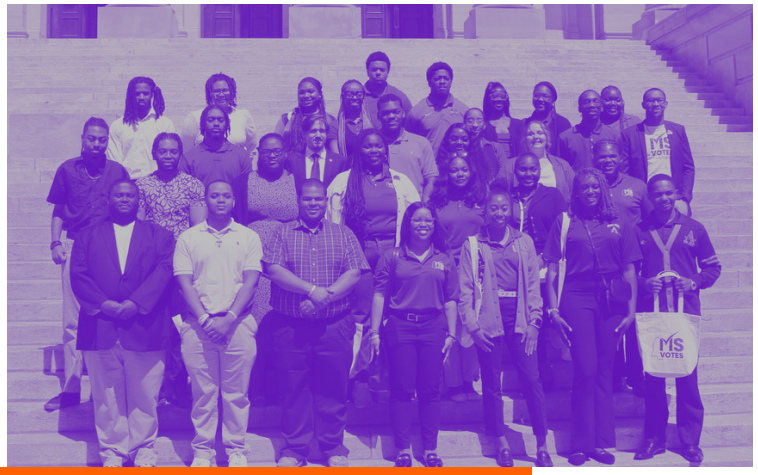
2025 LEGISLATIVE REPORT











Dear Friends, Partners, and Allies,

As the 2025 Mississippi Legislative Session comes to a close, I'm writing with deep gratitude—and deep determination. This year, the Mississippi Votes Action Fund advanced a bold vision for a Mississippi rooted in justice, dignity, and community power. And we didn't do it alone.

Together, we made incredible strides. We got farther than ever before in the fight for Early Voting—a monumental effort years in the making—and we kept up the pressure against harmful legislation designed to silence, punish, and exclude our people. Through wins and challenges alike, we remained focused, grounded, and relentless.

We opened and worked through every one of our policy portfolios this session, all of them shaped directly by the voices of Mississippians:

Electoral justice, reproductive justice, education justice, economic justice, criminal justice, youth justice, climate justice, and housing justice.

Each issue represents our commitment to building a Mississippi where all of us—not just some of us—can live, thrive, and lead.

To our invaluable partners at the Legal Defense Fund, Mississippi Poor People's Campaign, Mississippi Center for Justice, People's Advocacy Institute, Black Women's Roundtable, and Fair Fight Action—thank you. Your collaboration, legal expertise, and courage helped amplify our shared mission and bring real power to the people.

We are especially grateful to the legislators who stood with us—championing policy grounded in freedom, equity, and human dignity. Your courage in this political moment matters more than ever.

This work is people-powered, and our people showed up. From the Capitol steps to classrooms, from church basements to college campuses, Mississippians—especially young people—raised their voices and made their priorities known. Your stories shaped our strategy. Your presence changed the conversation. Your power moved policy.

A heartfelt thank you goes to our Policy & Research Team, whose brilliance and determination helped turn pain into policy and possibility into progress. Your leadership in tracking legislation, preparing testimony, and keeping our communities informed was nothing short of extraordinary.

As the 501(c)(4) advocacy arm of Mississippi Votes, MSVAF is uniquely positioned to speak truth to power—and to challenge the systems that seek to limit it. We are proud to carry that mantle, and we take seriously the responsibility it brings.

Looking ahead, we're already building for the future. From laying the groundwork for next year's session to expanding our coalition across the state, we remain laser-focused on the work to come. Because we know this movement is far from over—and our resolve is just getting stronger. Let this session be a reminder: when we organize, when we align our values, and when we lead with love and strategy, we win.

In community and in struggle,
Arekia Bennett-Scott
Executive Director
Mississippi Votes Action Fund



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

A Letter to Our Readers

As the 2025 Mississippi Legislative Session comes to a close, I'm writing with a clear-eyed view of the work ahead—and a deep sense of resolve rooted in the incredible progress we've made.

While this session fell short in many critical areas—failing to address felony disenfranchisement, Medicaid expansion, or restore our ballot initiative process—we also witnessed something powerful: real momentum toward making early voting a reality in Mississippi. For the first time in years, we saw meaningful movement that could transform a long-held dream into a concrete step forward for voting access in our state.

We can't overlook the setbacks. Not a single suffrage application was passed or even brought up for discussion. Instead of embracing policies that would expand democracy and uplift our communities, many lawmakers chose to focus on cutting the state income tax and dismantling Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives. These actions do little to support working families, protect healthcare access, or amplify the voices of everyday Mississippians.

But here's what gives me hope: we're not fighting alone—and we're not fighting in vain. Our community showed up this session with clarity, courage, and conviction. We trained advocates, built coalitions, held space for youth leadership, and brought real policy ideas to the table.

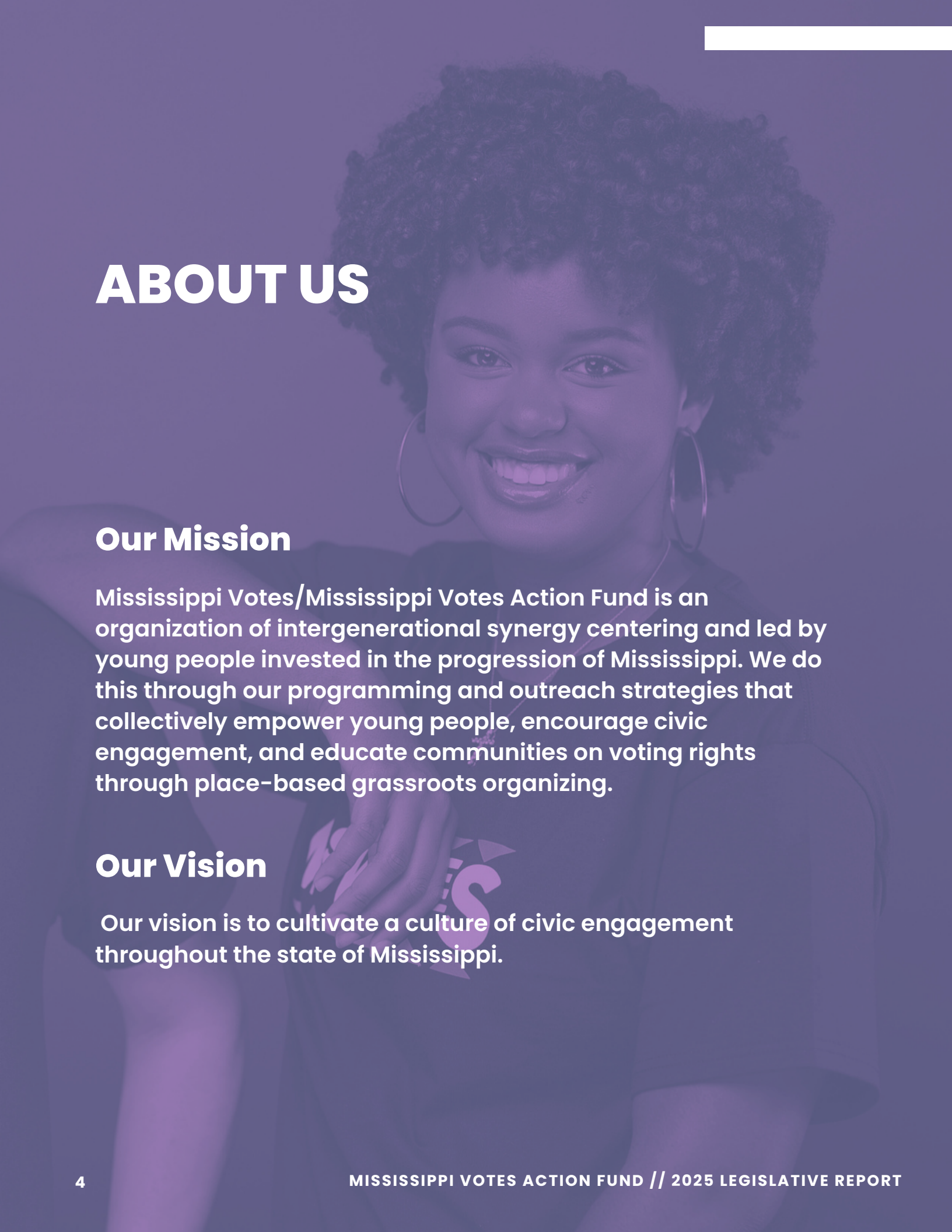
The progress on early voting shows us what's possible when we stay persistent, strategic, and grounded in the community. We're not just imagining a more just and inclusive Mississippi—we're building it.

We're not done. We're not discouraged. And we're certainly not backing down.

In solidarity and power,
Hannah Burnell Williams
Policy & Research Director
Mississippi Votes



Policy & Research Director



ABOUT US

Our Mission

Mississippi Votes/Mississippi Votes Action Fund is an organization of intergenerational synergy centering and led by young people invested in the progression of Mississippi. We do this through our programming and outreach strategies that collectively empower young people, encourage civic engagement, and educate communities on voting rights through place-based grassroots organizing.

Our Vision

Our vision is to cultivate a culture of civic engagement throughout the state of Mississippi.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Letter to the Reader 2
About Us 4
How a Bill Becomes a Law 6
Legislative Agenda 7
- Electoral Justice 7
- Housing Justice 7
- Education 8
- Healthcare 8
- Reproductive Justice 8
- Economic Justice 9
- Climate/Environmental Justice 9
- Criminal Justice 10
- Youth Justice 10

Definitions 12
- Early Voting 12
- Rights Restoration 12
- Voter Suffrage 12
- Voter Friendly 12
- Voter Unfriendly 12
- Ballot Initiative 12
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) 13
- Disenfranchising Crimes 13

Mississippi Votes' Legislative Standards 14
Bills We Followed 15
Felony Disenfranchisement/Black Policy Institute 25
Legislative Summary 26
Legislator Report Cards 27
Legislator of the Year 30
About the Authors 31
OGOV Report 34
RCAL Report 36
Acknowledgements 37

HOW A BILL BECOMES LAW



PHOTO CREDIT: SOS.MS.GOV

2025 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

This year, Mississippi Votes expanded its policy and advocacy work with the launch of 9 new issue-based portfolios, deepening our commitment to building a more just and equitable Mississippi. The portfolios focus on housing, education, health care, and reproductive justice, while uplifting efforts around economic justice, climate and environmental justice, youth justice, and criminal justice reform. These additions reflect the intersectional realities our communities face and our belief that democracy work must include the systems that impact everyday life.

Electoral Justice Issues:

Early Voting Access

Early voting would allow Mississippians to cast their ballots ahead of Election Day, increasing flexibility and reducing barriers for working families, students, and rural voters. Despite broad public support, legislation to establish early voting continues to stall in the legislature.

Online Voter Registration

Implementing online voter registration would modernize Mississippi's outdated process and make registering to vote more accessible and secure. It's a common-sense reform already adopted in 41 states, but Mississippi remains one of the last holdouts.

Rights Restoration

Thousands of Mississippians who have completed their sentences are still denied the right to vote due to the state's outdated felony disenfranchisement laws. The current process for restoring voting rights is deeply flawed, political, and inaccessible for most.

Ballot Initiative Process Restoration

Restoring Mississippi's ballot initiative process would give power back to the people, allowing citizens to propose and vote on laws directly. After the state Supreme Court struck down the process in 2021, lawmakers have yet to reinstate a viable replacement.

Clarification of Rights Restoration Process

Mississippi's rights restoration process is vague and inconsistently applied, leaving individuals confused about their eligibility and the steps required. Clear, transparent guidelines are urgently needed to ensure fairness and accessibility in restoring voting rights.

Housing Justice:

Rent Stabilization

Rent stabilization policies help prevent sudden, extreme rent increases, ensuring that tenants—especially low-income families—can remain in their homes without being priced out. These policies promote housing stability and are a critical tool in preventing displacement and homelessness.

Affordable Housing Access

Access to affordable housing remains out of reach for many Mississippians due to rising costs and limited availability. Expanding affordable housing options is essential for economic stability, public health, and community well-being.

Housing Vouchers

Housing vouchers provide low-income individuals and families with financial assistance to secure safe, decent housing in the private market. Despite their proven effectiveness, many voucher recipients face long waitlists and discrimination from landlords who refuse to accept them.

Education:

School Voucher Increase (Oppose)

Increasing funding for school voucher programs diverts critical public dollars away from public schools and into private institutions that are not held to the same standards of accountability or equity. Mississippi Votes opposes voucher expansion because it undermines public education and deepens educational inequality.

Increase Per Diem for Classroom Supplies

Raising the per diem allocation for classroom supplies ensures that teachers don't have to spend out of pocket to provide essential materials for their students. It's a small but meaningful investment in classroom equity and student success.

Teacher Pay Increases

Boosting teacher pay is vital to attracting and retaining high-quality educators, especially in underserved and rural communities. Competitive salaries reflect the value of educators' work and help strengthen the overall quality of Mississippi's public education system.

Healthcare:

Medicaid Expansion

Expanding Medicaid in Mississippi would provide health coverage to over 200,000 uninsured residents, including low-wage workers, caregivers, and people with chronic illnesses. It's a life-saving, economically sound policy that would improve health outcomes, support rural hospitals, and bring billions in federal dollars into the state.

Reproductive Justice:

Maternal Health Support

Improving maternal health in Missis
sippi means ensuring access to quality prenatal and postpartum care, especially for Black women who face disproportionately high risks. Expanding support services and Medicaid coverage for new parents is critical to reducing preventable deaths and improving long-term health outcomes.

Reproductive Justice:

Maternal Health Support

Improving maternal health in Mississippi means ensuring access to quality prenatal and postpartum care, especially for Black women who face disproportionately high risks. Expanding support services and Medicaid coverage for new parents is critical to reducing preventable deaths and improving long-term health outcomes.

Access to Emergency Contraception

Access to emergency contraception empowers individuals to prevent unintended pregnancies after unprotected sex or contraceptive failure. It must remain safe, affordable, and available without unnecessary barriers or stigma.

Access to Birth Control

Birth control is essential healthcare that allows people to make informed decisions about their bodies, families, and futures. Ensuring broad access to a full range of contraceptive options is a key part of reproductive justice.

Abortion Trafficking (Oppose)

So-called "abortion trafficking" bills aim to criminalize individuals who assist others—especially minors—in accessing abortion care, often across state lines. Mississippi Votes opposes this harmful legislation, which invades personal freedoms, punishes compassion, and further isolates those seeking care.

Economic Justice

Equal Pay

Mississippi remains the only state without an equal pay law protecting workers from wage discrimination based on gender. Ensuring equal pay for equal work is essential to closing the wage gap and advancing economic justice for women and families.

Childcare Support

Access to affordable, high-quality childcare enables parents—especially mothers—to work, pursue education, and support their families. Investing in childcare is an investment in economic mobility, child development, and a stronger workforce.

Predatory Lending

Predatory lending practices trap vulnerable Mississippians in cycles of debt with sky-high interest rates and deceptive terms. Stronger consumer protections and financial alternatives are needed to safeguard communities from exploitation.

Livable Wages

Every Mississippian deserves a wage that covers basic needs like housing, food, and healthcare. Raising the minimum wage to a livable standard is crucial to ending working poverty and building a fairer economy.

Climate/Environmental Justice

Clean Energy Sources

Investing in clean energy sources like solar and wind reduces harmful emissions and creates sustainable jobs for Mississippi communities. Transitioning to clean energy is essential for protecting public health and combating the climate crisis.

Alternative Energy Sources

Expanding access to alternative energy sources diversifies our energy grid and reduces dependence on fossil fuels. Embracing innovation in energy solutions supports resilience, affordability, and environmental sustainability.

Rural Community Pollution

Rural communities in Mississippi often bear the brunt of pollution from landfills, factories, and industrial agriculture—leading to serious health risks and environmental degradation. Environmental justice means holding polluters accountable and ensuring clean air, water, and land for all communities, no matter their ZIP code

Criminal Justice

Increase of Penalties for Those Convicted of a Violent or Felonious Crime (Oppose)

Mississippi Votes opposes legislation that increases penalties for individuals convicted of violent or felony crimes, as it prioritizes punishment over rehabilitation and contributes to mass incarceration. True public safety comes from addressing root causes—not harsher sentencing.

Reentry Programs

Reentry programs are vital for helping formerly incarcerated individuals reintegrate into society by providing support like job training, housing, and mental health care. Strengthening these programs reduces recidivism and promotes long-term community stability.

Detention Facility Conditions

Many Mississippi detention facilities face overcrowding, unsanitary conditions, and inadequate healthcare services. Improving these conditions is a moral and legal imperative to ensure the humane treatment of all incarcerated people.

Polling Locations Inside of Detention Facilities

Establishing polling places in detention facilities allows eligible voters—many of whom are awaiting trial or serving misdemeanor sentences—to exercise their constitutional right to vote. Expanding access to the ballot must include those behind bars.

Expungement Process

A fair and accessible expungement process gives individuals a chance to move forward without the burden of a criminal record. Reforming the system is key to removing barriers to employment, housing, and civic participation.

Youth Justice

Increase of Penalties for Minors Convicted of Violent or Felonious Crimes (Oppose)

Mississippi Votes opposes efforts to increase penalties for minors, as punitive approaches fail to account for the developmental differences between youth and adults. Youth deserve opportunities for rehabilitation, not lifelong punishment.

Youth Facility Conditions

Conditions in many youth detention centers across Mississippi are deeply concerning, with reports of inadequate staffing, unsafe environments, and lack of access to education and mental health services. Every young person in custody deserves safety, dignity, and care.

Juvenile Justice Diversion

Juvenile justice diversion programs offer alternatives to incarceration by addressing root causes of behavior and providing supportive services. These programs are proven to reduce recidivism and help youth stay connected to their families, education, and communities.



DEFINITIONS

Early Voting - a convenience voting process by which voters in a public election can vote before a scheduled election day.

Rights Restoration - the process of restoring voting rights to people with prior felony convictions who lost their voting rights under felony disenfranchisement

Voter Suffrage - The process of obtaining voting rights as a United States citizen. Ordinarily, a citizen can register to vote at 17 and a half and cast their first ballot during the first election after their 18th birthday. However, in Mississippi, persons convicted of any of the state's 23 Disenfranchising Crimes permanently lose their voting rights unless they are restored in one of two ways: a.) full pardon by the Governor or b.) Legislative Suffrage Bill passage. A person seeking to regain their voting rights stands a very slim chance of either of these two options working in their favor. Mississippi Votes believes that all impacted persons who have gone to prison or jail, entirely served their terms, and have finished their probation or rehabilitation programs should be automatically eligible for complete restoration of voting rights without having to jump through hoops.

Voter Friendly- Generally describes a bill, a process, or a practice that allows the opportunity for voting access to be expanded and more accessible to every eligible voter.

Voter Unfriendly- Generally describes a bill, a process, or a practice, that threatens or restricts voting access and its expansion to every eligible voter.

Ballot Initiative- A means by which citizens may propose to create, amend, or repeal a state law or constitutional provision through collecting petition signatures from a certain minimum number of registered voters. Successful initiative petition efforts result in the proposal being presented to voters within a state or other local government jurisdiction. Ballot initiatives are also referred to as ballot measures, popular initiatives, voter initiatives, citizen initiatives, and propositions.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)

DEI refers to a set of principles and practices aimed at fostering fair treatment, full participation, and a sense of belonging for all individuals, particularly those from historically underrepresented or marginalized groups.
Diversity encompasses the presence and acknowledgment of differences among individuals, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, disability, socioeconomic status, and cultural background.
Equity involves the fair and just distribution of resources and opportunities, recognizing that different individuals may require varying levels of support to achieve comparable outcomes.
Inclusion is the practice of creating environments where all individuals feel welcomed, respected, supported, and valued, enabling their full participation in organizational and community activities.
In legislative and policy contexts, DEI initiatives are designed to address systemic barriers and promote equal access to opportunities across various sectors, including education, employment, and public services.

Disenfranchising Crimes

Disenfranchising crimes are offenses that, upon conviction, result in the loss of the right to vote. The specifics can vary widely depending on the jurisdiction. Here are some key points about disenfranchising crimes:
Types of Crimes: Typically, disenfranchising crimes include serious offenses such as felonies. Common examples include murder, rape, and other violent crimes. However, in some jurisdictions, certain non-violent offenses, like drug crimes or fraud, can also lead to disenfranchisement.

Restoration of Voting Rights: The process for restoring voting rights varies. Some automatically restore voting rights after a sentence is completed, while others require a formal application process. In some cases, individuals may need a pardon from the governor or a court order to restore their voting rights.

LEGISLATIVE STANDARDS

Mississippi Votes asks the following questions to determine whether or not a bill is considered voter friendly:

1. Does this bill help or hinder individuals that are at high risk of disenfranchisement? (citizens in rural areas, black and brown citizens, poor citizens, and college students)

2. Does this bill make it harder or easier for individuals to have access to polling places? (polling locations changes or restrictions)

3. Does this bill hinder or help voters cast their ballots? (voter ID changes, acceptable forms of voter ID, accessibility to affidavit ballots, and absentee voting)

4. Does this bill make it easier or harder for college students to be involved in the electoral process? (access to absentee voting, voter ID, access to voter registration)

5. Does this bill expand or restrict access to current voters? (voter purging)

6. Does this bill make it harder or easier for citizens to register to vote? (voter modernization, online voter registration, automatic voter registration)

7. Does this bill include relief to those who have been felony disenfranchised? (the restoration of voting rights, outlines clear voting rights restoration process, updates the voting rights restoration process)

8. Is this bill helpful or harmful to the intended structure of democracy in the state of Mississippi? (limits the voice of residents of the state of Mississippi)

9. Will this bill create legislation that provides for a more equitable and equal Mississippi?

10. Will this bill create legislation that provides for a more progressive and forward-moving Mississippi?

BILLS WE FOLLOWED

ELECTORAL JUSTICE

HB 1419 – POLLING PLACE LOCATION STABILITY ACT

Bill Number:
HB 1419
Legislative History:
Passed both chambers; set to take effect July 1, 2025.
Policy Brief:
HB 1419 amends the Mississippi Code to ensure polling place stability by prohibiting changes to polling locations within 60 days of any primary, general, runoff, or special election—except in cases of documented emergencies. This legislation aims to protect voters from confusion and last-minute disruptions by requiring transparency and advanced notice when emergencies necessitate a change in polling sites.
Implications:
By safeguarding the consistency of polling locations, this bill promotes voter access, reduces disenfranchisement, and strengthens public trust in the electoral process—particularly for communities vulnerable to barriers in accessing the polls. However, the effectiveness of this bill hinges on the equitable and timely enforcement of its public notification requirements, especially in rural and underserved areas.
Policy Suggestions:
To further protect voter access, Mississippi should pair this legislation with proactive outreach strategies, including multilingual notices, digital alerts, and coordination with civic organizations to ensure voters are fully informed. Future reforms should also consider expanding early voting and adopting vote centers to increase flexibility and accessibility for all voters.

SB 2654 – IN-PERSON EARLY VOTING ACT

Bill Number:
SB 2654
Legislative History:
Introduced in the Senate; failed to pass before adjournment.
Policy Brief:
SB 2654 proposed the creation of a 15-day early voting period, allowing Mississippians to vote in person before Election Day. While the bill represented incremental progress toward voter access, it imposed significant limitations—restricting early voting to county registrar offices during standard business hours (with minimal extended time during the final week), prohibiting the use of ballot drop boxes, maintaining strict absentee voting rules, and upholding burdensome voter ID requirements.
Implications:
Despite being framed as a step toward modernization, the bill failed to meaningfully address the systemic obstacles that suppress voter participation across Mississippi—especially for Black voters, young voters, rural communities, and low-income residents. Without provisions for expanded access points, flexible hours, and voter education, the bill risked reinforcing the very barriers it sought to overcome.
Policy Suggestions:
Future early voting legislation should ensure extended evening and weekend hours, authorize multiple early voting sites per county, legalize secure ballot drop boxes, and ease absentee ballot access. Mississippi lawmakers must prioritize equitable, inclusive policies that uplift historically disenfranchised communities and increase civic participation statewide.

RIGHTS RESTORATION

HCR 3 - CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT/RIGHTS RESTORATION

Bill Number:
House Concurrent Resolution 3
Legislative History:
Double referred to Constitution and Judiciary B Committee, then would die on House Calendar.
Policy Brief:
HCR 3 would immediately restore the rights of all individuals convicted of the following crimes by removing those crimes from Section 241 of the Constitution: Bribery, Theft, Obtaining Money or Goods, Perjury, Forgery, Bigamy. HCR 3 would add the following crimes to the Constitution's list of disenfranchising crimes: Human Trafficking, Sexual Battery, Child Exploitation, and Commercial Sexual Activity.
Implications:
HCR 3 was a straightforward constitutional amendment that would immediately restore the voting rights of over 70% of the currently disenfranchised population in Mississippi.

HOUSE BILL 940 - VOTING RIGHTS AND FELONY EXPUNGEMENT

Bill Number:
HB 940
Legislative History:
Referred to Constitution Committee, passed, then died on House Calendar.
Policy Brief:
HB 940 was a bill that purports to restore voting rights for certain offenses and provides for automatic expungements. It includes a legally ineffective rights restoration provision that will successfully add disenfranchising crimes without removing any, placing Mississippians in a worse position than they are under current law. Nevertheless, the automatic expungement piece of HB 940 is positive, and the bill could have been amended only to include those provisions.
Implications:
The rights restoration provisions add certain disenfranchising crimes and allow for restoration of other disenfranchising crimes. If a legal challenge against the rights restoration provisions were successful, it would strike down the provision allowing for restoration, but uphold the provision adding disenfranchising crimes. In other words, we would be left with MORE disenfranchising crimes than we have now, and more people would be disenfranchised. Moreover, once a court challenge is filed, HB 940 will be tied up in litigation for years. No one will be registered during this time period.
Policy Suggestions:
Eliminate the requirement to wait for five years after sentence completion, allow for more than 1 felony expungement, clarify the mechanism for courts to automatically expunge a felony.

EDUCATION

HB 1193 – "REQUIRING EFFICIENCY FOR OUR COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES SYSTEM AND EDUCATION SYSTEM (REFOCUSES) ACT"

Bill Number:
HB 1193

Legislative History:
Passed both chambers.

Policy Brief:
This bill seeks to prohibit diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs, offices, and initiatives within Mississippi's public K-12 schools, community colleges, and universities. It bans the establishment or maintenance of DEI offices, prohibits mandatory DEI training, and forbids hiring or admissions practices that consider race, gender identity, or sexual orientation—including the use of diversity statements. The bill also requires institutions to implement a formal complaint process for perceived violations and report findings within 45 days. Proponents argue the bill promotes merit-based decision-making and eliminates "divisive concepts" in education.

Implications:
HB 1193 threatens to roll back decades of progress toward inclusive and equitable learning environments. By banning DEI programs and punishing institutions for promoting diversity, this legislation marginalizes students, faculty, and staff from underrepresented communities and may discourage enrollment and retention of minority students, educators, and researchers. It risks chilling academic freedom and narrowing the scope of educational engagement on race, gender, and social inequality.

Policy Suggestions:
Rather than banning DEI efforts, the Legislature should invest in inclusive campus climates that reflect Mississippi's diverse student population. Support for faculty and staff training, multicultural programming, and equitable hiring and admissions practices strengthens institutions and improves academic outcomes for all students. Lawmakers should prioritize education equity, not ideological censorship.

HB 1432 – MS CHARTER SCHOOL ACT OF 2013; REVISE TO EXPAND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ESTABLISHMENT OF CHARTER SCHOOLS IN CERTAIN DISTRICTS

Bill Number:
HB 1432

Legislative History:
Passed the House as amended; died in the Senate Education Committee

Policy Brief:
HB 1432 proposes amendments to the Mississippi Charter Schools Act of 2013 to expand the establishment of charter schools beyond current geographic restrictions. The bill would allow charter schools to be opened in C-rated districts (in addition to D- and F-rated districts) without local school board approval. It also permits charter operators with proven track records to replicate models across multiple districts and reduces certain regulatory barriers to charter authorization. Supporters argue this expansion provides families with more educational choices and fosters innovation in public education.

Implications:
HB 1432 threatened to divert public funds from traditional public schools, particularly those already underfunded and struggling to meet students' needs. Expanding charter access without local oversight undermines community control and democratic accountability in public education. Studies show that charter school outcomes are mixed, and rapid expansion without robust oversight can lead to inconsistent quality, lack of transparency, and inequitable access. The bill could exacerbate racial and economic segregation in Mississippi's public school system.

Policy Suggestions:
Rather than expanding charter schools without community input, the Legislature should invest in strengthening traditional public schools—particularly in underserved areas. Equitable funding formulas, teacher recruitment and retention initiatives, and culturally relevant curricula are proven tools for improving educational outcomes. Mississippi's students need strong neighborhood schools, not privatization cloaked in the language of "choice."

REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

HB 1041: AN ACT TO CREATE THE CRIME OF ABORTION TRAFFICKING; TO PROHIBIT ANY PERSON FROM TRANSPORTING A PREGNANT UNEMANCIPATED MINOR ACROSS STATE LINES FOR AN ABORTION

Bill Number:
HB 1041
Legislative History:
Died in committee
Policy Brief:
HB 1041 sought to create a new criminal offense termed "abortion trafficking," making it illegal for any individual to assist or transport an unemancipated pregnant minor across state lines to obtain an abortion without the consent of a parent or legal guardian. The bill applied even when the abortion is legal in the state where it is performed and could subject violators—including friends, relatives, clergy, or support networks—to criminal prosecution. Proponents claimed the bill protects parental rights and safeguards minors from making major decisions without adult oversight.

Implications:
HB 1041 was and is a part of a growing trend of legislation aimed at restricting abortion access, particularly for young people. By criminalizing support networks and travel for legal healthcare, the bill places minors in vulnerable positions, especially those facing abuse, neglect, or unsafe home environments. It may deter trusted adults from helping minors seek safe, legal medical care and could force more young people into dangerous, isolated circumstances. The bill also raises serious constitutional questions related to interstate travel, bodily autonomy, and privacy
.
Policy Suggestions:
Instead of criminalizing compassionate support and access to healthcare, Mississippi lawmakers should focus on comprehensive sex education, confidential counseling services, and reproductive healthcare access. Empowering young people with accurate information and safe options reduces harm and supports healthy decision-making. Legislators must reject criminalization in favor of care, dignity, and the fundamental rights of all individuals—especially minors in crisis.

ECONOMIC JUSTICE

HB 1 – INCOME TAX REDUCTION

Bill Number:
HB 1

Legislative History:
Passed both chambers; Approved by governor, signed into law.

Policy Brief:
This bill proposes a phased reduction of the state income tax on all taxable income exceeding $10,000, aiming to lower the rate to 3% by 2030. While tax reductions are often touted as pro-growth, this bill follows a regressive tax logic by shrinking the tax burden on wealthier Mississippians while providing negligible relief to low-income households who already pay a disproportionate share of their income on sales and excise taxes. Additionally, the potential loss of hundreds of millions in revenue threatens the financial stability of public services like education, healthcare, infrastructure, and social welfare programs — all of which working-class and poor Mississippians rely on.

Implications:
This bill risks exacerbating racial and economic inequality by undermining Mississippi's already underfunded social safety net. Historically marginalized communities will be the first to feel the cuts to public programs, deepening structural disadvantages across rural and urban areas.

Policy Suggestions:
Progressive tax reform should focus on expanding the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), eliminating the grocery tax, and increasing corporate tax rates on large businesses profiting from Mississippi labor without reinvestment in communities. A fair tax system should center the needs of low-income earners and preserve revenue streams for public goods.

HB 1123 – PROHIBITION OF SPREAD PRICING

Bill Number:
HB 1123

Legislative History:
Died in conference.

Policy Brief:
This bill seeks to prohibit spread pricing by pharmacy benefit managers (PBMs), a practice where PBMs charge insurers more than they reimburse pharmacies and pocket the difference. HB 1123 mandates transparency in PBM contracts and directs that savings be passed on to consumers. If passed and enforced effectively, this could reduce prescription drug costs and increase medication access for low-income and chronically ill Mississippians, who are often caught in the crossfire of opaque pharmaceutical pricing structures.

Implications:
Unchecked PBM practices have inflated out-of-pocket costs and contributed to medical debt, especially among Black and rural residents with limited access to care. By addressing corporate profiteering in healthcare delivery, the bill represents a step toward health equity.

Policy Suggestions:
The state should pair this legislation with a robust independent oversight body and data transparency mandates. Consider establishing a public pharmacy benefits program or exploring cost-sharing caps for essential medications like insulin and asthma inhalers.

HB 916 – REGULATION OF CIGARETTE SALES

Bill Number:
HB 916
Legislative History:
Passed both chambers. Approved by governor, signed into law.

Policy Brief:
This bill requires tobacco companies to file annual certifications with the Commissioner of Revenue, increasing oversight of cigarette distribution. While framed as a compliance measure, this policy could serve as a foundation for future health-based regulation of the tobacco industry, including efforts to curb illicit trade and reduce access among minors.

Implications:
Mississippi's smoking rates remain among the highest in the nation, disproportionately affecting low-income and Black communities. Regulating distribution channels is a necessary but insufficient first step in combating Big Tobacco's impact on public health.

Policy Suggestions:
This bill should be linked with broader anti-tobacco initiatives, including increased funding for cessation programs, taxes on vape products, and enforcement against advertising targeting youth and communities of color.

CLIMATE & ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

SB 2261 – MISSISSIPPI COMPREHENSIVE COASTAL CONSERVATION AND RESTORATION ACT OF 2025

Bill Number:
SB 2261
Legislative History:
Died in committee.

Policy Brief:
This bill creates a unified framework for coastal resilience, ecosystem restoration, and climate adaptation across Mississippi's Gulf Coast. It prioritizes environmental protection and economic revitalization through habitat restoration, flood mitigation, and infrastructure investment. For communities at the frontlines of climate disaster — including Black, Indigenous, and immigrant communities — this bill represents an opportunity to advance climate justice with equity at its core.
Implications:
The bill could help mitigate future hurricane damage, reduce insurance burdens on low-income homeowners, and generate green jobs in restoration and climate tech. However, without equity provisions, benefits could bypass historically excluded coastal residents.
Policy Suggestions:
Ensure equitable community participation in planning processes. Allocate funds for frontline communities and include workforce development for BIPOC youth in green infrastructure fields. Require racial equity impact assessments for any state-funded environmental project.

SB 2004 – PROHIBITION OF PFAS CONTAMINATION

Bill Number:
SB 2004

Legislative History:
Died in committee.

Policy Brief:
This legislation empowers Mississippi's environmental regulators to monitor and prevent the contamination of soil with per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), also known as "forever chemicals." These substances are linked to cancer, reproductive issues, and developmental harm, and disproportionately impact low-income and rural communities situated near industrial zones or waste sites.

Implications:
PFAS contamination is a growing public health crisis nationwide, with Black and low-income communities bearing the brunt due to environmental racism and proximity to polluting industries. Strong enforcement is essential to reduce long-term exposure and health inequities.

Policy Suggestions:
Mandate testing in schools and residential areas near former or current manufacturing facilities. Establish a statewide PFAS cleanup fund, hold corporations financially accountable, and provide legal aid and medical support to affected communities.

SB 2013 – GEOENGINEERING REGULATION

Bill Number:
SB 2013

Legislative History:
Died in committee.

Policy Brief:
This bill provides regulatory oversight over geoengineering, which includes large-scale technological efforts to manipulate climate systems (e.g., cloud seeding or solar radiation management). Without checks, these experiments could have disastrous unintended consequences for weather patterns, agriculture, and public health — especially in marginalized areas

Implications:
Climate interventions without democratic input risk concentrating power in the hands of corporate and academic elites. Mississippi's environmental justice history demands precaution, public transparency, and community consent.

Policy Suggestions:
Require public notice and environmental review for any geoengineering project. Prioritize indigenous sovereignty and local governance in any weather modification decisions. Support investment in proven, community-centered climate solutions like conservation agriculture and renewable energy cooperatives.

YOUTH JUSTICE

SB 2769 – MISSISSIPPI YOUTH COURT CHANCELLOR ACT OF 2025

Bill Number:
SB 2769

Legislative History:
Died in committee.

Policy Brief:
This bill creates full-time Youth Court Chancellor positions in Mississippi's chancery court districts to professionalize and standardize youth court proceedings. By replacing part-time referees with dedicated chancellors, the legislation aims to bring consistency, legal rigor, and trauma-informed oversight to the juvenile justice system — which has historically operated with vast disparities across counties, particularly harming Black youth and youth in rural areas.

Implications:
The current patchwork system enables inequities in detention decisions, legal representation, and access to diversion programs. Formalizing the court structure is a critical first step toward systemic reform but must be accompanied by investments in alternatives to incarceration.

Policy Suggestions:
Pair this structural reform with mandatory racial equity training, diversion-first policies, and funding for restorative justice practices. Youth courts must also be accountable to community review boards, including youth and family advocates

SB 2453 – JUVENILE JUSTICE TRAINING REQUIREMENT

Bill Number:
SB 2453

Legislative History:
Died in committee.

Policy Brief:
This bill mandates specialized training for youth court prosecutors and county attorneys handling juvenile cases. The training would cover adolescent development, trauma-informed care, and the disproportionate impact of the justice system on marginalized youth. At its core, this bill aims to reduce the use of carceral solutions for behavior linked to poverty, disability, and structural neglect.

Implications:
Without trauma-informed training, prosecutors may push for punitive sentences that compound cycles of harm. Mississippi's juvenile justice system has a long history of racial disproportionality, particularly affecting Black boys and girls, LGBTQ youth, and youth with disabilities.

Policy Suggestions:
Make the training publicly available, mandatory, and annually reviewed for racial bias and effectiveness. Include curriculum components on gender-responsive justice and culturally competent diversion. Expand the requirement to include youth detention staff and public defenders.

SB 2509 – LEGISLATIVE ACCESS TO YOUTH RECORDS

Bill Number:
SB 2509
Legislative History:
Introduced; died in committee.
Policy Brief:
This bill proposed allowing legislators to access children's legal records with prior written consent from a parent or guardian. The stated intent was to enhance oversight of youth services, but the bill's failure suggests concerns about data privacy, potential misuse, and the chilling effects such access might have on youth and families already navigating a punitive system.
Implications:
Though oversight is important, this approach risked compromising youth confidentiality, particularly for children involved in sensitive cases (e.g., abuse, mental health, LGBTQ+ identity). It may have also enabled political interference or selective targeting of services.
Policy Suggestions:
Create a nonpartisan independent ombudsman for youth services with subpoena power and transparent reporting requirements. Oversight should center youth and family dignity, not expand legislative surveillance powers.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

SB 2241 – PAROLE ELIGIBILITY FOR NONVIOLENT OFFENDERS

Bill Number:
SB 2241
Legislative History:
Died in committee.
Policy Brief:
This bill proposes that individuals convicted of nonviolent offenses become eligible for parole after serving 25% of their sentence or 10 years, whichever is less. It is a critical measure to reduce Mississippi's bloated prison population, which has one of the highest incarceration rates in the country — especially for Black Mississippians and people convicted of low-level drug crimes.
Implications:
Early parole eligibility can significantly cut incarceration costs, reunite families, and shift focus from punishment to rehabilitation. However, parole boards often deny release based on subjective assessments, meaning the impact of this bill depends on implementation and oversight.
Policy Suggestions:
Require transparent, criteria-based parole hearings with public data reporting. Expand reentry support, including transitional housing, mental health services, and employment access. Parole reform must be accompanied by ending parole revocation for technical violations.

SB 2503 – DRUG COURT EXPANSION

Bill Number:
SB 2503
Legislative History:
Died in committee.
Policy Brief:
This bill seeks to broaden the eligibility and resourcing of Mississippi's drug courts. These courts divert individuals with substance use disorders into treatment and monitoring programs instead of prison. SB 2503 would increase funding, extend access to nonviolent offenders with prior records, and integrate wraparound services like mental health care and peer-led recovery coaching.
Implications:
This is a vital harm reduction tool. But drug courts can replicate carceral control if over-monitored or punitive. Participants must be treated as individuals seeking healing — not as criminals on probation-lite.
Policy Suggestions:
Eliminate user fees, expand harm reduction education, and ensure that failure to complete treatment doesn't result in automatic incarceration. Offer culturally competent recovery services and include impacted people in program design and evaluation.



FELONY DISENFRANCHISEMENT/BPI

Mississippi Votes received a grant from Black Policy Institute to kickstart our Felony Disenfranchisement Policy/Advocacy Campaign in Mississippi. We were able to launch a Video series where we interviewed impacted individuals in the state to share their story of redemption and regaining their right to vote via the Legislative Suffrage Process. We also hosted a Townhall that brought together State Legislators and Impacted individuals together to discuss Voter Suffrage prior to the 2025 Legislative Session.

This 2025 Legislative Session, MS Votes and other advocacy partners helped turn in 90 plus suffrage petitions for Mississippians around the state. To have their voting rights restored, people convicted of any of the crimes must get a pardon from the governor, which rarely happens, or persuade lawmakers to pass individual bills just for them with two-thirds approval. The Mississippi Legislature passed 17 in the 2024 session.

We had high hopes that the same could be accomplished this Legislative session, however, individual suffrage bills or rights restoration policy were NOT a priority for lawmakers this session. Out of the 96 suffrage bills filed, not one was able to be brought up before the Senate and House adjourned.

THE RESTORATION PROJECT

LEGISLATIVE REPORT CARDS

Each year, the Mississippi Votes Policy and Research Team conducts a Legislative Grade Book to assess our engagement with lawmakers throughout the legislative session. This tool serves as a reflection of how legislators interact with us and respond to the values we champion. We evaluate elected officials based on a range of criteria—including their willingness to collaborate, accessibility to our team and partners, and the legislation they introduce, support, or oppose—especially as it relates to expanding democracy, protecting civil rights, and empowering young people across Mississippi. This year, for the first time, we've also included committee grades in both chambers, as well as overall chamber grades, to provide a fuller picture of how legislative bodies function collectively when it comes to issues that matter to us and our communities.

1. Legislation Introduced or Sponsored
2. Did they introduce or sponsor bills that align with democracy, voting rights, youth empowerment, etc.?
3. Voting Record
4. How did they vote on key bills related to civil rights, elections, education, and equity?
5. Accessibility & Responsiveness
6. Did they respond to outreach from MS Votes, constituents, or youth advocates? Were they open to meetings or collaboration?
7. Public Statements & Advocacy
8. Have they publicly supported or opposed issues that align with or go against your mission? Social media, press, etc.
9. Committee Participation
10. Were they active, engaged, and pushing for or against key issues in committee work?
11. Support for Youth Engagement
12. Do they make space for youth voices? Attend events like YCE Day? Engage young constituents?
13. Overall Allyship or Opposition to MS Votes' Values
14. This can be a holistic measure of friendliness, consistency, and values alignment—even if they aren't perfect in every other category.

LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY

The 2025 legislative session was marked by deep disappointment and missed opportunities. Despite overwhelming public support for critical issues like Medicaid expansion, rights restoration, and reinstating the ballot initiative process, the Mississippi Legislature failed to deliver meaningful change. Not a single suffrage application was passed—or even considered—and early voting legislation once again failed to make it across the finish line. Housing committees did not move any bills forward, and there was yet another attempt to overhaul public education funding. Instead of addressing the urgent needs of Mississippians, lawmakers prioritized cutting income taxes and dismantling Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) programs. In a state already known for the most restrictive voting laws in the nation, these efforts felt like salt in the wound.

Additional efforts to restrict abortion access and criminalize those seeking reproductive care resurfaced, accompanied by harmful rhetoric surrounding contraception.

Despite the setbacks, Mississippi Votes remains steadfast in its mission. The organization continues to dream big, work harder, and advocate for equity and justice at every level of government. Although the 2025 session highlighted the long road ahead, Mississippi Votes is more committed than ever to ensuring every Mississippian has a voice—and a vote—in shaping the state's future.



LEGISLATIVE REPORT CARDS

COMMITTEE GRADES

ELECTIONS

GRADE:
C
REASON:
There was one effort related to polling places—credit where it's due—but that's about it.

JUDICIARY B

GRADE:
F
REASON:
Not a single suffrage application made it through. The Senate didn't even bother to bring them up. Deeply disappointing.

MEDICAID

GRADE:
F
REASON:
Zero effort. No meaningful movement, no clear priorities—just silence.

WORKFORCE

GRADE:
C
REASON:
They put in some effort. It didn't move mountains, but they tried.

CONSTITUTION

GRADE:
F
REASON:
We're not sure if this committee fully understands the difference between general bills and resolutions. And as for the ballot initiative bill? It keeps getting weirder every time we look at it.

EDUCATION

GRADE:
D
REASON:
The obsession with defunding public education is troubling. Honestly, it deserves its own study.

HOUSING

GRADE:
D
REASON:
There were more housing-related bills drafted this year than last, but unfortunately, that's where the progress stopped.

LEGISLATIVE REPORT CARDS

CHAMBER GRADES

HOUSE

GRADE:
F
REASON:
This year, the House fell significantly short of its responsibilities, earning a failing grade for its performance. Adjourning the session a week early without finalizing state budgets placed numerous agencies in jeopardy. The eleventh-hour amendments to the early voting bill, coupled with a complete failure to advance rights restoration legislation, were both disheartening and unacceptable. Moreover, the House's unwillingness to collaborate with the Senate—marked by a display of legislative intransigence—was a clear demonstration of misplaced priorities and a lack of leadership.

SENATE

GRADE:
F
REASON:
This year, the Senate repeatedly stumbled into avoidable legislative pitfalls, undermining opportunities for meaningful progress. Their failure to advance the early voting bill in its original, broadly supported form effectively brought movement on voting reform to a halt. When the House sought to extend the session to complete essential tasks, the Senate's refusal to engage contributed to a breakdown in inter-chamber collaboration. While the House managed to advance several suffrage bills out of committee, the Senate failed to act on any—none were brought forward, likely by design.

2025 LEGISLATOR OF THE YEAR

Daryl L. Porter, Jr. became one of the youngest elected officials in Summit, Mississippi. As a council member, he worked alongside the mayor and board members to make Summit a more progressive town, improve infrastructure, and preserve the Town of Summit's historic essence. He also worked to build a new wastewater plant and helped revitalize Summit's historic downtown area with assistance from local economic development groups by promoting events in the downtown area.
He received a bachelor's degree in political science in 2013. Porter continued his education by attending Mississippi College School of Law where he obtained his Doctor of Jurisprudence. He is now a licensed personal injury attorney. Daryl is an Associate Attorney at the law firm Pepper & Odom P.C. During his four years of practice Porter has been named Top 40 Under 40 by the National Trial Lawyers. He is a member of Summit Missionary Baptist where he serves as a trustee and a junior deacon. He founded a young men's mentoring group that focuses on helping young men better themselves, so they positively impact society. Daryl is also a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. Daryl was elected to the Mississippi House of Representatives in 2019 to serve Mississippi's 98th House District. He serves on the following committees: Accountability Efficiency and Transparency (Vice Chair), Judiciary B, Public Health, Municipalities, and Public Utilities. In his short time in the State Legislature, Representative Porter has brought over $30 million dollars into District 98, served as parliamentarian of the Mississippi Legislative Black Caucus, and currently serves as the Vice Chair of the Mississippi House Democratic Caucus.



REP. DARYL PORTER JR.
DISTRICT 98

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

The challenges to voting in Mississippi are vast: outdated voter rolls, a significant lack of voter education, and systemic disinvestment in vulnerable communities. Mississippi Votes is committed to studying alongside communities to develop effective organizing strategies that equip every Mississippian with the tools necessary to participate in our democracy. The Policy and Research Program at MS Votes advocates for public policies that improve Mississippi's electoral landscape. Our team works to democratize public policy by expanding voting access and modernizing the state's antiquated voting laws.

Maisie Brown is a Mississippi native and racial justice organizer. Her life's work has been of deep commitment to improving the outcomes of Southern people. She is a Jackson Public Schools graduate and Summa Cum Laude Political Science graduate of Jackson State University. She started as a Youth Organizer on the field team but is currently the Advocacy & Outreach Coordinator at Mississippi Votes where she leads portfolios on some of Mississippi's most pressing issues: Housing, Education, Healthcare, and Reproductive Justice

Tiara James is a native of New Orleans, Louisiana, and a 2023 graduate of Jackson State University where she obtained her B.A. in Criminal Justice & Correctional Services. Tiara joined the Mississippi Votes team in 2023 as the Legislative Assistant for the Policy and Research Team. Prior to joining the team, Tiara served as an Executive Intern and One Girl, One Vote Fellow.

Karanja Norway Matory is a native of Jackson, Mississippi, and a proud product of Jackson Public Schools, having attended Clausell Elementary, Power APAC, Peeples Middle, and Provine High School. He went on to earn his bachelor's degree in Political Science from Jackson State University (2015–2019), where he was deeply engaged in campus life.
After graduating, Karanja pursued his Master of Public Administration at the University of Alabama (2019–2021). Following graduate school, he returned home to Jackson, where he currently serves as the Policy and Research Analyst for Mississippi Votes. He previously served as the organization's Community Engagement Manager.
Since moving back, Karanja has remained active in his community, working to advance policy initiatives and civic engagement efforts across Mississippi. Most recently, he developed the Robert G. Clark Advocacy and Legislative Fellowship Program for Black men in college.

Summar D. McGee is the Advocacy & Outreach Coordinator at Mississippi Votes, where she oversees civic engagement and policy advocacy strategies across key issue areas, including economic justice, youth justice, environmental justice and criminal justice. Her work bridges grassroots organizing and legislative analysis, with a focus on advancing equitable policy solutions that reflect the lived experiences of Mississippi communities.
With a background in research, education, and community development, Summar brings a multidisciplinary approach to public policy. Her commitment to transformative justice is grounded in years of experience supporting systems-impacted communities and advocating for structural change. She is passionate about building sustainable civic infrastructure and supporting the next generation of movement leaders.

Kennedy Pierce is a Research Associate at Mississippi Votes, where she supports legislative tracking, policy research, and community-driven advocacy initiatives. She reports directly to the Legislative Assistant and Policy Analyst and joined the team in August 2024. Joining MS Votes in 2024, Kennedy is a Chicago native with a passion for equity and public service. Kennedy brings experience in youth advocacy, civic engagement, and cross-sector collaboration. Her work focuses on analyzing legislation that impacts underrepresented communities and translating policy into accessible action for young voters and marginalized groups. Kennedy is deeply committed to creating systemic change through informed advocacy and intentional community engagement.

Hannah Williams is a native of Jackson Mississippi and a 2016 graduate of Jackson State University where she received a B.A. in History. Hannah joined the Mississippi Votes team in 2019 and is now Policy and Research Director where she leads the work in voting reform for pre-trial detainees and the restoration of rights for the felony disenfranchised as well as organizing student and community interaction with the Mississippi Legislature and directs the One Girl, One Vote fellowship.

ONE GIRL, ONE VOTE FELLOWSHIP

The One Girl One Vote (OGOV) Fellowship is a leadership and civic engagement program for young womxn and femmes of color in Mississippi. Grounded in a Black, Queer Feminist framework, OGOV is designed to deepen political education, sharpen organizing skills, and build power across communities. Fellows work alongside policy experts, lawmakers, and grassroots leaders to shape a legislative agenda rooted in justice, equity, and lived experience. Through training, advocacy, and collective action, OGOV prepares a new generation of changemakers to challenge oppressive systems and create lasting impact at every level of government.

OGOV FELLOWS

Porsha Brown
Logan Green
Ni-Lah Jones
Helayna Loggins



ONE GIRL, ONE VOTE FELLOWSHIP REPORT

This year, our One GIRL, One Vote Fellows boldly expanded the scope of their leadership, advocacy, and policy work. In addition to developing their own piece of legislation, the Fellows led the inaugural Black Women and Femme Lobby Day at the Mississippi State Capitol, authored comprehensive policy briefs, created a customized legislative tracker to monitor key bills throughout the session, and actively participated in multiple Legislative Advocacy Days alongside seasoned advocates and lawmakers

.

Working collaboratively, the Fellows selected an issue, researched best practices, drafted a policy proposal, and identified a legislative champion—ultimately securing the support of Representative Grace Butler-Washington, who agreed to sponsor their bill.

The result of their efforts is the **Comprehensive Reproductive Health and STD/STI Education Act** (House Bill 1631), a youth-driven legislative proposal designed to ensure that high school students aged 16–19 have access to accurate, inclusive, and medically sound education on reproductive health. The bill allows students to voluntarily participate in the program with parental or guardian consent and ensures that instruction is delivered by qualified medical professionals or trained advocates. The curriculum covers essential topics such as reproductive anatomy, contraception, STD/STI prevention and treatment, consent, and healthy relationships, with a strong emphasis on cultural sensitivity and inclusivity.

School district participation in the program is optional; however, districts that opt in will receive implementation support from the Mississippi Departments of Education and Health. Furthermore, students will be connected to trusted community resources, such as local clinics and support organizations, to reinforce what they learn in the classroom.

This youth-powered, policy-shaping initiative embodies the heart of the One GIRL, One Vote Fellowship and Mississippi Votes' broader mission: building collective power among young people, equipping them with the tools to lead, advocate, and drive transformative change within their communities and across the state.

ROBERT G. CLARK ADVOCACY & LEGISLATIVE FELLOWSHIP

The Robert G. Clark Jr. Policy & Legislation (RCAL) Fellowship is a civic leadership program for young Black men in Mississippi, inspired by the groundbreaking legacy of the first Black legislator elected in the state since Reconstruction. RCAL is designed to cultivate the next generation of policy leaders through hands-on experience at the Capitol, intensive political education, and mentorship from movement organizers and lawmakers. Fellows engage directly with the legislative process, learning how to craft bills, advocate for change, and build coalitions that advance justice and equity for their communities.

RCAL FELLOWS

Ajani Crenshaw
Jakari Holland
Wykendrick Jones
Desmond Washington
Justin Williams



ROBERT G. CLARK ADVOCACY & LEGISLATIVE FELLOWSHIP REPORT

During the 2025 legislative session, the inaugural cohort of Robert G. Clark Advocacy and Legislative Fellows (RCAL) at MS Votes focused on a diverse range of policy issues. Each Fellow was assigned to monitor legislation in one of four key areas: Elections and Voting Rights, Housing and Economic Justice, Healthcare and Reproductive Access, and Public Education.

A major highlight of the session was the Fellows' participation in Advocacy Days at the Capitol. These experiences offered Fellows a valuable opportunity to engage directly with lawmakers, ask critical questions, and witness the policymaking process in real time. By advocating for students, schools, and voting rights, RCAL Fellows deepened their understanding of the legislative process and the vital role advocacy plays in shaping policy outcomes.

Through direct engagement with policymakers, attendance at committee meetings, and collaboration with seasoned advocates, the Fellows gained hands-on insight into how bills progress through the legislature—and how community voices can influence outcomes. The experience served as a bridge between classroom theory and real-world governance, sharpening their understanding of civic engagement and systemic change.

A particularly impactful moment for the Fellows was launching an advocacy campaign in support of Senate Bill 2001 (SB 2001). This legislation proposed the creation of the National Statuary Hall Selection Commission, which would study and recommend two new historic figures to represent Mississippi in the National Statuary Hall at the U.S. Capitol. The aim was to select individuals who better reflect Mississippi's current and diverse demographic makeup. Although SB 2001 ultimately died in committee, Fellows saw firsthand how the legislative process can both empower and challenge advocacy efforts.

This fellowship experience reaffirmed the Fellows' commitment to advocacy and strengthened their passion for using public policy to advance equity and dignity for all Mississippians. Working alongside partner organizations and impacted community members proved to be both empowering and inspiring—laying the groundwork for a new generation of civic leaders.

PARTNER ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Mississippi Votes would like to offer our sincerest gratitude to all of our movement partners who continuously aid us in advancing our mission.

Thank you all for your unwavering support of young people and dedication to helping to create a transformative culture of civic engagement In Mississippi.

We appreciate you.

ALLIANCE FOR YOUTH ACTION

FAIR FIGHT ACTION

VOTING RIGHTS LAB

PEOPLE'S ADVOCACY INSTITUTE

LDF Legal Defense Fund

MISSISSIPPI CENTER FOR JUSTICE

SPLC

MISSISSIPPI Poor People's Campaign A NATIONAL CALL for MORAL REVIVAL

BLACK VOTERS MATTER

MISSISSIPPI BAIL FUND COLLECTIVE

FUSE MS

MISSISSIPPI RAPID RESPONSE COALITION

FUNDER ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Mississippi Votes would like to offer our sincerest gratitude to all of our funders who continuously aid us in advancing our mission.

Thank you all for your unwavering support of young people and dedication to helping to create a transformative culture of civic engagement In Mississippi.

We appreciate you.

Groundswell

PRO+DEMOCRACY CAMPAIGN

Civic (Re)Solve

Contact

Mississippi Votes Action Fund
P.O. Box 716
Jackson, MS, 39205