# Mississippi Votes 2026 Legislative Agenda

Primary Policy Areas

I. Rights Restoration and Ending Felony Disenfranchisement

**The Problem:** Mississippi permanently denies voting rights to thousands of residents under a system intentionally designed in the 1890 Constitution to suppress Black political power. Between forty and fifty thousand Mississippians (2% of the voting age population) have been permanently barred from voting due to a felony conviction—one of the highest disenfranchisement rates in the country. Mississippi is the sole state where voting rights can be restored only through an individual bill, requiring a two-thirds vote in both chambers. Few of these bills make it to the floor, and even fewer pass. This is an arbitrary and punitive process that does not meaningfully benefit public safety. In fact, research shows that restoring rights reduces recidivism and improves community reintegration.

**Proposed Solution:** An Act to automatically restore voting rights upon the completion of one's sentence, including probation and parole, with no additional barriers or fees. Ideally, the bill would not include any disenfranchising crimes—however, we would likely have more success advocating for a bill similar to the concurrent resolution introduced during the 2025 session. If the legislature refuses to act, Mississippi Votes will mobilize widespread public pressure through hundreds of coordinated suffrage applications, exposing the inequities of the approval process.

**Potential Sponsors:** Rep. Karriem, Rep. Wallace, Rep. Sanford, Rep. Mickens, Rep. Summers, Rep. Nelson, Rep. Scott, Sen. Simmons, Sen. Frazier, some moderate Republicans representing suburban districts, particularly those aligned with second-chance/reentry narratives. Empower Mississippi has supported rights restoration for non-violent offenders in the past (unlikely ally).

**Potential Opposition:** Conservative leadership (e.g., Sen. Angela Hill) in key committees (Constitution, Judiciary, Elections), lawmakers who view disenfranchisement as a "deterrent" or who oppose expanding the electorate, Gov. Tate Reeves, groups aligned with "tough-on-crime" narratives. We also need to be aware of potential "solutions" that do not address the problem (e.g., Noah Sanford's 3-panel adjudicative body idea).

**Relevant Legislation:** There have been several attempts to pass bills and resolutions addressing felony disenfranchisement. In 2022, the House introduced H.B. 1380, which would have automatically restored

the right to vote to anyone who had their record cleared. Both chambers passed the bill, but Governor Reeves ultimately vetoed the bill. During the 2024 session the House introduced H.B. 1081, which would have automatically restored voting rights upon completion of a person's sentence. The bill was passed by the House, but died in the Senate. In the 2025 session, the House introduced a concurrent resolution that would have changed the list of disenfranchising crimes to add human trafficking and sexual battery, but removed non-violent crimes. The resolution did not pass either chamber.

**2026 Success Metrics:** Rights restoration bill filed in the House, at least two legislative events centering directly impacted individuals (e.g., lobby day, hearings), 500+ suffrage applications submitted (if not passed), 15+ organizations signed onto a statewide coalition.

## II. Early No-Excuse Absentee Voting

**The Problem:** Early voting reduces election-day burdens, staffing shortages, and administrative errors. Over 40 states have adopted early voting with broad bipartisan support—Mississippi is not one of them. Mississippi also has a restrictive excuse-based absentee voting process, which means that for most voters the electoral process is confined to a single weekday with limited hours, which disproportionately impacts working-class voters, rural communities, caregivers, students, and people who lack flexible schedules or transportation. This system effectively suppresses turnout and creates longer Election Day lines.

**Proposed Solution:** An Act to establish a 14-day early voting period, allowing in-person voting at designated county locations, ballot return through secure monitored drop boxes, and no-excuse early voting. We should affirmatively push language similar to S.B. 2654, which came close to passing last session, and then push to expand voter access further in later sessions.

**Potential Sponsors:** Sen. England, Rep. Scott, Rep. Summers, Sen. Derrick Simmons.

**Potential Opposition:** House Elections Committee leadership, Gov. Reeves, conservative bloc aligned with election-security rhetoric, groups opposed to drop boxes or expanded access.

**Relevant Legislation:** Two bills relevant seeking to expand access to early voting were introduced in the 2025 legislative session. H.B. 228 (died in committee) would have permitted early in-person voting at the circuit clerks' offices up to 14 days before an election day. S.B. 2654, a bipartisan bill, would have allowed for no-excuse in-person voting up to 14 days before an election. The bill went through several amendments, including an amendment by the House to increase the early voting window from 14 days to 22 days. The Senate did not approve the amended timeframe, and the bill ultimately died.

**2026 Success Metrics:** Early voting bill filed in both chambers with bipartisan sponsors, at least one committee hearing held, five or more public endorsements from county election officials/clerks/circuit clerks who are willing to modernize voting access.

## III. Electronic Absentee Voting for College Students

**The Problem:** College students represent Mississippi's largest voting-age population, yet face the steepest barriers. Oftentimes there is no voting precinct on the college campus, creating a steep barrier for

those students who do not have reliable transportation. The lack of alternative means for casting a ballot—early voting, electronic absentee voting—further restricts participation among young people, especially Black, rural, and first-generation students. Technology allowing secure digital transmission is already used in many states for military and overseas voters, and Mississippi has already invested in statewide cybersecurity infrastructure that can support a secure portal.

**Proposed Solution:** An Act authorizing the Secretary of State to create a secure digital absentee portal where enrolled Mississippi college students can request absentee ballots, receive ballots electronically, return absentee ballots electronically with secure identity verification.

**Potential Sponsors:** Sen. Blount, Sen. Blackwell, Rep. Fabian Nelson, Rep. Shanda Yates, Sen. Brice Wiggins, Sen. Derrick Simmons

**Potential Opposition:** Lawmakers skeptical of electronic voting technologies, committees citing cybersecurity or voter fraud concerns (pretextual), groups opposing enfranchisement of young and transient populations

**Relevant legislation:** S.B. 2065, introduced by Sen. Blount during the 2025 legislative session, would have authorized the Secretary of State to establish an electronic absentee ballot application system for student voters. However, the bill would have required students to print out the application to get it signed and stamped by the college registrar, and students would only be able to cast their ballot via mail. S.B. 2007, introduced by Senator Blackwell during the 2024 session, would have permitted student voters to request and transmit absentee ballots via email. Student voters would have to request an absentee ballot 45 days prior to election day. The bill died in committee.

**2026 Success Metrics:** Secure a primary sponsor in each chamber and at least five co-sponsors representing districts with major college populations, achieve at least one public committee discussion or informational hearing on student voting barriers (maybe tie this into YCE day?), communicate with the Secretary of State about the feasibility of digital absentee infrastructure.

## IV. Restore Mississippi's Ballot Initiative Process

**The Problem:** Ballot initiatives often function as a corrective tool, allowing underrepresented groups to advance policies on voting access, healthcare, criminal justice, and/or local economic needs when the legislature stalls. Since the Mississippi Supreme Court invalidated the ballot initiative system in 2021, Mississippians have had no direct mechanism to pass laws when the Legislature is unresponsive to constituent demands. This has blocked the public's ability to advance Medicaid expansion, voting rights reforms, and other measures that are supported by a majority of voters in Mississippi. The absence of a ballot initiative process also disproportionately harms Black voters—who are more likely to support Democratic policies and candidates—by removing the sole pathway to advancing issues in a Republican-dominated state government.

**Proposed Solution:** An Act amending Art. 15, § 273 of the Mississippi Constitution to restore a workable ballot initiative process. The amendment should include updated signature thresholds based on current

congressional districts (ideally without naming the specific # of districts) and outline a citizen-driven process that enables the introduction of both legislation and constitutional amendments. The ballot initiative process should also prohibit any form of legislative veto over citizen driven proposals.

**Potential Sponsors:** Rep. Johnson, Sen. Frazier, Rep. Summers, Summers, bipartisan rural legislators.

**Potential Opposition:** Legislative leadership seeking to maintain control over policymaking (e.g., Sen. Boyd), groups opposing Medicaid expansion or other measures that could pass under an initiative (e.g., abortion).

**Relevant Legislation:** Several measures were introduced during the 2023 session that would have reinstated some form of ballot initiative process. S.B. 2638 would have allowed citizens to propose state laws, but not constitutional amendments. Similarly, S.C. 533 would have allowed citizens to create, amend, and repeal state law, but not amend the constitution. S.C. 529 would have permitted the use of the process to amend both state law and the constitution. All measures died, either in committee or on the calendar. During the 2024 session, the House passed H.C. 11, which would have allowed citizens to introduce state laws—but banned initiatives pertaining to abortion, public employee retirement, and local laws. It also would have required proposed initiatives to include financial analysis, and allowed the legislature to introduce competing legislation on the ballot. H.C. 11 died in the Senate. Senator Boyd introduced S.B. 2572 during the 2025 session that would have restricted the ballot initiative process to state legislation, which died in committee.

**2026 Success Metrics:** Bill filed with aligned sponsors in both chambers, conduct statewide educational events in all four congressional districts about the importance of direct democracy, collect at least 15,000 constituent contacts backing restoration.

## Secondary Issue-Based Policy Area (Support & Development)

I. Electoral Justice

### A. Online voter registration modernization

**The Problem:** Forty-three states offer online voter registration—Mississippi does not. Mississippi voters must submit a paper voter registration form, either via or in-person at a clerk's office (or at the DMV when getting a driver's license). Paper registration leads to frequent errors: handwriting that is illegible, incomplete forms, or mistakes during data transcription by election officials. These problems can lead to people being left off the voter rolls, delayed processing, or forced to vote via affidavit ballots.

**Proposed Solution:** An Act directing the Secretary of State to build a secure, ID-verified online registration portal so first-time voters can register digitally, with county-level verification and a paper backup.

**Potential Sponsors:** Rep. Summers, Rep. Anderson, Rep. Nelson, Rep. Sanford, Sen. Blount, legislators with younger constituents (e.g., representatives from districts with college campuses).

**Potential Opposition:** Legislators who have sponsored anti-electoral justice policy (e.g., Sen. Hill, Sen. Tate, Sen. Blackwell, Rep. Boyd, Rep. Shanks), legislators who have expressed concern about fraud risks

**Relevant Legislation:** H.B. 753 would have amended Miss. Code Ann. Section 23-15-49 to authorize online voter registration for first-time voters, and allow registered voters to update their information online. S.B. 2057 (2024 session, introduced by Sen. Blount) would have done the same.

**2026 Success Metrics:** Introduction of a bill establishing online voter registration in both houses with bipartisan sponsorship. Survey data from 5,000+ young Mississippians demonstrating their support for online registration. Public facing educational materials about the benefits of expanding the accessibility of the voter registration process.

B. Polling locations on college campuses

**The Problem:** Many Mississippi college students face unnecessary barriers to voting because most campuses lack on-site polling locations. With no early voting, no online voter registration for new applicants, and only a single Election Day to cast a ballot in person, students without reliable transportation or flexible schedules are disproportionately burdened. Several institutions—such as Mississippi Valley State University, Mississippi State University, the University of Southern Mississippi, and Jackson State University—already host campus precincts, demonstrating that these sites can operate successfully. Yet students at other colleges continue to navigate long distances, limited time, and complex procedures, resulting in preventable disenfranchisement.

**The Solution:** An Act requiring every four-year public or private postsecondary institution to maintain at least one polling precinct on its main campus or contiguous institutional property. This proposal fits squarely within existing law: under Miss. Code Ann. § 23-15-281, all facilities owned or leased by the state—including public universities—may be made available for use as polling places at no cost, with the approval of the controlling authority.

**Potential Sponsors:** Democratic legislators and Republicans representing districts with large student populations.

**Potential Opposition:** Lawmakers who have supported more restrictive voting measures may resist expanding precinct access

**2026 Success Metrics:** Passage of a campus-polling implementation bill, broad adoption of precincts across Mississippi colleges, and a measurable increase in youth turnout by 2026. With clearer access, reduced confusion, and fewer logistical barriers, young voters would be better equipped to exercise their political rights and contribute to a more representative and equitable democratic system.

C. Ballot curing protections

**The Problem:** Until 2020, Mississippi prohibited ballot curing entirely, leaving voters with no opportunity to fix minor errors on their absentee ballots. Although the state now requires registrars to

notify voters of signature mismatches within one day and allows roughly 10 days to respond, the process remains too limited and inaccessible for many. Elderly voters, disabled voters, students, and others who rely on assistance or who are more prone to clerical mistakes often face barriers in returning cure forms quickly. Moreover, if a voter's email or phone number is incorrect or misunderstood, the voter may never be contacted at all. This creates a system in which absentee ballots—already viewed skeptically by some—appear unreliable, deepening distrust and discouraging participation among marginalized communities.

**Proposed Solution:** An Act modeled on House Bill 163 to strengthen Mississippi's ballot curing process by requiring multiple methods of voter contact and providing a longer, more realistic window for corrections. H.B. 163, which passed the House but failed in the Senate, would have required registrars to notify voters by both phone and email (when both are provided), and to send the cure form via email or fax. Voters would have up to five days after Election Day to cure deficiencies, ensuring adequate time for those who depend on caregivers, have limited mobility, or face technology or transportation barriers. Similar protections exist in other states—Georgia allows three days after the election to cure, Louisiana requires prompt notice with in-person correction, and Texas provides up to six days for in-person cures—illustrating that Mississippi's one-day turnaround is an outlier and unnecessarily burdens voters. A strengthened cure system would increase response rates, reduce rejected ballots, and ensure that minor errors do not silence eligible voters.

**Potential Sponsors:** Rep. Noah Sanford and legislators with a track record of supporting bipartisan election administration improvements or who represent constituencies with high rates of absentee voting (e.g., elderly, disabled, student, or rural populations).

**Potential Opposition:** Legislators who have sponsored restrictive voting measures (e.g., Sen. Tate, Sen. Blackwell, Sen. McMahan, Sen. Barrett, Sen. DeLano, Sen. Hill; Rep. Powell, Rep. Aguirre, Rep. Boyd, Rep. Shanks, Rep. Wallace) and those who express heightened concerns about election fraud may oppose expanded curing efforts, arguing they are time- or resource-intensive. Lawmakers representing districts with low absentee-voter usage or those seeking to limit participation among groups who rely on absentee voting may also resist.

**Relevant Legislation:** House Bill 163 (Rep. Sanford, 2025 Session) and House Bill 1050 (Rep. Sanford, 2024 Session) sought to reform Mississippi's curing procedures. Mississippi Administrative Code Rule 1-17-4.2 currently requires registrars to notify voters within one business day of rejection and allows voters only one business day after receiving notice to return the cure form, delivered by mail, email, facsimile, or in person. Mississippi law also requires absentee ballots to be postmarked by Election Day and received within five business days to be counted, underscoring the need for flexible curing timelines.

**2026 Success Metrics:** Supporting effort to enact a bill that contains comprehensive ballot curing protections; comms support around implementation of the improved system by 2027.

II. Reproductive and Health Justice
    A. Medicaid expansion

*(Our role: We will not lead this initiative, but will support coalition members and partner organizations by providing research, policy analysis, and advocacy materials as needed.)*

**The Problem:** Mississippi's healthcare system consistently ranks near the bottom nationally, and the state remains one of the last ten that have not fully expanded Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act. Approximately 125,000 Mississippians fall into the coverage gap, lacking access to basic health protections because the state has refused expansion. This failure not only harms individuals—especially low-income families, rural residents, and people with chronic health needs—but also weakens hospitals, drains state resources, and leaves significant federal funding on the table. As hospitals close or cut services due to staffing shortages and financial strain, Mississippi's overall human capital and economic stability continue to erode.

**Proposed Solution:** Expansion of Medicaid eligibility up to 138% of the Federal Poverty Level, without work requirements or punitive removal provisions that prevent coverage for individuals on the financial margins. Proposals such as H.B. 1725 (2024) sought to impose 20-hour weekly work requirements, a policy that would undercut expansion's intended effect. Research shows that expansion could save Mississippi hundreds of millions—an estimated $335 million in 2024 and $346 million in 2025—and help stabilize hospitals facing low staffing levels, high uncompensated-care burdens, and rising costs.

**Potential Sponsors:** Rep. Bryant Clark, Rep. Jason White, Rep. Missy McGee, Rep. Omeria Scott, Rep. Hester Jackson-McCray, Rep. Kabir Karriem, Rep. Dana McLean, Rep. Zakiya Summers, Rep. Oscar Denton. Democratic legislators broadly, as well as Republicans representing districts with large low-income populations, many children, students, or elderly residents, may be receptive to expansion arguments centered on fiscal responsibility and hospital stability.

**Potential Opposition:** Republican legislators who cite concerns about long-term fiscal burdens, provider strain, or who have ideological objections rooted in longstanding opposition to the Affordable Care Act. Districts with low Medicaid enrollment or high distrust of federal programs may also resist expansion efforts.

**Relevant Legislation:** H.B. 125 (2025, Johnson) proposed expanding eligibility up to 200% FPL and covering those up to 100% FPL; H.B. 546 (2025, Clark) directed the Governor and Medicaid Division to negotiate federal expansion terms; S.B. 2554 (2025, McMahan) sought to gauge legislators' positions on expansion; S.B. 2888 (2025, Hickman) proposed a study of work-requirement impacts on state finances.

**2026 Success Metrics (if expansion is adopted):** Enactment of Medicaid expansion legislation and a clear timeline for full implementation in 2026; increases in the insured population—particularly reversal of recent coverage declines; measurable improvements in healthcare equity, quality, and outcomes; reductions in uncompensated care and financial strain on hospitals; and long-term improvements in Mississippi's public health rankings and economic stability.

B. Permanent postpartum Medicaid extension

*(Our role: We will not lead this initiative. We will monitor any legislation that seeks to repeal or shorten the 2023 postpartum-coverage law, and we will support coalition partners—such as the Black Women's Roundtable—by providing research, analysis, and advocacy materials.)*

**The Problem:** Mississippi consistently ranks among the worst states in the nation for maternal mortality, with many preventable complications arising during the postpartum period. In 2023, the state expanded postpartum Medicaid coverage from 60 days to 12 months—a crucial step toward stabilizing maternal health outcomes. However, many pregnancy-related conditions, including hypertension and diabetes, can persist well beyond a year after childbirth, and disruptions in care place both mothers and infants at heightened risk. Although the current policy provides year-long coverage with no sunset provision, it remains vulnerable to repeal efforts or legislative attempts to shorten the coverage window, threatening hard-won gains in maternal health.

**Proposed Solution:** Maintain and defend the 12-month postpartum coverage established in 2023. Senate Bill 2212 (2023) authorized continuous full-year postpartum Medicaid coverage "to the extent allowable under federal law," with no planned end date. Protecting this framework requires active monitoring of proposed legislation, rapid response to repeal or rollback bills, and coordinated advocacy underscoring the medical necessity of continued postpartum care. Partner organizations leading this work—including reproductive-justice advocates and the Black Women's Roundtable—will drive public messaging and coalition strategy; our role will be to provide research and policy support as needed.

**Potential Sponsors / Supporters:** Rep. Daryl Porter, Rep. Earle Banks, Rep. Tamarra Butler-Washington, health-care providers, maternal-health advocates, women's rights organizations, and public-health coalitions focused on protecting maternal outcomes. Legislators who supported the 2023 expansion or represent communities with high maternal-mortality rates may also defend the current policy.

**Potential Opposition:** Some Republican legislators may oppose sustained postpartum expansion on fiscal or ideological grounds, echoing arguments used against broader Medicaid expansion. Opposition may stem from long-standing political resistance to the Affordable Care Act, concerns about provider strain, or beliefs that continued coverage constitutes unnecessary government spending.

**Relevant Legislation:** Senate Bill 2212 (2023) established 12 months of postpartum Medicaid coverage beginning July 1, 2023, with continuous eligibility for individuals qualifying as pregnant women. The bill authorizes ongoing coverage "not less frequently than required by federal law," and contains no sunset clause.

**2026 Success Metrics:** No legislation passes that reduces or repeals the 12-month postpartum coverage; public awareness increases around the importance of continuous postpartum care; maternal-mortality rates begin to decline; and health systems report improved continuity of care for postpartum patients. Success would also include strengthened partnerships with maternal-health organizations and effective rapid-response monitoring that prevents harmful policy rollbacks.

C. Pregnancy-related data privacy reforms

*(Our role: We will not lead this initiative. We will support advocates and partner organizations—such as reproductive-justice coalitions—by providing legal research, policy analysis, and advocacy materials.)*

**The Problem:** Mississippi lacks a comprehensive state health-data privacy law, leaving major gaps in the protection of sensitive reproductive-health information. While HIPAA provides federal safeguards, it applies only to licensed medical providers and covered entities. Crisis Pregnancy Centers (CPCs)—which often present themselves as medical clinics despite being staffed by unlicensed personnel—are not bound by HIPAA and frequently collect, store, and share highly sensitive data that can be used to discourage abortion or penalize pregnant women. Even some licensed professionals, under pressure from increasingly restrictive reproductive laws, may over-collect or improperly share data out of fear of violating state policy. In a state with strong prohibitions on abortion and limited reproductive-health access, pregnant women's personal medical information is not adequately protected, enabling data brokering, surveillance, and potential criminalization.

**Proposed Solution:** An Act creating a comprehensive statutory framework that protects pregnancy-related health data across both licensed and unlicensed facilities.Future legislation should incorporate these protections, explicitly prohibit the use of pregnancy-related health data in criminal proceedings, and restrict the sale or transfer of reproductive-health data by non-HIPAA-covered entities. Together, these reforms would prevent state and private actors from weaponizing personal health information against pregnant people.

**Potential Sponsors:** Rep. Daryl Porter, Rep. Earle Banks, Rep. Tamara Butler-Washington, health-care workers, women's rights advocates, digital-privacy groups, reproductive-justice organizations, and medical providers committed to patient confidentiality. These stakeholders are likely to support stronger protections against the misuse of reproductive-health data.

**Potential Opposition:** Rep. Becky Currie, Rep. Lester Carpenter, Rep. William Tracy Arnold, Rep. Donnie Scoggin, Rep. Kevin Ford, and Rep. Stacey Hobgood-Wilkes, as well as others who have supported restrictive reproductive policies. Stakeholders aligned with CPC networks or anti-abortion advocacy groups.

**Relevant Legislation:** Previous legislation—such as H.B. 1374—sought to safeguard information relating to pregnancy, prenatal and postnatal care, miscarriages, abortion records, maternal-health visits, contraception, and other sensitive reproductive-health data. The bill also would have required all facilities, including CPCs, to obtain explicit patient consent before using or sharing sensitive information. H.B. 1268 (2024) proposed banning the geofencing of consumer health data and allowing patients to request deletion of their information from data brokers.

**2026 Success Metrics:** Supporting the passage of a comprehensive pregnancy-related health-data privacy statute incorporating the protections envisioned in H.B. 1374 and H.B. 1268..

III. Education Justice

A. High school preregistration and civic access

**The Problem:** Mississippi does not currently permit high school voter preregistration. As a result, many eligible young people—especially those about to turn 18—miss the opportunity to register early, which can delay or suppress their first participation in elections. Studies and experiences from other states show that preregistration can increase youth turnout, build civic habits, and reduce barriers that arise when young people move for college, work, or other life transitions. Without preregistration, Mississippi risks losing the engagement of a generation that may otherwise be ready and eager to vote.

**Proposed Solution:** Mississippi should explore adopting a voter preregistration law for high school students. Under such a system, students who are 16 or 17 (or otherwise below 18) could complete a voter registration application; once they turn 18, their registration would automatically convert, enabling them to vote without additional paperwork. While we are not sponsoring legislation ourselves, we commit to conducting research — both community-based and quantitative — to assess how preregistration could work in Mississippi, developing educational materials for youth, schools, and community groups, and supporting legislative or advocacy partners who wish to propose such a law. We also intend to explore complementary civic-access measures (e.g., preregistration drives in high schools, civic-education programs, outreach to underrepresented youth) to maximize the impact if preregistration becomes legal.

**Potential Supporters:** Democratic and forward-looking legislators interested in boosting youth turnout; civil-rights and youth-advocacy organizations; high school administrators supportive of civic engagement; community-based groups focused on youth empowerment; and organizations working on voter access and civic education.

**Potential Opposition:** Some lawmakers might resist expanding preregistration due to concerns about youth readiness, administrative burden, or political turnout effects. There may be resistance from stakeholders who oppose expanding voter access or believe registration should only occur at 18. Logistical challenges could arise in implementing preregistration in high schools, such as ensuring accurate record-keeping, verifying information, and safeguarding data privacy.

**Relevant Context:** According to the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), as of early 2025 eighteen states plus Washington, D.C. allow preregistration beginning at age 16, with additional states permitting preregistration at age 17 or other ages under 18. These states show that preregistration is a well-established reform that can help smooth the transition to voting age and increase youth civic participation.

**2026 Success Metrics:** Success can be measured by the passage of a state law authorizing high school voter preregistration, along with the creation and dissemination of educational materials and outreach campaigns in schools. Additional indicators include increased preregistration among 16–17-year-olds, higher first-time voter turnout among newly eligible 18-year-olds, sustained engagement in civic activities, and improved retention on voter rolls over time, demonstrating that preregistration strengthens long-term youth participation in Mississippi's elections.

B. Protection of culturally relevant curriculum and DEI work

**The Problem:** Mississippi's K–12 schools face legislative threats aimed at restricting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, as well as culturally relevant curriculum. House Bill 1193 (2023 Legislative Session) prohibited public schools from incorporating "divisive concepts" into instruction, creating a chilling effect on teaching that reflects diverse histories and perspectives. The reintroduction of similar legislation could severely limit students' access to educational content that reflects their communities, undermining inclusive learning and increasing inequities in educational outcomes.

**Proposed Solution:** Our approach will be defensive: we will monitor for the reintroduction of bills similar to HB 1193, conduct research on potential legislative and legal vulnerabilities, and provide support to partners in the advocacy and legal space. This includes working with lawyers currently litigating DEI-related cases to identify groundwork that can strengthen potential future challenges, and partnering with Democratic legislators to provide background research, data, and analysis to support amendments or otherwise make passage of restrictive bills more difficult. The goal is to ensure schools can continue implementing culturally relevant curriculum and DEI initiatives without the threat of punitive legislation.

**Potential Sponsors:** Democratic legislators supportive of inclusive education, organizations focused on educational equity and civil rights, teacher advocacy groups, and legal partners engaged in DEI litigation (MCJ, ACLU, etc.).

**Potential Opposition / Challenges:** Legislators and interest groups promoting "anti-CRT" or anti-DEI policies may push for the reintroduction of bills restricting classroom content, framing these efforts as protecting students from "divisive concepts." Resistance may also come from conservative education advocates and state-level policy influencers opposed to equity initiatives.

**Relevant Legislation & Policy Context:** House Bill 1193 (2023 Legislative Session) restricted K–12 schools from teaching content deemed "divisive," limiting DEI work and culturally relevant curriculum.

**2026 Success Metrics:** Success will be measured by the absence or defeat of bills restricting DEI work in K–12 schools, the provision of timely research and resources to legislative partners, and strengthened legal groundwork for potential future challenges. Additional indicators include increased capacity among partner organizations to respond to legislative threats, the preservation of culturally relevant curricula in classrooms, and broader awareness among legislators and school administrators of the benefits and legal protections surrounding DEI initiatives.

IV. Economic Justice

A. Refundable state Earned Income Tax Credit

*(Our role: leading advocacy and educational efforts under the AYO grant, including legislator outreach and community education.)*

**The Problem:** Mississippi has some of the highest poverty rates in the nation, alongside persistent income inequality and limited financial supports for low-income families. While the federal Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) provides meaningful financial relief, many families struggle to access the full

benefits of these programs, and Mississippi lacks a state-level refundable EITC to supplement the federal credit. Without such a mechanism, low-income workers miss opportunities to build financial stability, invest in education, afford healthcare, and contribute to local economic growth.

**Proposed Solution:** An Act creating a refundable state EITC that builds on federal eligibility. Modeled after previous efforts like House Bill 228, the credit would provide a state income tax refund equivalent to a percentage (e.g., 10%) of the federal EITC. Critically, the refundable feature ensures that qualifying families receive the full benefit even if it exceeds their state tax liability, offering direct financial relief and economic stimulus for communities. Through the AYO grant, we will educate legislators and community members about the benefits of a refundable EITC, provide research on economic and social impacts, and support coalition partners working to advance legislation, while also raising public awareness about how the credit improves financial security and reduces poverty.

**Potential Supporters:** Democratic legislators and policy makers focused on economic justice, child and family welfare organizations, anti-poverty and workforce advocacy groups, community coalitions, and local chambers of commerce interested in stimulating local economies.

**Potential Opposition:** Some fiscally conservative legislators or business groups may resist expanded state spending or refundable tax credits, citing budget concerns (including the recent income tax cut).

**Relevant Legislation & Policy Context:** House Bill 228, introduced by Representative Robert Johnson, aimed to provide a 10% state EITC for taxpayers claiming the federal credit, with a refundable option if the credit exceeded state tax owed. The bill was referred to the House Ways and Means Committee but died in committee. Nationwide, several states implement refundable EITCs, demonstrating the policy's effectiveness in reducing poverty, boosting family income, and stimulating local economies.

**2026 Success Metrics:** Introduction and advancement of legislation establishing a refundable state EITC, active engagement from legislators and community groups, and dissemination of research and educational materials to policymakers and the public.

B. Paid family leave and fair scheduling protections

*(Our role: providing research support, policy analysis, and advocacy resources to partner organizations — not leading the drafting or championing of legislation ourselves.)*

**The Problem:**
Mississippi workers, particularly in private-sector jobs, hourly or low-wage positions, often lack reliable paid family leave or fair scheduling protections. Without paid leave, parents and caregivers face a stark trade-off between job security and vital time for childbirth, bonding, and recovery. Inconsistent or unpredictable work schedules — common in many service, retail, and hourly-wage jobs — exacerbate financial instability, make childcare planning difficult, and undermine worker well-being. The absence of broad statewide protections for family leave and fair scheduling creates deep inequities, especially for working-class families, single parents, and low-income communities.

**Proposed Approach:** Building on the passage of recent legislation for state employees, we will support partner organizations advocating to extend paid leave to all workers, and to ensure employers provide

predictable, fair schedules. Our role will be to gather and synthesize data (e.g., economic impact, public-health outcomes, workforce retention), produce educational materials, and supply advocacy research to partners pushing for broader protections.

**Potential Supporters:** Labor and worker-rights organizations, family-advocacy and public-health groups, childcare providers, working-class and low-income community organizations, and legislators sympathetic to workforce stability and family welfare.

**Potential Opposition / Challenges:** Some employers and business groups may resist mandates for paid leave or scheduling reform, citing concerns over cost and operational flexibility. Legislators prioritizing a minimal-regulation environment may oppose expanding mandated leave or scheduling protections statewide.

**Relevant Legislation & Policy Context:** In 2025, the state enacted Mississippi State Employees Paid Parental Leave Act (House Bill 1063), which provides eligible state employees with six weeks of paid parental leave for the birth or adoption of a child. There was also a broader proposal (HB 1047) to establish a statewide paid family and medical leave program, which died in committee.

**2026 Success Metrics:** Introduction of legislation extending paid family leave and fair-scheduling protections to private-sector and hourly workers; growing public-policy support for such reforms by labor and community groups; published research and data demonstrating the benefits of paid leave (e.g., workforce retention, child and maternal health, economic stability); distribution of educational materials and outreach campaigns.

V. Criminal Justice
    A. End incarceration for unpaid fines and fees

*(Our role: supporting MMRC, the MacArthur Justice Center, and community partners with research, analysis, and advocacy materials.)*

**The Problem:** Mississippi continues to jail people who cannot afford court fines and fees, despite constitutional limits on criminalizing poverty. These practices disproportionately affect low-income residents and Black communities, turning minor infractions into spirals of debt, job loss, housing instability, and incarceration. Judges retain broad discretion in determining "willful" nonpayment, and administrative or past-due fees fall outside key protections. The system relies financially on fines and fees, burdening jails and taxpayers while worsening unequal justice.

**Proposed Solution:** An Act strengthening and expanding protections created by H.B. 387 (2018) by eliminating judicial discretion that leads to jail for nonpayment, standardizing statewide indigency assessments, and expanding alternatives such as community service, workable payment plans, or debt forgiveness. The Act should also require clearer court-notification systems and simplified procedures to prevent unnecessary warrants and reduce incarceration for poverty-driven nonpayment.

**Potential Sponsors:** Rep. Zakiya Summers, Rep. Earle Banks, Rep. Kabir Karriem; Democratic legislators; lawmakers representing high-poverty or high-impact districts; civil-rights groups; public defenders; community-based justice advocates.

**Potential Opposition:**"Tough on crime" legislators, some law enforcement associations, and political groups aligned with punitive justice models may oppose reductions in fines-and-fees enforcement or fear revenue loss for local courts.

**Relevant Legislation:** Mississippi's baseline protection comes from H.B. 387 (2018), which prohibits automatic incarceration for inability to pay, but gaps in enforcement and judicial discretion still leave many residents vulnerable. New proposals—H.B. 560 (2025) and H.B. 898 (2025)—would expand alternatives such as community service and strengthen prohibitions on jailing people for nonpayment. Existing rules (Miss. R. Crim. P. 26.6 and 27.3) require courts to assess willfulness before jailing someone, in line with constitutional protections established in *Williams v. Illinois*, but these safeguards remain inconsistently applied. Local examples, such as Meridian's 2019 decision to end incarceration for unpaid fines, show that more equitable approaches are workable and fiscally sound.

**2026 Success Metrics:**
Passage of strengthened legislation eliminating incarceration for unpaid fines; increased use of alternatives such as community service; reductions in jail bookings tied to fines and fees.

B. Bail and pretrial reform

*(Our role: monitoring for harmful bills, acting defensively if needed, and supporting partners such as the Mississippi Bail Fund Collective, MMRC, the MacArthur Justice Center, and the Mississippi Center for Justice with research and advocacy materials.)*

**The Problem:** Mississippi's money-bail system keeps thousands of legally innocent people in jail simply because they cannot afford to pay. Pretrial detention destabilizes families, causes people to lose jobs and housing, limits access to legal counsel, and increases the likelihood of future involvement with the justice system. Overcrowded jails strain staff, deepen safety risks, and divert millions in taxpayer funds toward detaining people who often pose little risk to public safety. The system disproportionately harms poor residents and Black Mississippians, effectively criminalizing poverty while failing to improve court appearance rates or community safety.

**Proposed Solution:** Mississippi needs comprehensive bail and pretrial reform that shifts away from wealth-based detention. Effective reform could include eliminating money bail for low-level and nonviolent offenses, expanding release on recognizance, and using non-punitive alternatives such as supervised release or electronic monitoring only when necessary. Courts should adopt standardized ability-to-pay assessments and ensure meaningful access to counsel—particularly for indigent defendants. Improved court-notification systems and procedures would reduce missed hearings and prevent unnecessary detention. The goal is a pretrial system rooted in risk, fairness, and public safety—not a person's financial resources.

**Potential Sponsors:** Rep. Zakiya Summers, Rep. Earle Banks, Rep. Kabir Karriem; Democratic legislators; lawmakers representing high-poverty or heavily policed communities; and fiscally conservative legislators who recognize that pretrial detention is extremely costly and inefficient. Broad support is also likely from civil-rights and legal-advocacy organizations.

**Potential Opposition:** "Tough on crime" lawmakers, prosecutors, some judges, law-enforcement associations, and political blocs that prioritize punitive justice may resist changes to the money-bail system. Some opponents may claim reforms pose public-safety risks or reduce court revenue.

**Relevant Legislation:** Recent reforms have been incremental. S.B. 2315 (2025), now law, permits courts to set aside bail based on a defendant's financial circumstances and allows 48 hours to file for bail reduction, offering limited relief. Earlier efforts, including H.B. 1196 (2019)—the "Bail Reform Act of 2019"—left money bail largely intact and continued reliance on judicial discretion, demonstrating the need for more substantive reform.

**2026 Success Metrics:** Passage of legislation reducing or eliminating money bail for low-level offenses, expanding release on recognizance, and standardizing ability-to-pay assessments.

C. Diversion and reentry infrastructure expansion

*(Our role: supporting partner organizations—through research, policy analysis, and advocacy materials — as they lead efforts in diversion and reentry reform.)*

**The Problem:** Mississippi's diversion and reentry infrastructure is drastically under-resourced relative to need. Although roughly 9,000 people leave state prisons each year, past MDOC reporting shows the state historically maintained only around 100 transitional reentry beds, leaving thousands without support. Mississippi consistently posts some of the highest recidivism rates in the country, and existing programs such as restitution centers often worsen outcomes. Restitution centers disproportionately entrap poor people in cycles of debt and reincarceration, and evidence suggests these punitive models exacerbate racial disparities, particularly in high-poverty regions like the Delta.

**Proposed Solution:** An act expanding and modernizing Mississippi's diversion and reentry systems by phasing out punitive restitution centers and replacing them with well-funded, evidence-based reentry programs focused on stability and rehabilitation. Conversion of underperforming restitution centers into reentry facilities is an immediate, achievable step. Effective reentry requires accessible mental and physical healthcare, job training, workforce placement, and safe housing.

**Potential Sponsors:** Rep. Zakiya Summers, Rep. Earle Banks, Rep. Kabir Karriem; Democratic lawmakers; legislators representing communities heavily impacted by incarceration; and fiscally conservative legislators open to cost-saving reforms that reduce jail populations and reliance on punitive programs.

**Potential Opposition:** "Tough on crime" lawmakers, certain law-enforcement groups, some prosecutors and judges, and opponents of funding rehabilitative services may resist changes to restitution programs or expansion of state-supported reentry services.

**Relevant Legislation:** Recent legislative proposals—including H.B. 224 (2025), which would have converted three restitution centers into reentry facilities, H.B. 474 (2025) establishing reentry housing, and S.B. 2363 (2025) replacing restitution centers with prerelease reentry programs—demonstrate growing legislative interest, though all died in committee. National models such as the Second Chance

Act (2007) underscore the value of evidence-based reentry supports and federal alignment for state reform efforts.

**2026 Success Metrics:** Success would include passage of legislation expanding reentry services, converting or eliminating restitution centers, and creating statewide standards for diversion programs. Indicators would include increased access to transitional housing and job training, reduced recidivism rates, lower incarceration costs, and improved outcomes for individuals reentering their communities. A comprehensive, rehabilitative reentry system should reduce the number of people cycling back into prison and improve economic stability for returning residents.

VI. Youth Justice

A. Raise the age of juvenile jurisdiction to eighteen

*(Our role: actively advancing this issue as part of our youth justice portfolio, connecting to felony disenfranchisement and rights restoration. We will support legislative advocacy, research, and coalition building to ensure juveniles are not automatically barred from voting for crimes adjudicated in adult court.)*

**The Problem:**
Seventeen-year-olds in Mississippi face adult criminal penalties despite not being fully developed adults. The frontal lobe, critical for decision-making and impulse control, does not fully mature until around 25. Mississippi defines legal adulthood at 21, yet the juvenile court cut-off is 16, forcing 17-year-olds into the adult penal system. This punitive approach disrupts cognitive and emotional development, increases recidivism, and reduces the effectiveness of rehabilitation programs. Incarcerating youth in adult facilities can have lasting consequences, including exposure to unsafe environments, limited educational and mental health resources, and long-term barriers to civic engagement, such as voting rights restoration.

**Proposed Solution:** An Act raising the age of juvenile jurisdiction to 18, creating a presumption that individuals under 18 are handled in juvenile court.

**Potential Sponsors:** Rep. Daryl Porter, Rep. John Hines, Rep. Robert Johnson, Rep. Carl Mickens; Democratic legislators; justice advocacy groups (e.g., The Bail Project), legal aid organizations, Families as Allies, Teen Health Mississippi; youth-focused advocacy coalitions invested in rehabilitation and rights restoration.

**Potential Opposition:** "Tough on crime" legislators, law enforcement groups, and public officials resistant to reforms that limit adult court jurisdiction may oppose raising the age.

**Relevant Legislation:** Mississippi has introduced several legislative efforts to raise the age of juvenile jurisdiction to 18. House Bill 361 (2024) sponsored by Representatives Porter, Hines, Johnson, and Mickens successfully proposed raising the age, and House Bill 219 (2025), sponsored by Representative Johnson, sought to reintroduce and reinforce this reform.

**2026 Success Metrics:** Passage and implementation of a "Raise the Age" law, resulting in fewer 17-year-olds processed in adult criminal court and more handled within juvenile or family court.

VII. Climate and Environmental Justice

A. Water quality enforcement systems

*(Our role: supporting community partners with research, advocacy, and public-education resources.)*

**The Problem:** Jackson's water system has suffered from decades of neglect, underinvestment, and infrastructural decay, resulting in repeated water main breaks, treatment-plant failures, lead contamination, boil-water orders, and prolonged shutoffs. The August 2022 failure of the O.B. Curtis Water Treatment Plant left over 150,000 residents without safe drinking water, demonstrating the catastrophic consequences of long-term disinvestment. These failures disproportionately affect Black and low-income communities, highlighting systemic environmental injustice. Oversight and accountability remain weak, and efforts to secure state or federal funding for repairs have often stalled or fallen short. Without sustained attention, the city's water infrastructure remains vulnerable to both ongoing public-health risks and environmental inequities.

**Proposed Solution:** Support community-based groups such as the People's Advocacy Institute, Mississippi Rapid Response Coalition, NAACP, and other partners by conducting research on water-quality failures, environmental justice impacts, and public health consequences. Develop educational and advocacy materials to inform both the public and policymakers about systemic deficiencies in Jackson's water system. Additionally, we will assist partners in tracking regulatory compliance, amplifying community input during public comment processes, and supporting legal or administrative efforts to hold water authorities accountable, ensuring that investments and oversight address the needs of the most affected communities.

**Potential Sponsors:** Supporters include local grassroots coalitions, public health organizations, environmental justice advocates, legal aid and public-interest law firms, and elected officials committed to equitable infrastructure investment. These stakeholders can provide additional advocacy, visibility, and resources to ensure that water quality improvements remain a priority and that affected communities have a meaningful voice in decision-making.

**Potential Opposition:** Opposition may come from officials or private managers resistant to increased oversight, policymakers concerned about the costs of infrastructure investment, or entities hesitant to prioritize equity-focused water-quality initiatives. These challenges may slow enforcement, complicate funding efforts, or reduce transparency in system management.

**Relevant Context:** Relevant context includes repeated violations of federal Safe Drinking Water Act standards prior to 2022, civil-rights complaints filed with the EPA by affected residents, and concerns over the privatization of Jackson's water system under JXN Water, Inc., which have raised fears of reduced community input and potential rate increases. Existing federal and state water-quality laws provide a framework for enforcement, but consistent monitoring and accountability mechanisms are critical to ensuring compliance and equitable access.

**2026 Success Metrics:** Increased transparency in public reporting on system performance and sustained investment in pipes, treatment plants, and distribution infrastructure will indicate progress. Establishment

of meaningful community oversight, such as advisory councils, and increased civic engagement and accountability of water-system managers.

B. Disaster utility shutoff protections

*(Our role: supporting community and advocacy partners with research, analysis, and public-education resources — not leading legislation directly.)*

**The Problem:** Mississippi currently lacks comprehensive statewide policies prohibiting utility shutoffs during extreme climate events or emergencies. As climate change intensifies, extreme heat, cold snaps, storms, floods, and other disasters pose increased risks—especially for low-income households, the elderly, people with medical vulnerabilities, and families already experiencing energy or economic stress. Losing water, electricity, or heat during extreme weather can threaten health, safety, and access to essential services. Without enforceable protections, many households may face disconnection at exactly the moments when utilities are most critical for survival, compounding inequality and environmental injustice.

**Proposed Approach:** Supporting partner organizations (such as community-based advocacy groups, legal aid organizations, and public-interest groups) as they push for statutory protections that prevent utility shutoffs during extreme weather or declared emergencies. Compiling research and data on the human, health, and economic harms of weather-related shutoffs; producing educational materials for legislators, utilities regulators, and the public; and helping build a compelling case for laws or public-utility-commission regulations that guarantee service continuation during disasters or extreme heat/cold events. Monitor for any regulatory or legislative developments affecting shutoff protections, and support advocacy efforts aimed at strengthening and expanding those protections.

**Potential Supporters:** Public-interest and environmental-justice organizations, legal aid and civil-rights groups, public-health advocates, low-income and vulnerable-community networks, local governments, and legislators concerned with equity, public health, and climate resilience.

**Potential Opposition:** Resistance may come from utility companies (Atmos, Entergy) concerned about financial losses or administrative burdens, policymakers prioritizing deregulation, or stakeholders who view shutoff protections as interference with contractual or market-based utility service. Budget constraints or political reluctance to mandate universal protections may also limit the appeal or feasibility of such reforms.

**Relevant Context:** Across the U.S., many states already have "cold-weather rules," summer heat-moratoriums, or "extreme weather" shutoff protections under which utilities cannot disconnect residential customers when temperatures reach dangerous levels or during formally declared emergencies. These protections reduce risk of hypothermia, heat-related illness, and other weather-driven health hazards, particularly for households with limited resources.

**2026 Success Metrics:** Evidence of legislative or regulatory proposals introduced to guarantee utility continuity during extreme weather; development and distribution of public-education materials highlighting the need for shutoff protections; strengthening of state or utility-commission rules to prevent

disconnections under defined emergency conditions; increased awareness among vulnerable communities about their rights and protections.

VIII. Housing Justice

A. Source-of-income discrimination protections

*(Our role: working alongside community partners such as Springboard to Opportunities, providing research, advocacy and educational resources — not leading legislation directly.)*

**The Problem:** In Mississippi, there is no statewide law prohibiting landlords from discriminating against renters who use housing assistance such as Section 8 vouchers or other forms of subsidized or public income support. As a result, many low-income individuals and families, often including elderly people, people with disabilities, and working families, are excluded from safe and affordable housing simply because of their source of income. This lack of protection perpetuates housing instability, deepens economic inequality, and limits opportunity for people who already face financial or social vulnerabilities. The absence of statewide protections allows discriminatory practices to continue unchecked, making it difficult for voucher-dependent renters to secure housing in decent neighborhoods, and undermines efforts to ensure equitable access to housing across income levels.

**Proposed Approach:** Advocating for statewide legislation that prohibits source-of-income discrimination in housing. Such a law would require landlords and property managers to consider all lawful sources of income—including Section 8 vouchers, housing assistance, or other public benefits—on equal footing with private income when evaluating rental applicants. Work in partnership with community organizations such as Springboard to Opportunities to compile data and stories that demonstrate the need for reform, produce educational materials for legislators and the public, and mobilize support from housing advocates, civil-rights organizations, and affected communities.

**Potential Supporters:** Community-based housing advocacy groups (such as Springboard to Opportunities), fair-housing and civil-rights organizations, tenant-rights coalitions, social service providers, public-interest legal aid organizations, and legislators concerned with affordable housing, poverty reduction, and social equity.

**Potential Opposition:** Opposition may come from landlord associations, property-management firms, or real-estate interests concerned about perceived restrictions on their discretion and potential financial or administrative burdens. Some policymakers may argue that expanding housing protections could discourage rental investment or complicate landlord-tenant screening processes.

**Relevant Legislation & Policy Context:** In 2021, Senate Bill 2317 was introduced aiming to prohibit source-of-income discrimination in housing by authorizing the use of Section 8 vouchers and other lawful sources of income for rental applications statewide. The bill did not pass.

**2026 Success Metrics:** Introduction or reintroduction of a statewide source-of-income discrimination bill, increased public and legislative awareness of the issue thanks to educational campaigns and advocacy materials, and growing endorsements from housing-advocacy, civil-rights, and tenant-rights organizations.

B. Eviction diversion and right-to-counsel models

*(Our role: supporting partners such as legal-aid organizations, housing justice groups, and MCJ by providing research, community data, and advocacy resources — not leading legislation.)*

**The Problem:** Mississippi currently lacks a statewide right-to-counsel for tenants facing eviction and has weak protections against eviction for many renters. As a result, low-income families and individuals—often in precarious housing situations—face eviction proceedings without legal representation, putting them at a severe disadvantage and increasing the risk of losing stable housing. Without diversion programs, mediation, or tenant support systems, many evictions stem from temporary financial setbacks, misunderstandings, or short-term crises that could be resolved if tenants had access to legal counsel or support services. The lack of structured eviction-prevention mechanisms also contributes to housing instability, cycles of homelessness, and heightened vulnerability among renters.

**Proposed Approach:** Support the establishment of a statewide right-to-counsel model for tenants facing eviction, along with eviction diversion and mediation programs designed to prevent displacement before court proceedings. Working with partner organizations—legal aid providers, housing justice groups, community-based nonprofits, and MCJ—compile community data on eviction rates, housing instability, and tenant outcomes; produce research briefs and educational materials; and assist in advocating for policies or pilot programs that guarantee legal representation for tenants, access to mediation, and diversion services (such as rent assistance, payment plans, or housing counseling) aimed at preventing eviction altogether.

**Potential Supporters:** Legal-aid organizations, tenant-rights and housing justice groups, community-based nonprofits, public-interest law firms, civil-rights organizations, public-health and social-service advocates, and legislators interested in housing stability, poverty reduction, and equitable access to safe housing.

**Potential Opposition:** Opposition may come from landlords, property-management firms, real-estate interest groups, or policymakers concerned about costs, landlord rights, or increased regulation. Some may argue that rent assistance or mediation programs could encourage nonpayment or reduce property-owner flexibility. Resistance may also emerge from those opposed to expanding government- or state-funded legal services for tenants.

**Relevant Context:** Cities such as New York have implemented robust eviction diversion and right-to-counsel models that provide tenants with free legal representation, mediation, and access to housing-stability services. This has resulted in fewer evictions, lower displacement rates, and improved tenant outcomes.

**2026 Success Metrics:** Introduction of eviction-diversion or right-to-counsel legislation or pilot programs; increased access to legal representation for tenants facing eviction; expanded use of mediation, rent-assistance, or diversion services to prevent eviction; measurable reductions in eviction filings and completed evictions among program participants or in pilot jurisdictions.