MS VOTES ACTION FUND

2026 LEGISLATIVE REPORT





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The State of **Our State**

Mississippi is a state of extraordinary people doing extraordinary things, and a democracy that has not yet caught up with them.

Across this state, young people are organizing on college campuses and in high school hallways. Working families are stretching every dollar in one of the nation's poorest states, navigating a system without adequate safety nets, affordable healthcare, or fair wages. Black mothers are surviving a maternal health crisis that makes Mississippi one of the most dangerous places in the country to give birth. Renters are one missed paycheck away from eviction with no right to counsel and no meaningful protection from discrimination. Formerly incarcerated Mississippians who have served their time, rebuilt their lives, and rejoined their communities are still being told their voice doesn't count.

These are not separate problems. They are the same problem, showing up in different rooms: the hospital, the classroom, the courtroom, the polling place. And they all raise one fundamental question: who gets to participate in shaping the future of this state?
Every year, working parents, college students, formerly incarcerated people, rural families, and young Mississippians ask for the basic tools of democratic participation. And every year, the legislature finds reasons to say no.

The consequences are not abstract. When early voting fails to pass, it fails night-shift worker in the Delta who cannot make it to the polls before they close. When the ballot initiative process remains dormant, it is everyday Mississippians—not lobbyists, not out-of-state special interest groups—who lose the ability to bring their priorities directly to a vote.

When rights restoration stalls, it impacts the father who completed his sentence years ago, rebuilt his life, and still cannot cast a ballot in the state he calls home.

At the same time, when these reforms pass the wins belong to everyone. Early voting does not help one community at the expense of another. It helps the small business owner who can't leave work on a Tuesday. It helps the elderly voter who needs more time and flexibility. It helps the college student voting for the first time.

A restored ballot initiative process returns power to citizens across the political spectrum. Automatic rights restoration means more Mississippians— neighbors, taxpayers, community members—with a full stake in this state's future. These are not partisan victories. They are democratic ones.

Mississippi Votes Action Fund is not a Democratic organization or a Republican one. We are a Mississippi organization. And we believe that the right to vote, the right to be heard, and the right to participate fully in democracy are not political positions; they are the floor of a functioning society.

As we look ahead to the 2027 legislative session, three priorities rise above the rest: early voting, rights restoration, and the restoration of Mississippi's ballot initiative process. We have fought for each of these before. We will fight for them again. And we will fight harder. Mississippi's people have never stopped showing up. It's time for their legislature to do the same.

By the Numbers

Legislative Reach

- **280+ bills tracked** across 8 policy areas
- **50+ committee hearings attended** to monitor legislative activity and inform advocacy strategy

Community Engagement

- **150+ Mississippians mobilized** at the Capitol through advocacy days
- **3 advocacy days held**, creating direct opportunities for community members to engage with lawmakers

Rights & Representation

- **60 suffrage petitions submitted**
- **2 voting rights restorations passed** during the 2026 session

Youth Engagement

- **70+ young** people engaged through legislative programming, policy development, and advocacy efforts at the Capitol

Communications & Public Education

- **142** posts
- **72,870** impressions
- **1,475** likes
- **747** clicks
- **504** shares/retweets
- **59** saves
- **26** comments

- **12 legislative newsletters distributed**, providing timely updates and analysis throughout the session

Our 2026 Legislative Agenda

Mississippi Votes advances durable democratic power by integrating youth and base-building, legislative advocacy, coalition infrastructure, and narrative change. Every priority below is grounded in one belief: that a healthy democracy requires every Mississippian—especially those historically pushed to the margins—to have a real seat at the table.

Democratic Access & Direct Democracy

The Problem

Mississippi remains one of the most difficult states in the country in which to vote. Online voter registration still doesn't exist. The ballot initiative process, which is the people's most direct tool for shaping state law, was struck down in 2021 and has not been restored. Without ballot curing protections, thousands of votes are thrown out on technicalities every cycle. The result is a democracy that works better for some Mississippians than others.

What We're Fighting For

- Restoring Mississippi's ballot initiative process
- Early/no-excuse absentee voting
- Online voter registration
- Ballot curing protections

How It Connects

Democracy is only as strong as its access points. Every reform in this policy cluster removes a barrier between a Mississippian and their vote, and restoring the ballot initiative process returns power directly to the people, where it belongs.

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Youth Civic Power

The Problem

Mississippi's young people face some of the highest barriers to participation in the country. Without pre-registration pathways, accessible campus polling, or modern absentee options, college students and first-time voters are forced to navigate a system that wasn't built with them in mind. As a result, too many give up before they ever cast a first ballot.

What We're Fighting For

- High school voter pre-registration
- Campus polling locations
- Electronic absentee voting for college students

How It Connects

When young people can register before they turn 18, vote where they live and learn, and access their ballot without unnecessary barriers, they don't just participate once; they become lifelong civic actors. These reforms also reduce administrative strain on Election Day and build the durable democratic culture Mississippi needs to thrive.

Decarceration & Reentry

The Problem

Mississippi has one of the highest incarceration rates in the country, and the consequences fall hardest on Black Mississippians, low-income families, and young people. People are jailed for unpaid fines and fees they cannot afford. Pretrial detention separates families before anyone has been convicted of anything. And when people complete their sentences, Mississippi's felony disenfranchisement laws lock them out of the very democratic process that could help change their circumstances.

What We're Fighting For

- Automatic voting rights restoration for people convicted of disenfranchising crimes
- Ending incarceration for unpaid fines and fees
- Bail and pretrial reform
- Diversion and reentry infrastructure expansion
- Raising the age of juvenile jurisdiction to 18

How It Connects

Civic reintegration and public safety reinforce each other. Research consistently shows that restoring voting rights and supporting reentry reduces recidivism and strengthens communities. These reforms don't just affect individuals; they stabilize families and neighborhoods across the state.

Economic Security for Families

The Problem

Mississippi is the poorest state in the nation, and working families here carry a disproportionate share of the tax burden while receiving the least in return. Without a state Earned Income Tax Credit or fair workplace protections, low-wage workers, who are disproportionately women and people of color, are left without the economic floor they need to participate fully in civic and community life.

What We're Fighting For

- Refundable state Earned Income Tax Credit
- Paid family leave and fair-scheduling protections

How It Connects

Economic instability is a barrier to civic participation. When people are working multiple jobs with unpredictable schedules and no financial cushion, showing up to vote (let alone advocate, organize, or run for office) becomes a luxury. These reforms create the stability that makes full democratic participation possible.

Reproductive & Health Justice

The Problem

Mississippi has some of the worst maternal health outcomes in the nation, and Black women bear the brunt of that crisis. Additionally, hundreds of thousands of Mississippians remain uninsured because the state has refused to expand Medicaid.

What We're Fighting For

- Medicaid expansion
- Maintenance of postpartum Medicaid coverage
- Pregnancy-related health data privacy protections

How It Connects

You cannot build civic power in communities where people are sick, uninsured, and afraid. Healthcare access is the foundation on which everything else rests: workforce participation, family stability, and the ability to show up and engage.

Education Justice & Inclusive Democracy

The Problem

Across Mississippi, culturally relevant curricula and DEI initiatives are under legislative attack. When schools are stripped of programs that reflect the full history and diversity of their students, young people—particularly Black and brown students—receive the message that their experiences don't belong in public life. That message follows them out of the classroom and into the voting booth.

What We're Fighting For

- Protection of culturally relevant curriculum and DEI initiatives
- Youth civic access research and support

How It Connects

Civic readiness begins in the classroom. Students who see themselves reflected in what they learn are more likely to believe they have a stake in their democracy and become active participants in it. Inclusive education is an investment in the next generation of Mississippi's civic life..

Housing, Climate & Community Stability

The Problem

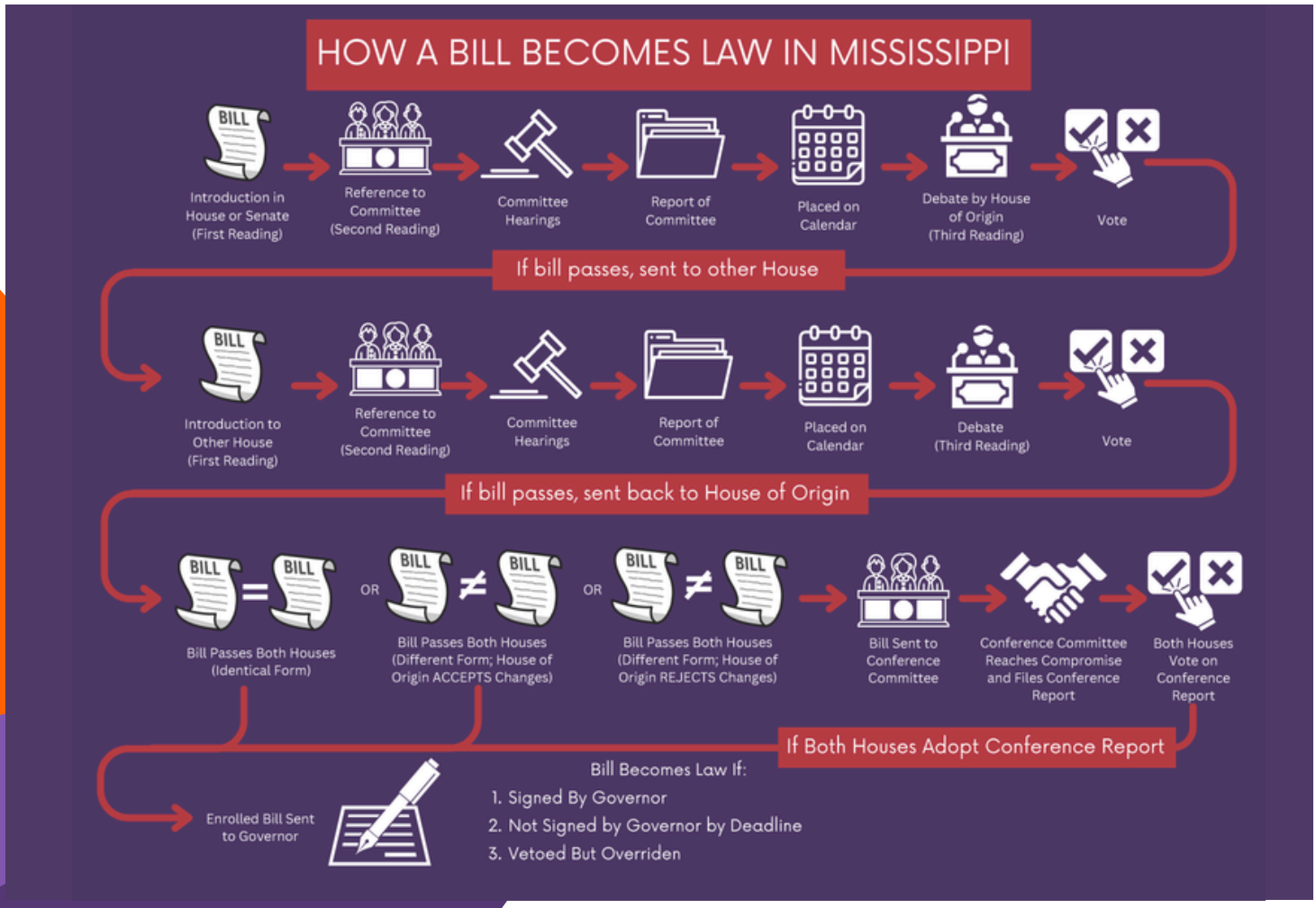
Too many Mississippians are one missed paycheck away from eviction, one storm away from losing water service, and one landlord's bias away from being denied a home. Rural communities and communities of color are hit hardest by failing water infrastructure, climate-related disasters, and a housing market with no meaningful tenant protections.

What We're Fighting For

- Water quality enforcement and accountability
- Disaster-related utility shutoff protections
- Source-of-income discrimination protections
- Eviction diversion and right-to-counsel models

How It Connects

Stable housing and reliable basic services are prerequisites for civic participation. When people are in survival mode—fighting an eviction, boiling water, or navigating displacement after a disaster—democratic engagement is out of reach. These reforms create the community stability that makes everything else possible.



2026 Session **Scorecard**

Electoral justice

The Problem

Mississippi continues to deny its residents a fair and accessible democracy. The state has no early voting, no online voter registration, and no meaningful ballot initiative process, leaving voters with few avenues to make their voices heard. Its extreme felony disenfranchisement laws permanently strip voting rights from people convicted of 23 categories of offenses, with restoration available only through a governor's pardon or an individual act of the legislature. Instead of expanding access, lawmakers moved in the opposite direction this session, passing new voter verification requirements that create additional barriers and disproportionately harm naturalized citizens, elderly residents, and people with unstable housing.

Proposed solution

Mississippi must take action to expand and protect the freedom to vote. Lawmakers should establish no-excuse early voting for at least 14–21 days before Election Day, with extended hours and multiple locations in every county. The state must restore a robust ballot initiative process that empowers voters to advance constitutional amendments. Voting rights should be automatically restored upon completion of a sentence, ensuring that returning citizens can fully participate in their communities. Finally, recently enacted voter verification requirements must be repealed or significantly rolled back to eliminate unnecessary and discriminatory barriers to the ballot.

2026 Session **Scorecard**

HB 355

Sponsor:
Rep. Scott
Description:
Early voting — 14 days before election through 5pm the Saturday before; registrar offices with extended hours during final week
Outcome:
Died in committee.
Our Stance:
Support

HB 1426

Sponsor:
Rep. Karriem
Description:
Early voting — 21 days before the election
Outcome:
Died in committee.
Our Stance:
Support

HC 13

Sponsor:
Rep. McCray
Description:
Early voting — 10-day window, extended hours during final week, allows alternate locations beyond registrar offices
Outcome:
Died in committee.
Our Stance:
Support

SB 2090

Sponsor:
Sen. Blackwell
Description:
Early voting — 1 week before election through Monday before election day; Saturday hours 8am–noon; registrar offices only, no additional locations
Outcome:
Died in committee.
Our Stance:
Monitor

2026 Session **Scorecard**

HB 732

Sponsor:
Rep. Anderson
Description:
People convicted of "voter fraud, bribery, theft, arson, obtaining money or goods under false pretense, perjury, forgery, embezzlement, bigamy, and any crime considered disenfranchising by AG (except murder and rape) will be allowed to vote once they complete requirements of their sentences (except probation)
SoS, registrar, and elections commissioners will receive regular reports of progress in sentence completion (except probation) and voting rights shall be automatically restored once sentence is complete (except probation portion)
Outcome:
Died in committee.
Our Stance:
Support

SCR 504

Sponsor:
Sen. Barnett
Description:
Amending sections 241 and 253 of the MS Constitution
By ⅔ vote, if a person is not allowed to vote based on the alteration to section 241 of the Constitution, the legislature can vote to restore the right to vote
People who lost their right to vote under section 241 or section 253 of the Mississippi Constitution (and due to nonviolent felonies) will have their right to vote restored after completing the terms of their sentence (which they delineate):

- Served all terms of their sentence
- Paid all fees, fines, and restitution
- The person has remained crime and arrest free for the 7 years following the full completion of any sentence

Outcome:
Died in committee.
Our Stance:
Oppose (unless it is the only option)

HC 42

Sponsor:
Rep. Sanford
Description:
Suffrage panel — constitutional amendment creating a panel for rights restoration for nonviolent crimes; panel structure is biased, includes broad "good cause" rejection clause
Outcome:
Died on calendar
Our Stance:
Oppose

2026 Session **Scorecard**

HCR 3

Sponsor:
Rep. Arnold
Description:
Ballot initiative restoration — updates congressional district language to prevent future court invalidation
Outcome:
Died in committee.
Our Stance:
Support

SCR 517

Sponsor:
Sen. Blackmon
Description:
Ballot initiative restoration — updates congressional district language to prevent future court invalidation
Outcome:
Died in committee.
Our Stance:
Support

SCR 518

Sponsor:
Sen. England
Description:
Ballot initiative — statutory changes only; bans use of initiative for any abortion-related legislation; financial restrictions on petitions; odd proportional district thresholds
Outcome:
Died on calendar
Our Stance:
Oppose

SB 2588

Sponsor:
Sen. England
Description:
Voter verification — expands mandatory SAVE database citizenship checks for voter registration; discrepancies trigger 30-day notice and potential removal from rolls
Outcome:
⚠ Signed into law
Our Stance:
Oppose

2026 Session **Scorecard**

Criminal justice & Reentry

The Problem

Mississippi's criminal justice system prioritizes punishment over people. The state has one of the highest incarceration rates in the country, driven in part by some of the most restrictive parole and expungement policies nationwide. People labeled as "habitual offenders" are categorically denied any chance at parole, no matter their rehabilitation or readiness to return home. Opportunities for a second chance are nearly nonexistent, with only six felonies eligible for expungement. Meanwhile, restitution centers operate in practice as modern-day debtor prisons, forcing incarcerated people to pay for their own confinement while earning as little as $0.10 an hour. Instead of advancing rehabilitation or reentry, lawmakers continue to expand mandatory minimum sentences—entrenching a system that keeps people locked up longer and communities destabilized.

Proposed solution

Mississippi must shift from a system rooted in punishment to one grounded in rehabilitation, dignity, and second chances. Lawmakers should expand parole eligibility to include people convicted as habitual or violent offenders who have demonstrated rehabilitation and readiness to return to their communities. Expungement must be broadened to include all misdemeanors, ensuring that a past conviction does not permanently block access to jobs, housing, and stability. Restitution centers should be transformed into true reentry centers that are focused on post-release support and equipped with wraparound services like mental health care, job training, and housing assistance. Finally, policymakers must reject any effort to expand mandatory minimum sentences for non-homicide offenses and instead invest in policies that reduce incarceration and support successful reentry.

2026 Session **Scorecard**

HB 455

Sponsor:
Rep. Nelson
Description:
Expungement — all non-traffic misdemeanors eligible for expungement
Outcome:
Died in committee.
Our Stance:
Support

HB 1344

Sponsor:
Rep. Denton
Description:
Expungement — misdemeanors expunged 7 years after sentence imposition or completion, whichever is later
Outcome:
Died in committee.
Our Stance:
Monitor

SB 2336

Sponsor:
Sen. Sparks
Description:
Expungement restriction — prevents expungement of prostitution and prostitution procurement, a nonviolent felony
Outcome:
Died in committee.
Our Stance:
Oppose

HB 131

Sponsor:
Rep. Johnson
Description:
Parole — eligibility for habitual offenders who have served at least 10 years of a 40-year or longer sentence
Outcome:
Died in committee.
Our Stance:
Support

2026 Session **Scorecard**

HB 1517

Sponsor:
Rep. Taylor & Nelson
Description:
Parole — expanded eligibility for violent offenses at 50% or 15 years (whichever is less); murder in the first degree after 25 years; murder in the second degree after 20 years
Outcome:
Died in committee.
Our Stance:
Support

SB 2776

Sponsor:
Sen. Wiggins
Description:
Parole restriction — mandates 2-year wait after parole denial before refiling; extends prison stays and increases MDOC costs
Outcome:
Died in committee.
Our Stance:
Oppose

HB 101

Sponsor:
Rep. Johnson
Description:
Restitution centers — requires DOC to convert restitution centers into post-release reentry centers
Outcome:
Died in committee.
Our Stance:
Support

SB 2205

Sponsor:
Sen. Simmons
Description:
Restitution centers — converts restitution centers statewide into post-release reentry centers
Outcome:
Died in committee.
Our Stance:
Support

2026 Session **Scorecard**

HB 525

Sponsor:
Rep. Remak
Description:
Mandatory minimums — sexual battery offenses; 5-year minimum for first offense, 10-year minimum for second offense
Outcome:
⚠ Signed into law
Our Stance:
Oppose

HB 528

Sponsor:
Rep. McKnight
Description:
Mandatory minimums — additional fines and prison time for fentanyl possession under 1/10th gram
Outcome:
Died on calendar
Our Stance:
Oppose

HB 1059

Sponsor:
Rep. Ford
Description:
Mandatory minimums — child abuse offenses; solidifies excessive correctional oversight over rehabilitative goals
Outcome:
Died in committee.
Our Stance:
Oppose

2026 Session **Scorecard**

Youth justice

The Problem

Mississippi's youth justice system fails to recognize what science and common sense make clear: children are not adults. The state continues to prosecute 17-year-olds as adults even though Mississippi law does not recognize full adulthood until age 21. Research shows that the frontal lobe, which governs decision-making and impulse control, is not fully developed until around age 25. Yet young people are routinely placed in adult correctional facilities, where they are exposed to adult criminal networks, denied age-appropriate support, and pushed further from stability, all of which dramatically increases the likelihood of reoffending. At the same time, youth detention facilities across the state are under-resourced and ill-equipped to meet young people's needs, with chronic staffing shortages, inadequate mental health services, and limited access to meaningful education. Instead of supporting growth and rehabilitation, the system too often sets young people up to fail.

Proposed solution

Mississippi must build a youth justice system that reflects both science and fairness. Lawmakers should raise the age of juvenile jurisdiction to at least 18, with a presumption that all youth are served in the juvenile system rather than pushed into adult court. The state must invest in robust, rehabilitative programming within youth facilities—including comprehensive mental health care, quality educational opportunities, and strong reentry support that helps young people successfully transition back into their communities. Finally, policymakers must reject any legislation that increases penalties for minors or expands the pipeline from juvenile to adult court, and instead commit to policies that prioritize development, accountability, and long-term success.

2026 Session **Scorecard**

SB 2710

Sponsor:
Sen. Fillingane
Description:
Juvenile jurisdiction — children who carry firearms during felonies automatically tried in adult circuit court
Outcome:
⚠ Signed into law
Our Stance:
Oppose

HB 1678

Sponsor:
Rep. Nelson
Description:
Youth coordination task force — juvenile justice and behavioral health collaboration to create rehabilitation and recidivism prevention programs
Outcome:
Died in committee.
Our Stance:
Support

SB 2226

Sponsor:
Sen. Simmons
Description:
Juvenile jurisdiction — raises age for circuit court removal from 13 to 16; requires three prior felonies and two prior state training program placements for transfer
Outcome:
Died in committee.
Our Stance:
Support

2026 Session **Scorecard**

Reproductive & Health Justice

The Problem

Mississippi is in the midst of a reproductive and health care crisis, and policymakers continue to make it worse. The state has some of the highest maternal and infant mortality rates in the nation, outcomes driven in large part by a near-total abortion ban originally enacted in 2007 and triggered into effect after the fall of Roe v. Wade in 2022. Instead of addressing these alarming disparities, state leaders have doubled down on policies that restrict care and endanger lives.

Mississippi has also refused to expand Medicaid, leaving nearly 200,000 residents without health coverage and forfeiting roughly $1 billion in federal funding each year. In the 2026 legislative session, lawmakers introduced additional measures to further criminalize abortion access, deepening fear and limiting access to essential healthcare.

Proposed solution

Mississippi must take action to protect the health, dignity, and autonomy of its residents. Lawmakers should expand Medicaid to cover all individuals up to 133% of the federal poverty level, closing the coverage gap and bringing critical resources into the state. Postpartum Medicaid coverage must be made permanent to ensure ongoing care for new parents during a vulnerable period. The state should enact strong protections for health data privacy to safeguard pregnant people from surveillance and criminalization. Policymakers must oppose any legislation that further restricts reproductive healthcare or imposes criminal penalties related to abortion care. Finally, Mississippi should restore power to the people by placing abortion access on the ballot, allowing voters to directly decide the future of reproductive rights in the state.

2026 Session **Scorecard**

HB 224

Sponsor:
Rep. Scott
Description:
Medicaid expansion — coverage for all residents with incomes up to 133% of the federal poverty level
Outcome:
Died in committee
Our Stance:
Support

HB 226

Sponsor:
Rep. Scott
Description:
Medicaid expansion — full expansion under the Affordable Care Act
Outcome:
Died in committee.
Our Stance:
Support

HB 50

Sponsor:
Rep. Johnson
Description:
Medicaid work reporting — study on the impact of work reporting requirements on coverage gaps and eligibility
Outcome:
Died in committee.
Our Stance:
Support

HB 1613

Sponsor:
Rep. Horan
Description:
Abortion drug ban — criminalizes the use, sell, manufacture, or purchase of abortion drugs. A person convicted of any of these would have to serve anywhere from 1-10 years in prison. AG has the right to bring forth a civil case and recover civil penalties and costs.
Outcome:
⚠ Signed into law.
Our Stance:
Oppose

2026 Session **Scorecard**

HB 850

Sponsor:
Rep. Banks
Description:
Abortion ban repeal — repeals statutory abortion ban and puts access to abortion on the November ballot for Mississippians to decide
Outcome:
Died in committee
Our Stance:
Support

2026 Session **Scorecard**

Economic Justice

The Problem

Mississippi faces some of the highest poverty rates in the country, alongside persistent income inequality and limited financial supports for working families. While the federal Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) provides meaningful relief, the absence of a state-level refundable EITC leaves many low-income workers without the full benefit of this proven anti-poverty tool. As a result, families miss critical opportunities to build financial stability, cover basic needs, and invest in long-term economic mobility.

At the same time, many Mississippi workers, particularly those in low-wage, hourly, and service-sector jobs, lack access to paid family leave and predictable work schedules. Without paid leave, workers are often forced to choose between their income and their health or caregiving responsibilities. Unpredictable scheduling further destabilizes household finances, disrupts childcare arrangements, and contributes to economic insecurity. These gaps disproportionately impact working-class families, single parents, and communities already facing structural barriers to opportunity.

Proposed solution

Mississippi should adopt policies that strengthen financial stability and expand economic opportunity for working families. Establishing a refundable state Earned Income Tax Credit would provide direct financial relief to low-income households and stimulate local economies. Ensuring the credit is refundable is critical to reaching families with the greatest need.

In addition, policymakers should build on recent progress by expanding paid family leave beyond state employees and advancing protections for fair and predictable scheduling. These policies would improve workforce retention, support public health, and promote economic stability for families across the state.

To support these efforts, continued investment in research, public education, and coalition-building is essential. Providing lawmakers and communities with clear data on economic impact, workforce outcomes, and family well-being can help advance policies that reduce poverty and create more equitable access to opportunity

2026 Session **Scorecard**

SB 2860

Sponsor:
Sen. Blackmon
Description:
EITC – Creates a refundable state Earned Income Tax Credit that provides a percentage of the federal EITC as a state income tax credit, ensuring low-income taxpayers receive a direct refund even if the credit exceeds their tax liability.
Outcome:
Died in committee
Our Stance:
Support

HB 1000

Sponsor:
Reps. Butler-Washington and James-Jones
Description:
Paid family and medical leave — Establishes the Mississippi Paid Family and Medical Leave Act, creating a state-administered insurance program that provides paid leave benefits to eligible workers for family, medical, and caregiving needs, with protections for job security and a dedicated state fund
Outcome:
Died in committee.
Our Stance:
Support

HB 1450

Sponsor:
Reps. Thompson and Nelson
Description:
Affordable child care — Establishes the Mississippi Affordable Child Care Act, redirecting and reallocating federal TANF funds to expand the state's Child Care Payment Program and increase subsidies for eligible low-income families through the Child Care and Development Fund.
Outcome:
Died in committee.
Our Stance:
Support

HB 527

Sponsor:
Rep. Karriem
Description:
Minimum wage — Establishes the Mississippi Minimum Wage Act, setting the state minimum wage at $15 per hour.
Outcome:
Died in committee.
Our Stance:
Support

2026 Session **Scorecard**

Education Justice & Inclusive Democracy

The Problem

Mississippi's public education system faces ongoing legislative threats that undermine equity, inclusion, and access. Efforts to restrict diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives risk creating a chilling effect in classrooms across the state. Policies like House Bill 1193 from the 2023 legislative session, which prohibited the teaching of so-called "divisive concepts," have constrained educators' ability to provide students with a full and accurate understanding of history and society. The potential reintroduction of similar legislation continues to threaten inclusive learning environments and deepen disparities in educational outcomes.

At the same time, the expansion of school choice policies, including voucher-style proposals, poses an additional risk to public education. These measures divert resources from already underfunded public schools while lacking consistent accountability and oversight. Without adequate safeguards, such policies can exacerbate inequities, particularly for students in rural communities and under-resourced districts.

Together, these trends reflect a broader shift away from investment in public education and toward policies that fragment the system, limit access to inclusive curriculum, and weaken community-centered schools.

Proposed solution

Mississippi must prioritize policies that protect and strengthen public education as a foundation for equitable opportunity. Lawmakers should reject efforts to restrict DEI initiatives and culturally relevant curriculum, ensuring that educators can teach inclusive, accurate, and community-responsive content without fear of penalty.

In addition, the state should shift away from expanding voucher and school choice programs and instead invest in public schools, including funding equity, teacher support, and student resources. Strengthening accountability and transparency in any alternative education programs is essential to prevent the diversion of public funds without clear outcomes.

A proactive and defensive strategy is critical to this work. Monitoring and responding to legislation that mirrors past restrictions—such as HB 1193—in future sessions will be key, alongside supporting legal and advocacy efforts to challenge harmful policies. Partnering with educators, legal experts, and community organizations can help ensure that students retain access to inclusive curriculum and that public schools remain responsive to the communities they serve.

Finally, expanding youth civic access and civic education programming will help equip students with the knowledge and tools to engage in democratic processes, strengthening both educational and civic outcomes across the state.

2026 Session **Scorecard**

HB 2

Sponsor:
Reps. White & Owens
Description:
School choice — Establishes the Mississippi Education Freedom Act, expanding school choice by creating publicly funded education scholarship accounts that allow parents to use state education dollars for private school tuition, homeschooling expenses, and other approved educational services.
Outcome:
Died in committee
Our Stance:
Oppose

SB 2002

Sponsor:
Sen. DeBar
Description:
Public to public school choice — Removes the requirement for a student's home school district to approve transfers to another district.
Outcome:
Died in committee.
Our Stance:
Oppose

HB 1659

Sponsor:
Rep. Hood
Description:
DEI — Brings forward existing Mississippi code regulating diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies in K–12 schools and higher education institutions for potential amendment
Outcome:
Died in committee.
Our Stance:
Monitor

HB 428

Sponsor:
Rep. Karriem
Description:
DEI — Requires the State Board of Education to develop and implement African American Studies and racial diversity courses for grades 9–12.
Outcome:
Died in committee.
Our Stance:
Support

2026 Session **Scorecard**

Housing, climate & community stability

The Problem

Mississippi lacks basic legal and policy protections that ensure housing stability and community safety for renters and vulnerable households. Tenants facing eviction have no statewide right to counsel, leaving low-income families at a severe disadvantage in court and increasing the likelihood of avoidable displacement. At the same time, Mississippi does not prohibit source-of-income discrimination, allowing landlords to deny housing to individuals and families using housing vouchers or public assistance. These gaps disproportionately harm elderly residents, people with disabilities, and working families already facing economic insecurity.

These housing instability challenges are compounded by environmental and infrastructure failures that threaten community health and safety. In Jackson, decades of underinvestment in water infrastructure have resulted in repeated system failures, including boil-water notices, contamination risks, and prolonged shutoffs, most starkly illustrated by the 2022 collapse of the O.B. Curtis Water Treatment Plant, which left over 150,000 residents without safe drinking water. These failures disproportionately impact Black and low-income communities and reflect long-standing environmental injustice and infrastructure neglect.

Finally, Mississippi lacks statewide protections to prevent utility shutoffs during extreme weather or declared emergencies. As climate-related events intensify, households are increasingly at risk of losing access to water, electricity, or heat during conditions where those services are most essential for health and survival. Together, these gaps in housing, infrastructure, and utility protections deepen inequality and leave communities vulnerable to preventable harm.

2026 Session **Scorecard**

Housing, climate & community stability

Proposed solution

Mississippi should adopt a coordinated set of policies that strengthen housing stability, protect tenants, and ensure basic utility access as a foundation for community well-being. Establishing a statewide right-to-counsel for tenants facing eviction, paired with eviction diversion and mediation programs, would reduce preventable displacement and connect households to resources before court-ordered housing loss occurs.

The state should also prohibit source-of-income discrimination to ensure that housing vouchers and public assistance are treated as valid forms of income in rental decisions, expanding access to safe and affordable housing for low-income families.

In addition, Mississippi must invest in infrastructure accountability and water system reliability, particularly in communities like Jackson that have experienced long-term underinvestment and repeated system failures. Supporting community-based organizations in documenting water quality issues, tracking regulatory compliance, and elevating community input is critical to ensuring that public investments address the needs of those most affected.

Finally, the state should adopt enforceable protections against utility shutoffs during extreme weather and emergency declarations. These protections are essential to safeguarding public health and ensuring that households maintain access to water, electricity, and heat during climate-related crises.

Together, these policies form a framework for housing and climate stability that prioritizes prevention, equity, and long-term community resilience.

2026 Session **Scorecard**

SB 2421

Sponsor:
Sen. Hickman
Description:
Fair housing — Establishes the Mississippi Fair Housing Act, prohibiting discrimination in housing and real estate transactions
Outcome:
Died in committee
Our Stance:
Support

HB 839

Sponsor:
Rep. Mangold
Description:
Utility shutoffs — Limits the Governor's emergency authority over utility shutoffs by shifting decision-making power to local governing authorities, allowing them to determine whether and under what conditions to suspend water, electric, sewer, and natural gas disconnections during emergencies..
Outcome:
Died in committee.
Our Stance:
Monitor

HB 1677

Sponsor:
Rep. Yates
Description:
Jackson water system — Creates the Metro Jackson Water Authority as a public benefit corporation to assume long-term governance, management, and maintenance of Jackson's water and wastewater systems, establishing a new regional authority structure
Outcome:
Signed into law
Our Stance:
Oppose

2026 Session **Scorecard**

Youth Civic Power

The Problem

Mississippi's youngest eligible voters face some of the highest structural barriers to participation in the country. College students—one of the state's largest voting-age populations—often lack convenient access to polling locations, particularly on or near campus. While some universities host precincts, many students must travel long distances or navigate limited transportation options to vote, creating disproportionate burdens for Black, rural, and first-generation students.

These challenges are compounded by the absence of expanded voting access tools. Mississippi does not offer early voting, electronic absentee ballot return for in-state voters, or streamlined digital systems for voter engagement. Although secure electronic ballot transmission is used for military and overseas voters in many states, and existing state cybersecurity infrastructure could support expanded access, these tools are not available to most students.

Additionally, Mississippi does not allow high school voter preregistration, limiting early civic engagement opportunities for young people who are otherwise eligible or approaching eligibility. Without these systems in place, many young voters encounter unnecessary administrative and logistical barriers at the moment they first become eligible to participate in elections.

2026 Session **Scorecard**

Youth Civic Power

Proposed solution

Mississippi should modernize and expand youth voting access through a set of complementary reforms that reduce logistical barriers and strengthen early civic engagement.

First, the state should require campus-based polling locations at all public and private four-year postsecondary institutions, ensuring that students have accessible, on-site options for in-person voting. This builds on existing law that already permits the use of state-owned or leased facilities as polling places.

Second, Mississippi should establish a secure electronic absentee ballot portal for enrolled college students, allowing them to request and return absentee ballots through verified digital systems. This would reduce barriers for students who are geographically displaced or unable to access polling locations due to academic or work obligations.

Finally, the state should adopt a high school voter preregistration system that allows eligible students under 18 to complete voter registration in advance, automatically activating upon eligibility. This approach supports civic habit formation, reduces administrative barriers at age 18, and increases long-term voter participation.

In support of these goals, we will focus on research, education, and coalition-building. This includes analyzing turnout barriers for young voters, developing educational materials for students and schools, and supporting partners advancing legislative and administrative reforms that expand youth civic access.

2026 Session **Scorecard**

SB 2047

Sponsor:
Sen. Blount
Description:
Electronic absentee ballots — Authorizes the Secretary of State to create a secure electronic absentee ballot system allowing eligible Mississippi college students to apply for absentee ballots online and receive them through a verified digital process, with expanded access for students whose studies require them to be away from their voting residence.
Outcome:
Died in committee
Our Stance:
Support

HB 380

Sponsor:
Rep. Osborne
Description:
Civic education — Establishes the Mississippi "VOTE Act" pilot program to provide voter registration information to high school seniors (12th grade) in public schools
Outcome:
Died in committee.
Our Stance:
Support

Spotlight Stories: Defending & Expanding Democracy in 2026

The 2026 legislative session highlighted both the fragility and resilience of democracy in Mississippi. While several proposals aimed to expand access to the ballot and strengthen civic participation, many of the most consequential outcomes came through defensive advocacy: stopping or reshaping legislation that would have restricted direct democracy, narrowed voting access, or weakened rights restoration.

At the same time, longstanding priorities such as early voting continued to stall, despite overwhelming public support. These spotlight stories highlight three key moments from the session: the passage of the SHIELD Act (SB 2588), defensive efforts to protect ballot initiative and rights restoration from restrictive reforms, and the continued absence of early voting progress. Together, they reflect both urgent threats to access and the ongoing work required to expand democratic participation in Mississippi.

Spotlight: **The SHIELD Act (SB 2588)**

The Story

The SHIELD Act (SB 2588), incorporating HB 1253 language, was passed by the Legislature and signed into law by the Governor. The law takes effect in July 2026 and significantly expands voter documentation and verification requirements for Mississippi voters.

Framed as a measure to prevent non-citizen voting, the SHIELD Act addresses a problem that does not exist in Mississippi elections. Instead, it introduces new barriers that will make it more difficult for eligible U.S. citizens to register and remain registered to vote.

The law expands citizenship verification requirements and increases reliance on the federal SAVE database. Individuals who register without a driver's license number may be flagged for additional review, and some voters may be required to provide proof of citizenship such as a birth certificate or passport, even when the federal database confirms eligibility.

Community Impact

The SHIELD Act will disproportionately impact voters who already face barriers to accessing documentation.

Most Mississippians do not have a passport, and many lack easy access to a birth certificate, which may require travel or long processing times to obtain. These requirements also impose financial costs and logistical burdens that fall hardest on rural residents, married women with name changes, young voters, and voters with disabilities.

The law also requires annual voter roll checks using the federal SAVE database, a system that has produced errors in other states and incorrectly flagged eligible citizens. This increases the risk of wrongful flagging, administrative burden on counties, and unnecessary voter confusion. It also expands reliance on federal data systems that may retain voter information for years.

Rather than improving election integrity, the SHIELD Act risks increasing administrative complexity and creating new barriers for eligible voters across Mississippi.

Mississippi Votes' Role

MSV tracked the bill throughout the legislative process, analyzed its provisions, and elevated concerns about its impact on eligible voters. Working with coalition partners, MSV helped clarify how the SHIELD Act would function in practice and who would be most affected by its expanded documentation requirements.

MSV also engaged lawmakers and stakeholders to highlight risks associated with increased reliance on the SAVE database and shifting verification burdens onto voters.

What Comes Next

As implementation begins in July 2026, MSV's work will focus on ensuring voters and election officials are prepared for the new requirements.

This includes community education to help voters understand what documentation may be required and how to access it, as well as circuit clerk education and support to ensure consistent and accurate implementation across counties.

MSV will also assist impacted community members in navigating documentation challenges, working to reduce barriers and prevent eligible voters from being unnecessarily excluded from the registration process.

While the SHIELD Act is now law, its impact will depend heavily on implementation, and MSV will remain engaged to protect access at every stage.

Spotlight: **Defensive Wins — Protecting Ballot Initiative & Rights Restoration**

The Story

In a session defined by high-stakes policy fights, some of the most important victories were the ones that prevented harmful proposals from becoming law. Efforts to restore Mississippi's ballot initiative process and expand voting rights for returning citizens were framed as progress. In reality, they risked entrenching deeply flawed systems.

After the Mississippi Supreme Court invalidated the state's ballot initiative process in 2021, Mississippians have been left without any direct way to propose constitutional amendments. This session, lawmakers introduced SC 518 as a "restoration." In practice, the bill would have created a limited statutory initiative process while continuing to deny voters the power to amend their own constitution.

At the same time, HC 42 proposed embedding a suffrage restoration panel into the state constitution. While presented as a solution, the bill offered no clear standards or safeguards—locking in a discretionary, bureaucratic system that falls far short of meaningful rights restoration.

Community Impact

Both proposals would have had lasting consequences for democratic participation in Mississippi.

SC 518 would have created a weakened, "in name only" version of direct democracy—restricting what issues voters could address, raising barriers to qualification, and allowing the Legislature to compete with or override citizen-led initiatives. Rather than restoring power to the people, it would have permanently limited it.

HC 42 would have turned voting rights restoration into a case-by-case privilege instead of a guaranteed right. A panel-based system risks inconsistent decisions, delays, and unnecessary administrative burdens—requiring individuals to navigate a complex process to regain a fundamental right. Embedding this model in the constitution would make it harder to implement more effective, scalable solutions in the future.

Mississippi Votes' Role

MSV worked in close partnership with coalition allies to ensure these proposals were fully understood and effectively challenged. By breaking down complex policy language, elevating community impact, and reframing the narrative, MSV helped shift the conversation from surface-level reform to long-term consequences.

Through coordinated advocacy, legislative engagement, and public education, MSV contributed to a unified effort to stop policies that would have undermined direct democracy and meaningful rights restoration.

What Comes Next

These outcomes make clear that Mississippi cannot afford "in name only" reform. The state still lacks a functional ballot initiative process, and thousands of residents remain disenfranchised.

Real progress requires restoring a full constitutional ballot initiative process and establishing automatic voting rights restoration upon completion of a sentence. Anything less risks preserving the same barriers under a different name.

Spotlight: **Early Voting — A Missed Opportunity**

The Story

Mississippi once again failed to advance early voting legislation during the 2026 session. Although multiple bills were introduced that would have created a framework for early voting, none made it out of committee.
Proposals varied widely in scope. The most expansive bills, including HB 1426 and SB 2213, would have established early voting periods of 21 and 20 days, respectively. Other proposals clustered in the 10–15 day range, reflecting a growing recognition of the need for expanded access. However, some bills offered only a single week of early voting and included restrictive provisions on polling locations, potentially limiting their effectiveness. The lack of alignment around a clear, unified model—and the absence of political will—meant that early voting once again stalled before reaching meaningful consideration.

Community Impact

The absence of early voting continues to place unnecessary burdens on Mississippi voters. Without expanded voting windows, residents are forced to navigate rigid Election Day schedules, which disproportionately impacts working people, caregivers, rural voters, and those with limited transportation. Long lines, scheduling conflicts, and geographic barriers remain persistent challenges.
While some proposals aimed to expand access, others introduced limitations that would have restricted participation in practice, such as limiting additional polling locations. These approaches risk replicating existing barriers rather than removing them.
Failing to pass early voting legislation means Mississippi remains one of the few states without this basic access point, leaving voters with fewer opportunities to participate in the democratic process.

Mississippi Votes' Role

MSV supported efforts to advance meaningful early voting legislation while helping to clarify what effective policy must include. During the session, MSV hosted an Early Voting Advocacy Day at the Capitol, creating space for direct engagement with lawmakers and elevating the urgency of expanding access to the ballot. Through conversations with legislators and community members, as well as broader advocacy and education efforts, MSV emphasized the importance of not just passing any early voting bill, but advancing a model that truly expands access. This included highlighting the shortcomings of overly restrictive proposals and encouraging alignment around a framework that is both practical and impactful.

What Comes Next

The path forward requires coordination and clarity. A successful early voting framework should center on a consistent, accessible model. That might look like a two-week early voting period ending the Saturday before Election Day, with extended hours and flexibility to add polling locations where needed.
Building bipartisan alignment around a clear standard will be critical to moving legislation forward. Without it, fragmented proposals will continue to languish.
Early voting remains one of the most achievable and widely supported reforms available to Mississippi. The missed opportunity of this session underscores the urgency of turning momentum into action in the sessions ahead.

Rights Restoration Deep Dive

The Landscape

Mississippi has one of the most restrictive voting rights restoration systems in the country. Completing a sentence does not automatically restore the right to vote, leaving tens of thousands of residents locked out of the democratic process for life.

This system is rooted in the 1890 Mississippi Constitution, which was explicitly designed to suppress Black political power. Today, that legacy persists. Approximately 70,000 Mississippians are disenfranchised, and a disproportionate number are Black, reflecting the enduring impact of policies built on exclusion.

Importantly, not all felony convictions result in disenfranchisement. Only 23 specific offenses trigger the loss of voting rights, and only convictions in Mississippi state court apply. Yet confusion about eligibility remains widespread, preventing many eligible individuals from participating.

How the Process Works

Mississippi offers no automatic path to voting rights restoration. Instead, individuals must navigate one of two limited and burdensome pathways:

Legislative Restoration

An individual must secure a legislator to sponsor a suffrage bill on their behalf. The bill must pass both chambers of the Legislature with a two-thirds majority and be approved by the Governor. This process is time-intensive, highly individualized, and difficult to access without direct connections or knowledge of the system.

Executive Restoration

Individuals may also seek restoration through the Governor, typically by working through the Department of Corrections. This pathway is rarely used and depends entirely on executive discretion, with no guaranteed timeline or outcome.

Where the System Fails

While pathways technically exist, they are not designed to restore rights at scale. The legislative process requires significant time, access, and political support, which are resources most impacted individuals do not have. As a result, only a handful of people regain their voting rights each year. In some recent sessions, suffrage bills were passed.

At the same time, the state provides little clarity about who is eligible or how the process works. The absence of clear, accessible information creates confusion and misinformation, leaving many eligible voters disenfranchised in practice, even when they may qualify for restoration.

Together, these barriers create a system where rights are restored inconsistently, selectively, and far too rarely.

Rights Restoration Deep Dive

In Action: **Second Chances Day at the Capitol**

In response to these barriers, MSV brought directly impacted Mississippians into the heart of the legislative process through Second Chances Day at the Capitol.
Participants met directly with lawmakers, shared their experiences navigating disenfranchisement, and called for a system that restores rights fully and fairly. The day centered lived experience as a tool for advocacy, with the goal of shifting the conversation from abstract policy to real people and real impact.
Participants also gained practical tools to engage in the legislative process, from understanding how suffrage bills move to learning how to advocate for their own restoration and broader reform.

Media coverage captured both the urgency and momentum of the day, highlighting how advocates and returning citizens are continuing to push lawmakers toward meaningful change and away from inaction.







The Path Forward

Mississippi's current system entrenches inequity. Meaningful reform requires a shift from discretionary, case-by-case restoration to systems that operate fairly and automatically. MSV supports a policy framework that prioritizes:

- Automatic restoration of voting rights upon completion of a sentence
- Constitutional reform to remove disenfranchising provisions entirely
- Transparency measures and community education to ensure voters understand their eligibility

At the same time, MSV opposes proposals that create additional layers of bureaucracy—such as discretionary panels—that replicate the same barriers under a different structure. Voting is a fundamental right. Mississippi has the opportunity to build a system that reflects that.

2026 Session **Committee Scorecard**

JUDICIARY B (HOUSE)

Summary:
House Judiciary B played a mixed but ultimately concerning role this session. While the committee moved a significant share of individual suffrage bills to the floor, it also advanced a range of harmful legislation—including expanded mandatory minimums, limits on expungement, youth transfer to adult court, and proposals expanding capital punishment. Some bipartisan openings emerged around parole and reentry reform, but these efforts failed to advance. Overall, the committee demonstrated willingness to act on individual cases while continuing to support policies that expand incarceration and restrict second chances.

Grade:
C-

JUDICIARY B (SENATE)

Summary:
Senate Judiciary B advanced suffrage bills at a similar rate to its House counterpart but otherwise moved a slate of legislation that was largely punitive and restrictive. Key measures included expanded mandatory minimums, expungement limitations, youth transfer to adult court, and capital punishment expansion. The committee showed limited engagement with reforms that would reduce incarceration or expand reentry opportunities.

Grade:
D

PUBLIC HEALTH & WELFARE (SENATE)

Summary:
The Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee focused primarily on licensing and administrative matters rather than structural reform. While most legislation was neutral, a few positive efforts emerged—particularly around childcare funding and preserving rural hospital access. However, broader systemic improvements to healthcare access were limited.

Grade:
B-

2026 Session **Committee Scorecard**

PUBLIC HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES (HOUSE)

Summary:
The House committee focused largely on licensing and administrative issues. While a small number of constructive proposals were introduced, including efforts to modernize health data systems, overall impact on expanding healthcare access or addressing systemic inequities was limited.

Grade:
B-

ELECTIONS (SENATE)

Summary:
The Senate Elections Committee was a central barrier to pro-voter reform this session. While early voting, rights restoration, and ballot initiative proposals were introduced, none advanced out of committee. Instead, the committee moved restrictive legislation, including the SHIELD Act and limitations on absentee voting. The committee consistently prioritized restrictive measures over access-expanding reforms.

Grade:
F

APPORTIONMENT & ELECTIONS (HOUSE)

Summary:
The House Apportionment and Elections Committee failed to advance nearly all major pro-democracy legislation, including early voting, online voter registration, rights restoration, and state-level voting rights protections. In contrast, restrictive measures—including the SHIELD Act and limitations on absentee voting—moved forward. One narrow positive measure emerged but did not advance. Overall, the committee served as a bottleneck for voter access.

Grade:
F

2026 Session **Committee Scorecard**

MEDICAID (HOUSE)

Summary:
The House Medicaid Committee avoided harmful policy but failed to advance transformative legislation. Multiple Medicaid expansion and oversight bills were not taken up, despite their potential to significantly expand healthcare access. Limited progress was made, with one youth-focused care bill advancing. The committee's inaction on expansion represents a missed opportunity with significant consequences.

Grade:
C

MEDICAID (SENATE)

Summary:
The Senate Medicaid Committee similarly avoided harmful legislation but did not advance meaningful expansion efforts. Key Medicaid expansion proposals were not considered, despite clear need. Some targeted improvements to youth healthcare moved forward, but broader systemic reform was not prioritized.

Grade:
C

CORRECTIONS (HOUSE)

Summary:
The House Corrections Committee was one of the more constructive committees this session. Several bills improving healthcare access for incarcerated individuals and reducing financial burdens on those under supervision advanced. However, key reentry and parole reforms were not taken up, limiting broader impact. The committee showed potential for bipartisan progress, particularly in health-related areas.

Grade:
B

2026 Session **Committee Scorecard**

CORRECTIONS (SENATE)

Summary:
The Senate Corrections Committee advanced a number of positive measures, including reducing financial burdens on individuals on probation and parole and improving healthcare access. However, like the House, it did not advance more comprehensive reentry and parole reforms. The committee demonstrated a generally constructive approach, with room for deeper structural reform.

Grade:
B

EDUCATION (HOUSE)

Summary:
The House Education Committee advanced a slate of legislation that reflected a broader push toward privatization and "school choice," while failing to meaningfully invest in or strengthen public education systems. High-profile efforts like the Mississippi Education Freedom Act (HB 2) signaled a clear prioritization of diverting public resources toward alternative education pathways rather than addressing systemic inequities in public schools.
While a number of bills touched on teacher pay, early learning expansion, student health, and workforce development, most failed to advance. At the same time, several measures raised concerns around equity and access, including proposals expanding charter authorization, introducing new residency verification barriers, and weakening professional standards in student support services.
Only a small number of bills ultimately became law, with limited impact on addressing core issues like underfunding, educational disparities, and student support systems. Overall, the committee's work did little to expand opportunity or remove barriers for students—particularly those in under-resourced communities—and instead reflected a shift toward policies that risk further fragmentation of the public education system.

Grade:
F

2026 Session **Committee Scorecard**

UNIVERSITIES & COLLEGES (HOUSE)

Summary:
The House Universities and Colleges Committee focused primarily on institutional operations, workforce alignment, and administrative flexibility. Key measures included reauthorizing research partnerships through the SMART Business Act, modifying eligibility requirements for financial aid, and authorizing the sale or lease of public higher education land. These efforts reflect a priority on aligning higher education with economic development goals and institutional management needs.
However, proposals aimed at expanding direct student support—such as scholarships for families of fallen first responders and broader workforce upskilling initiatives—failed to advance. Additionally, limited attention was given to college affordability, access for underserved students, or closing attainment gaps. While some workforce-oriented policies moved forward, the committee's overall impact on improving equitable access to higher education was modest.

Grade:
C

ECONOMIC & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT (SENATE)

Summary:
The Senate Economic and Workforce Development Committee advanced a limited set of workforce-related policies, with its most significant action being the creation of a statewide apprenticeship framework. This measure reflects a continued emphasis on strengthening workforce pipelines and aligning training opportunities with industry needs.
However, other proposals that could have expanded access to workforce participation—including investments in construction training and a childcare assistance partnership program—failed to advance. Additional measures focused on administrative oversight and regulatory adjustments, with minimal impact on expanding economic opportunity. Overall, the committee's work demonstrated a narrow focus on workforce development without addressing key barriers that prevent many individuals from participating in and benefiting from these programs. Efforts to support economic mobility through more comprehensive or equity-focused strategies were limited.

Grade:
C

2026 Session **Committee Scorecard**

EDUCATION (SENATE)

Summary:

The Senate Education Committee demonstrated a consistent commitment to preserving and supporting the public education system this session. Most notably, the committee declined to advance major school choice legislation, serving as a key barrier to policies that would have redirected resources away from traditional public schools. It also advanced targeted measures, including clarifying funding allocations within the student funding formula, supporting career and technical education programs, and limiting charter school access to unused public school facilities.

While the committee moved a small number of constructive policies, many proposals related to teacher pay, student support, and broader system improvements did not advance. At the same time, some enacted measures—such as changes to counselor oversight requirements—raised concerns about weakening professional standards. Despite these limitations, the committee's overall approach reflected a clear prioritization of strengthening public education and maintaining system stability over pursuing privatization or fragmentation.

Grade:

B+

UNIVERSITIES & COLLEGES (SENATE)

Summary:

The Senate Universities and Colleges Committee advanced a mix of workforce-aligned and institutional governance measures, with several bills successfully enacted. Key actions included the creation of a statewide career and technical education employability program, changes to financial aid eligibility requirements, and the repeal of the Education Achievement Council. The committee also approved measures supporting institutional partnerships and administrative flexibility, including agreements between K-12 districts and higher education institutions and expanded authority over public land use.

While the committee demonstrated greater legislative movement than its House counterpart, its focus remained largely on system-level changes rather than direct student support. Proposals that would have expanded access failed to advance. Additionally, changes to financial aid eligibility were not paired with broader investments in student readiness or support. As a result, the committee's work prioritized alignment with workforce needs and institutional efficiency over improving affordability and equitable access to higher education.

Grade:

C

Legislator of the Year: Representative Fabian Nelson

Representative Fabian Nelson has emerged as a leading voice for equity, access, and justice in the Mississippi Legislature. Representing House District 66, Nelson has consistently used his platform to advocate for policies that expand opportunity and protect the rights of historically marginalized communities.

During the 2026 legislative session, Representative Nelson demonstrated exceptional leadership on voting rights, authoring 22 suffrage bills aimed at restoring the right to vote to Mississippians who have completed their sentences. In a state with one of the most restrictive disenfranchisement systems in the country, this level of commitment represents a significant and sustained effort to challenge structural barriers to civic participation.



REP. FABIAN NELSON
DISTRICT 66

His work led directly to the restoration of voting rights for two individuals this session. While the number may seem small, each restoration reflects the reality of Mississippi's burdensome and highly individualized process and underscores the persistence required to navigate it. Representative Nelson's efforts not only changed outcomes for those individuals, but also continued to shine a light on the urgent need for systemic reform.

Beyond individual restorations, Nelson has been a consistent advocate for broader changes to the state's rights restoration system, including proposing legislation to establish automatic restoration of voting rights upon completion of all sentencing requirements for disenfranchising offenses. This approach would replace the current discretionary process with a clear, equitable standard, ensuring that returning citizens can fully participate in civic life without unnecessary barriers.
Representative Nelson's work during this session exemplifies a commitment to building a more inclusive democracy in Mississippi where all people have the opportunity to fully participate in civic life.

One Girl, One Vote Fellowship (2025–2026)

The One Girl, One Vote Fellowship is designed to equip young women and femmes of color with the tools, knowledge, and political education necessary to organize, advocate, and lead within their communities. Grounded in a Black queer feminist framework, the fellowship introduces participants to civic engagement while deepening their understanding of Mississippi's legislative process and policy landscape.

Throughout the program, fellows gain foundational knowledge of how the Mississippi Legislature operates and are supported in developing and drafting policy proposals rooted in the needs and lived experiences of their communities.

During the 2025–2026 cycle, Mississippi Votes hosted four fellows representing three universities: Selina Clay (Delta State University), Jayla Jones and Naya Chadwick (Jackson State University), and Gariuna Williams (University of Mississippi). During the summer orientation, fellows identified a shared interest in advancing student life, campus resources, and equity-centered policy solutions at their respective institutions.

Following orientation, fellows participated in biweekly sessions combining political education with applied policy work. Early trainings focused on foundational concepts such as how a bill becomes law in Mississippi and the basics of legislative drafting. Fellows then applied this knowledge through writing exercises, process analyses, and early-stage policy development.

As the training progressed, fellows developed a collective piece of legislation titled the Public College Investment Act, aimed at increasing state investment in public colleges and universities. The proposal focused on improving student housing and strengthening public transportation infrastructure on and around campuses, while establishing funding standards, accountability measures, and implementation mechanisms. Fellows engaged in legislative outreach to identify potential sponsors for their proposal; however, the legislation was not introduced during the 2026 session. Following bill submission deadlines, the fellowship shifted toward legislative analysis and policy engagement.

In this phase, fellows reviewed legislation relevant to their policy focus area, including both active and inactive bills from the session. Each fellow conducted policy analysis and delivered presentations on selected legislation. Building on this work, fellows developed proposed amendments to revive inactive bills or crafted advocacy materials, including talking points, to support ongoing legislative efforts.

While the fellowship did not result in direct bill passage during this cycle, participants gained a strong foundation in legislative processes, policy analysis, and civic advocacy. Most importantly, fellows developed a deeper understanding of how to engage effectively with lawmakers and navigate the legislative system to advance community-centered policy change.

Looking Ahead: Building a More Inclusive Democracy

The 2026 legislative session made one thing clear: progress in Mississippi requires both persistence and clarity of purpose. While we continue to defend against policies that restrict access, we remain focused on advancing solutions that expand participation and strengthen our democracy.

In the coming year, Mississippi Votes will prioritize three core reforms. First, establishing early voting to ensure that all Mississippians—regardless of work schedule, geography, or circumstance—have a fair opportunity to cast a ballot. Second, restoring a functional ballot initiative process that returns power to the people and allows voters to directly shape the state's constitution. Third, advancing automatic voting rights restoration so that individuals who have completed their sentences can fully participate in civic life without navigating a burdensome and inconsistent system.

At the same time, we recognize that civic participation does not exist in a vacuum. Policies that shape access to stable housing, quality education, healthcare, and economic opportunity all directly impact whether individuals are able to engage in the democratic process. Expanding democracy means addressing these interconnected barriers and ensuring that every Mississippian has both the ability to participate.

This work does not begin and end with the legislative session.

THE PATH FORWARD IS CLEAR.

Mississippi deserves a democracy that is accessible, transparent, and responsive to its people.

TOGETHER, WE CAN BUILD IT.

You can stay engaged and be part of what comes next:

- Stay in touch with your legislators and build relationships before the next session begins
- Follow Mississippi Votes on social media to stay informed about advocacy opportunities, events, and updates throughout the year
- Provide your input to help shape our 2027 policy agenda
- Volunteer with Mississippi Votes to support outreach, education, and organizing efforts across the state

Who We Are



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.

Mississippi Votes would like to offer our sincerest gratitude to all of our movement partners and 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.

Partners

ALLIANCE FOR YOUTH ACTION

FAIR FIGHT ACTION

VOTING RIGHTS LAB

MISSISSIPPI CENTER FOR JUSTICE

LDF Legal Defense Fund

PEOPLE'S ADVOCACY INSTITUTE

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

Funders

Groundswell

Civic (Re)Solve

PRO+DEMOCRACY CAMPAIGN

Glossary

BALLOT INITIATIVE

Definition:
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)

Definition:
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.

Glossary

DISENFRANCHISING CRIMES

Definition:
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.

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 jurisdictions 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 a governor or a court order to restore their voting rights.

EARLY VOTING

Definition:
A convenience voting process by which voters in a public election can vote before a scheduled Election Day.

RIGHTS RESTORATION

Definition:
The process of restoring voting rights to people with prior felony convictions who lost their voting rights under felony disenfranchisement.

VOTER FRIENDLY

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

Glossary

VOTER SUFFRAGE

Definition:

The process of obtaining voting rights as a United States citizen. Ordinarily, a citizen can register to vote at age 17½ and cast their first ballot in 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
- Passage of a legislative suffrage bill.

A person seeking to regain their voting rights faces significant barriers to either option. Mississippi Votes believes that all impacted persons who have completed their incarceration, probation, parole, or rehabilitation requirements should be automatically eligible for full restoration of voting rights.

VOTER UNFRIENDLY

Definition:

Generally describes a bill, a process, or a practice that threatens, restricts, or limits voting access and its expansion for eligible voters.

Contact

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