



One Voice

2023 Mississippi Legislative Recap: Raising Collective Power by Building Strong Communities

Session Overview

The 2023 Mississippi Legislative Session began on January 3rd and ended on April 2nd. Generally, legislative sessions before election years are pretty mild. Not this year! The first bill that passed both the Mississippi House of Representatives and Senate was a bill to ban gender assignment surgery or prescribe drugs such as hormone replacement therapy to those under 18⁷ although there was no evidence of gender-affirming surgeries for Mississippians 18 or undertaking place in the state.

While some expected the Legislature to take up hot-button issues, like the state's growing health-care crisis, growing welfare scandal, suspended ballot initiative process, and rising incarceration rates, the Legislature spent the majority of the session working to take power away from the City of Jackson and Hinds County residents. Lawmakers proposed legislation to undermine their right to elect judges of their choice, recall municipal elected officials, expand the Capitol Police, create a separate court system in Jackson, and take over Jackson's water system.

In addition, the Legislature passed its largest budget in the state's history and increased public preK-12 funding, infrastructure spending, money for hospitals, and money for individual lawmaker projects. No significant changes to the state's tax system occurred during this session. No suffrage bills were passed. And voting rights took another hit this session. In all, this was a tough session for many, and due to the state's continued efforts to take over public services and resources in Jackson and Hinds County, it will likely be talked about for years to come.

Key Points:

- The Mississippi Legislature extended postpartum Medicaid coverage for mothers from three to twelve months. This means that Mississippi mothers will have increased access to healthcare after birth, and the state's high maternal mortality rates may be reduced.
- The City of Jackson and Hinds County was a significant focus for legislators across the state. Bills to expand the Capitol Police, take voting power away from residents by appointing judges, and take control of the Jackson water system dominated the session. In the end, the Legislature passed House Bill No. 1020, a bill that will expand the Capitol Police's jurisdiction, circumvent the voting rights of Jackson and Hinds County residents through the appointment—not election—of new circuit court judges, create a new court, fund additional court staff with an increased Jackson sales tax, and more.
- Once again, despite a large budget, the Legislature failed to take up Medicaid expansion, fully-fund education, or fix the state's ballot initiative process. And despite the state's growing welfare scandal and high incarceration rates, the Legislature failed to improve the state's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families ("TANF") program or create laws to reduce mass incarceration. In addition, the Legislature further restricted voting rights in the state.

A few bills that the Mississippi Legislature passed this session:

- House Bill 603: an act to direct the state treasurer to transfer certain mounts from the capital expense fund to fund improvements.
- House Bill 795: Revises how the fines for the crime of shoplifting are calculated
- House Bill 817: Increases the minimum funding levels for each student enrolled in full-day early learning collaborative programs to \$2,500.00 and half-day early learning collaborative programs to \$1,250.00
- House Bill 1020: Expands the Capitol Complex Improvement District
- House Bill 1089: Clarifies and corrects names and purposes of certain projects funded from disbursements from the 2022 local improvements projects fund.
- House Bill 1125: Bans gender-affirming surgery and drugs from Mississippians 18 and under.
- House Bill 1310: Authorizes the Secretary of State to audit elections/ makes it easier to remove voters from the election rolls.
- House Bill 1613: K-12-related funding bill
- Senate Bill 2082: Prohibits a court from considering incarceration as intentional or voluntary unemployment or underemployment when establishing or modifying a child-support order
- Senate Bill 2101: Creates mandatory minimums for fleeing a law enforcement officer and carjacking
- Senate Bill 2212: Extends postpartum coverage for mothers up to 12 months
- Senate Bill 2343: Revises the jurisdiction of the Capitol Police
- Senate Bill 2358: Bans ballot harvesting
- Senate Bill 2454: Budget-related bill
- Senate Bill 2634: Allows criminal charges for child support three years after the child turns 21

To view a full list of new laws, visit the Mississippi Legislature's website <http://www.legislature.ms.gov/legislation/>

Regarding One Voice's 2023 Legislative Priorities, the Mississippi Legislature failed to address many issues that would improve the lives of families in the state and create stronger communities.

Tax and Budget

Improving the state's budget and tax systems to help strengthen local communities

- ✗ Improve the state's budget process
- ✗ Strengthen the state's income tax system
- ✗ Enact refundable state tax credits like the Earned
- ✗ Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit
- ✗ Tackle the state's grocery tax

Voting Rights

Ensuring that all voters have an equal opportunity to participate in the political process

- ✗ Secure the restoration of voting rights for disenfranchised individuals with felony convictions through the state's suffrage process
 - Expand voting rights
 - Eliminate voter purging policies
 - Prohibit strict voter ID laws
 - Reform voter registration procedures to allow for automatic, online, and same-day voter registration, as well as extended voting hours
 - Address language barriers to voting
 - Allow for no-excuse early voting and mail-in voting
 - Extended polling hours and locations
- ✗ Restore and amend the state's ballot initiative process

Education

Advancing educational opportunities that ensure every child in Mississippi thrives, regardless of where they grow up

- ✗ Fully fund and invest in education
 - Expand state-funded, quality early pre-k programs
 - Fully fund the Mississippi Adequate Education Program
 - Expand community school models that help families and kids thrive
 - Increase meaningful access and affordability in our higher education system
- ✗ End practices that push students out of educational opportunity

Working Families Support

Improving the lives of working families

- ✗ Expand Medicaid
- ✓ Expand postpartum coverage to mothers
- ✗ Improve the state's TANF program
- ✗ Improve climate justice
- ✗ Secure a livable wage
- ✗ Enact state paid family and medical leave
- ✗ Improve the state's equal pay law

Criminal Justice

Reforming the state's criminal justice to reduce disparities and help support safe communities.

- ✗ Reduce mass incarceration
 - Addressing sentencing laws to set lower penalties for low-level, non-violent offenses, particularly drug offenses.
 - Eliminate the state's habitual offender law that adds years to an individual's sentence because they have been previously convicted of crimes and allow for greater judicial discretion in sentencing.
 - Increase alternatives to incarcerations for Mississippians suffering from mental health and drug abuse.
 - Expanding probation and parole reforms to allow alternatives to incarceration, provide a method of earlier release from incarceration, and provide alternatives to incarceration for those with technical parole and probation violations.
- ✗ Improve prison conditions
- ✗ Reform the state's bail practices
- ✗ Reduce collateral consequences, decrease recidivism, and increase access to reentry

One Voice will continue to support policies that create a better future in Mississippi by empowering and providing opportunities for communities, local organizations, and leaders to engage in the formation of public policy that affects their lives.