



2024 Legislative Priorities:

Building resilient communities: A whole community approach

The 2024 Mississippi Legislative Session, running from January 2nd to May 3rd, marked significant changes with Governor Reeves in his second term and a new House majority leader after over a decade. Addressing several hot button issues like the state’s public school funding formula and Medicaid expansion, the session saw progress, including the restoration of voting rights for 21 Mississippians with past felony convictions through the state’s suffrage process and the passing of presumptive Medicaid eligibility for pregnant women. However, we have a long way to go to ensure more effective leadership, an increase in collective impact, and the expansion of economic opportunities in Black and other communities of color across the state. Overall, this session serves as another reminder of the importance of collective advocacy and engagement in fostering fair and inclusive communities for *all* in Mississippi.

5 Strategic Priorities:

Education:

Increase resources to make quality public education available to all.

Voting Rights:

End voter suppression.

Criminal Justice:

Redefine public safety in our communities.

Energy Democracy:

Advance climate and environmental equity.

Economic Justice

Advocate for systems that advance economic mobility.

Priority-Education: Increase resources to make quality public education available to all.

Education emerged as a focal point this session with a flurry of proposed reforms and policy initiatives. From the introduction of harmful vouchers to proposed revisions to the Mississippi Accountability System, a grading system used to show how well local schools and districts are serving their students, state lawmakers grappled with a wide array of proposals aimed at reshaping the state's educational landscape.

Some education highlights include a \$229-million increase in public school funding and more pre-K funding. One of the most consequential developments of the session was the rewrite of Mississippi's Adequate Education Program (MAEP), the state's public school funding formula that had been in existence for nearly 30 years.

According to analysis from the Parent's Campaign, HB 4130, the Mississippi Student Funding Formula, slated to replace MAEP, includes some of the following key features:

- An increase in school funding of approximately \$230 million statewide
- Like MAEP, an objective formula that determines the base student cost of education funding in the state
- An inflation factor that accounts for rising costs
- An increase in funding for special education and gifted services, poverty, English language learner support, career and technical programs, and more rural districts
- An allocation of funds using net enrollment rather than average attendance

While this represented an achievement in education reform, concerns linger as to whether schools will remain underfunded compared to the previous formula. This is because while all state funding formulas have a degree of complexity, one of the major challenges with MAEP has been that, in the 27 years since its implementation, lawmakers have only fully funded the formula twice. This has resulted in Mississippi's public schools being underfunded by more than \$3.5 billion over time and by \$175 million during the 2023-2024 school year.

In addition, the fight to keep public school funding public remained in limbo as lawmakers awaited the Mississippi Supreme Court's decision on the legality of sending \$10 million to private schools for the majority of the session. Nonetheless, this did not stop attempts by some state lawmakers to funnel public dollars to private schools and to expand voucher programs in the state. House Bill 1988, the Children's Promise Act, provided a loophole which would have used state tax dollars to subsidize private schools via tax credits. Ultimately, this bill was defeated in the last week of the session. Of particular note, too, was the introduction, yet ultimately defeated bill seeking to close three public Mississippi universities within four years.

Priority-Voting Rights: End voter suppression.

Suffrage: Unlike most states, Mississippi doesn't automatically restore voting rights to individuals after they complete their sentences. Instead, a two-thirds majority in both legislative chambers must approve reinstating suffrage on a case-by-case basis. This year, House Bill 1609, which aimed to restore voting rights to individuals with previous nonviolent felony convictions, passed the House but was blocked in the Senate. However, during the session, state lawmakers approved 21 suffrage bills, restoring voting rights to individuals with past felony convictions.

Redistricting: In Mississippi, the process of judicial redistricting continues. Both the House and Senate introduced redistricting plans. A plan passed by the Senate during the session would have decreased the Black voting age population in several circuit courts across the state, potentially diluting Black voter influence and reducing the representation of Black judges and district attorneys in certain areas. However, lawmakers failed to reach an agreement on the state's circuit and chancery court districts, leaving the task unfinished. The state has until 2025 to come to a consensus on a new set of maps.

Ballot Initiative: Since 2021, Mississippians have been stripped of a ballot initiative process to ensure that voices are heard on legislation and amendments that may be less popular with state leadership. Although both the House and the Senate passed bills intending to reinstate this process, they included restrictive measures such as prohibiting the consideration of issues like abortion. However, the bills died, leaving Mississippians without a functioning ballot initiative process.

Priority-Economic Justice: Advocate for systems that advance economic mobility.

Medicaid expansion: Since the full implementation of the Affordable Care Act in 2014, Mississippians have pleaded with lawmakers to expand Medicaid. For the first time since the law passed, Mississippi lawmakers took up the issue.

During the 2024 Legislative Session, a Medicaid bill, House Bill 1725, finally made it out of committee. However, state lawmakers were unable to reach a consensus on the bill. Challenges with the proposed plan included political disagreements regarding the number of individuals eligible for Medicaid, whether the plan provided sufficient health coverage to qualify for federal match rates, and the inclusion of a work requirement.

Mississippi entered the session as one of ten states that had not expanded the program, leaving approximately 200,000 uninsured adults in the state caught in the Medicaid "coverage gap." These individuals have incomes below the poverty line and would qualify for Medicaid if the state were to expand its program.

Presumptive eligibility: House Bill 539, which has already been approved by the Governor, grants presumptive Medicaid eligibility for pregnant women in Mississippi. Under this law, pregnant women will not have to delay receiving essential prenatal care if they are presumed eligible for Medicaid. It means that Medicaid will cover outpatient medical expenses for pregnant women for up to 60 days while their application for the government-funded insurance program is under review.



To view the full list of bills introduced this session, visit the Mississippi Legislature's website:

<https://www.legislature.ms.gov/legislation/>







One Voice's 2024 Legislative Overview: Building Resilient Communities: A Whole Community Approach

During the 2024 Mississippi Legislative Session, lawmakers introduced several bills aligned with our priorities, but many stalled in committee early in the legislative process. Moving forward, we continue to urge lawmakers to prioritize education funding, criminal justice reforms, end felony disenfranchisement, reinstate the ballot initiative process, expand voting rights, expand Medicaid, invest in energy democracy, advance a fair tax system, and reform critical safety-net programs, among others.





It's important to recognize that public engagement significantly influences outcomes. Actively reaching out to and engaging with our elected officials, both now and until the next session, is essential to building a cohesive community and ensuring that everyone in every Mississippi community THRIVES.

The diagram below illustrates the legislative progress made during the session towards building resilient communities: The green  on the diagram below illustrates the legislative progress made during the session towards building resilient communities. We will continue to fight for the issues with a red .




Education

-  Expand state-funded early pre-K public education
-  Fully fund the Mississippi Adequate Education Program
-  Public school funding
-  Invest in higher education
-  Expand community schools
-  End corporal punishment



Criminal Justice

-  Reduce mass incarceration
-  Improve prison conditions
-  Bail reform
-  Reduce collateral consequences, decrease recidivism, and increase access to re-entry services










Voting Rights

-  Reform the state's disenfranchisement laws and enact an effective suffrage procedure
-  Expand voting rights
-  Restore the state's ballot initiative process

Energy Democracy

-  Increase broadband access
-  Create renewable energy, equity, and economic development in rural areas

Policy

-  Improve the state's budget process
-  Strengthen the state's income tax system
-  Enact an Earned Income Tax Credit
-  Enact a Child Tax Credit
-  Grocery tax reform
-  Medicaid expansion
-  Livable wage
-  Reform Mississippi Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
-  Paid family and medical leave



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