

STRATEGIC PLAN
PUBLIC UTILITIES STAFF
812-00
OF THE
STATE OF MISSISSIPPI
FOR THE PERIOD
ENDING

JUNE 30, 2024



MISSISSIPPI PUBLIC UTILITIES STAFF
Agency #0812
Five-Year Strategic Plan for FY 2024-2028

I. Comprehensive Mission Statement

The mission of the Staff is to represent the broad interests of the State of Mississippi by balancing the respective concerns of the residential, commercial, or industrial ratepayers, and the state and its agencies and departments, and the public utilities. (**Miss. Code Ann., § 77-2-1, et seq., 1-26-8, 43-35-504, and 49-17-29**).

II. Philosophy

The Staff conducts audits, reviews filings, investigates public utilities, advises the Public Service Commission and when necessary, intervenes as a party to advocate positions in cases before the Commission. The Staff intervenes in Federal litigation where necessary to protect the state's interest as to matters under the jurisdiction of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, Securities and Exchange Commission, Federal Communications Commission, and other federal or state agencies.

III. Relevant Statewide Goals and Benchmarks

The Mississippi Public Utilities Staff is a support agency for the Mississippi Public Service Commission. Its exclusive function is to provide investigative and advisory services to the Public Service Commission as outlined in Mississippi Code Section 77-2-9 (3) and (4). Although, in recent legislative sessions, the Staff has been tasked with special projects, namely the administration of Broadband Grant funding and oversight of the City of Jackson water and sewer arrearage programs. Consequently, with respect to Statewide Goals and Benchmarks, the Staff supports the goals and benchmarks as adopted by the Commission.

The Legislature has defined the policy goals regarding the regulation of public utilities subject to the jurisdiction of the Public Service Commission. Miss. Code Ann. § 77-3-2 (2014). The Legislature has declared the following to be the policy of the State of Mississippi:

- (a) To provide fair regulation of public utilities in the interest of the public;
- (b) To promote the inherent advantage of regulated public utilities;
- (c) To promotes adequate, reliable, and economical service to all citizens and residents of the state
- (d) To provide just and reasonable rates and charges for public utility service without unjust discrimination, undue preferences or advantages, or unfair or destructive competitive practices and consistent with long-term management and conservation of energy resources by avoiding wasteful, uneconomic and inefficient uses of energy;
- (e) To encourage and promote harmony between public utilities, their users and the environment;

(f) To cooperate with other states and the federal government in promoting and coordinating interstate public utility service and reliability;

(g) To encourage the continued study and research for new and innovative rate-making procedures which will protect the state, the public, the ratepayers and the utilities, and where possible reduce the costs of the ratemaking process.

(h) To foster the continued service of public utilities on a well-planned and coordinated basis that is consistent with the level of service needed for the protection of public health and safety and for the promotion of the general welfare;

As mentioned above, the Legislature has also enumerated the duties and responsibilities of the Staff in providing investigative and advisory services to the Commission. These duties include the following:

(a) In uncontested matters review, investigate and make appropriate written recommendations to the commission with respect to the reasonableness of rates charged or proposed to be charged by any public utility and with respect to the consistency of such rates with the public policy of assuring an energy supply adequate to protect the public health and safety and to promote the general welfare;

(b) Review, investigate, and make appropriate written recommendations to the commission with respect to the service furnished or proposed to be furnished by any utility;

(c) When deemed necessary by the executive director, in the broad public interest of the State of Mississippi, the using and consuming public, and the public utilities, make written recommendations and reports to the commission regarding all commission proceedings affecting the rates or service of any public utility;

(d) When deemed necessary by the executive director, in the broad public interest of the State of Mississippi, the using and consuming public, and the public utilities, petition the commission to initiate proceedings to review, investigate and take appropriate action with respect to the rates or service of public utilities. Receipt of such petition shall be spread on the minutes of the Public Service Commission. The commission shall, within thirty (30) days of receipt of such petition, spread upon its minutes and forward to the Executive Director of the Public Utilities Staff a response detailing actions taken or proposed to be taken;

(e) When deemed necessary by the executive director, in the broad public interest of the State of Mississippi, the using and consuming public, and the public utilities, make written recommendations and reports to the commission regarding all certificate applications filed and provide assistance to the commission in making the analysis and plans required;

(f) When deemed necessary by the executive director, in the broad public interest of the State of Mississippi, the using and consuming public, and the public utilities, make written recommendations and reports to the commission regarding all proceedings wherein any public utility proposes to reduce or abandon service to the public;

(h) When deemed necessary by the executive director, in the broad public interest of the State of Mississippi, the using and consuming public, and the public utilities, make written recommendations and reports to the commission regarding all commission proceedings with respect to transfers of franchises, mergers, consolidation, and combination of public utilities;

(i) When deemed necessary by the executive director, in the broad public interest of the State of Mississippi, the using and consuming public and the public utilities, review, and investigate contracts of public utilities with affiliates or subsidiaries;

(j) When deemed necessary by the executive director, in the broad public interest of the State of Mississippi, the using and consuming public, and the public utilities, advise the commission with respect to regulations and transactions;

(k) When deemed necessary by the executive director, in the broad public interest of the State of Mississippi, the using and consuming public and the public utilities, review and make recommendations to the commission on all miscellaneous uncontested filings;

(l) Advise the Public Service Commission in writing as to the broad public interest of the State of Mississippi, the using and consuming public, and the public utilities in all major rate cases and automatic adjustment clauses;

(m) When deemed necessary by the executive director, in the broad public interest of the State of Mississippi, the using and consuming public, and the public utilities, review, and investigate the justness and reasonableness, to both the public and the public utility, of rates charged or proposed to be charged by any public utility, the rates of which are subject to regulation under the provisions of this chapter; and

(n) Accumulate evidence and other information from public utilities and other sources as required or as may be requested by the Public Service Commission.

IV. Overview of the Agency Five-Year Strategic Plan

The Staff plans to continue to operate with a total of from 24-30 PINS over the next five years. To keep pace with the complexity of utility regulation and the significant changes in energy policy anticipated over the next five years (increased demand for electricity generated by electric cars, increased push for renewable energy, etc.) the Staff must either expand its audit personnel or use outside consultants in conjunction with existing Staff. Our in-house Staff will continue to perform regulatory review functions including formula rate plan reviews, rate cases, fuel monitoring, certificate reviews, rider reviews, etc. For matters requiring specialized expertise, the Staff will outsource these requirements when necessary to expert consultants with the required competencies. The Staff will continue to strive to improve our service to the Commission by maintaining on-going education and training for Staff members and by improving internal reporting systems to minimize response times to the Commission and to meet all statutory or Commission imposed deadlines. We will also continue to enhance our mapping system to upgrade it to industry standards and improve the accuracy of the maps.

There are several keys to maintaining a competent professional Staff. These include (1) on-going education and training, (2) reduced employee turnover and (3) adequate compensation for the specialized, professional Staff. We will address on-going education by scheduling at least 24 hours of education per management/professional employee per year and at least 16 hours for our administrative personnel. This education will be provided by classroom instruction, webinars, and in-house training programs. Professional education will be focused on improving each professional staff member's core competencies. The focus of administrative personnel training will be on improving skills with personal productivity software.

During the next five years, the Staff must also address its transitioning workforce. The Staff has lost every division and section directors in the past three years and a current director is on track to retire shortly. The Staff had little to no succession planning to minimize the impact of this loss of institutional knowledge in a very specialized, niche area.

V. Agency’s External/Internal Assessment

- (1) The Staff’s workload is largely beyond its control and dependent on the regulated activities undertaken by the utilities and the Commission’s requests for services.
- (2) The scarcity of qualified potential employees is on-going and expected to increase.
- (3) Compensation is crucial to attracting and retaining competent staff.

VI. Agency Goals, Objective, Programs and Measures for FY2024-FY2028.

GOAL A: Represent the Broad Interests of the State of Mississippi (Miss. Code Ann. § 77-2-1)

OBJECTIVE A.1.: Effectively balance the interest of the state, utilities, and ratepayers in all cases filed before the Public Service Commission, and continued oversight of all certificated utility companies.

(This is directly related to the volume produced, i.e. how many cases worked or documents generated.)

	FY 2022 Actual	FY 2023 Estimated	FY 2024 Projected
Certificated utility Companies	1,388	1,420	1,375
	FY 2022 Actual	FY 2023 Estimated	FY 2024 Projected
Utility Case Matters Filed with MPSC	158	240	260

A.1.1. STRATEGY: Participate in proceedings before the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, the Securities and Exchange Commission, the Federal Communications Commission and other federal agencies, national regulatory organizations to protect the state’s interest.

GOAL B: To improve operational efficiency and responsiveness to the Commission by Implementing internal systems to track performance of the investigative and Advisory services provided to the Public Service Commission as outlined in Mississippi Code Section 77-2-9(3) and (4).

OBJECTIVE B.1.: Develop internal reporting system to monitor case progress, critical deadlines and employee productivity.

Outcome: Timely assignment of all docketed cases, timely preparation of data requests and review of data responses, timely preparation of orders granting CPCN's, compliance orders, and administrative orders, in order to comply with deadlines as mandated by state law.

	FY 2022 Actual	FY 2023 Estimated	FY 2024 Projected
Number of days to Complete CPCN's	90-120	60-90	30-60
Number of days to Complete formula rate case	120	120	120

A.2.1 Strategy Establish annual education plan and schedule for each employee and monitor progress toward achieving goals and hold frequent meetings or status conferences on filings to insure cases are handled in timely matter consistent with state law. *(This measure directly related to number of days to complete investigation.)*

GOAL C: Program outcomes. Measures the effectiveness of the services provided by this program.

OBJECTIVE C.1.: Equitable treatment of the utilities and public

Outcome: Expressed in percentage within a 12-month period

	FY 2022 Actual	FY 2023 Estimated	FY 2024 Projected
Equitable treatment Of Utilities and Public	100	100	100

Explanatory Measures

Quantitative indicators are affected by many outside factors. Factors outside control of the agency. The agency does not dictate the number or types of filings before it. Yet state statute dictates the respective timelines the agency has to work within. Very few cases filed annually are ongoing. Changes in technology in the utility industry could require revision to goals to some extent. Proposals for new forms of regulation or industry restructuring require significant additional staff time and usually the need to hire outside consultants.

Internal Management

Each division director assigns and coordinates projects. The Executive Director holds frequent meetings with each division to monitor progress. The timetable to dispose of cases is set by statute.