

The Office of the Mississippi Secretary of State Five Year Strategic Plan

For the Fiscal Years 2028 - 2032



Michael Watson
SECRETARY OF STATE

1. Agency Mission Statement

The Secretary of State's Office exists and is committed to serving the citizens of the State of Mississippi by fulfilling its statutory duties in a transparent, efficient, and cost-effective manner.

2. Statement of Agency Philosophy

First established in the 1817 Constitution of the State of Mississippi, the Mississippi Secretary of State has since been entrusted with several additional duties, responsibilities, and functions by the State Legislature. We are dedicated to being both a service and information agency - committed to modeling efficient, effective operations and prudent resource management. We will always conduct our business with the understanding we work for all Mississippians.

3. Relevant Statewide Goals and Benchmarks

(From the "Statewide Strategic Plan for Performance and Budgetary Success – Building a Better Mississippi" created by the Mississippi Legislature in July 2014)

- STATEWIDE GOAL – "To develop a robust state economy that provides the opportunity for productive employment for all Mississippians."
- STATEWIDE GOAL – "To ensure that current and future generations have access to the state's abundant natural resources through restoration, protection, conservation and wise development of those resources."
- STATEWIDE GOAL – "To create an efficient government and an informed and engaged citizenry that helps to address social problems through the payment of taxes, the election of capable leaders at all levels of government and participation in charitable organizations through contributions and volunteerism."

4. Overview of the Agency Five Year Strategic Plan

Over the next five years, the Secretary of State will continue to increase efficiency through streamlining operations, shrinking the size of government where possible, and continuing to serve Mississippians to the best of our ability. These efforts will support the Agency's mission to fulfill duties in a transparent, efficient, and cost-effective manner. The Secretary of State's Office will continue to operate as a results-based, goal-driven Agency. Specifically, the Agency will focus on the following projects:

Help America Vote Act (HAVA) of 2020. President Donald Trump signed a \$380,000,000 Omnibus Bill in March 2018, with Mississippi receiving \$4,483,541. On December 20, 2019, President Donald Trump signed the Consolidated Appropriation Act of 2020, authorizing an additional \$425,000,000 in new Help America Vote Act funds. Of that money, Mississippi received \$5,037,597. These amounts were calculated by the U.S. Government using the State of Mississippi's Voting Age Population. In August 2020, the Elections Assistance Commission (EAC) advised that the two separate awards were amended into a single grant with an indefinite

period of performance. Mississippi was awarded an additional combined total of \$3,272,727 in additional funds in supplementary grant fund disbursements in 2022, 2023, 2024, and 2025.

The Agency has obtained these funds for a broad use of areas to improve election administration in Mississippi. The funds may be used to replace voting equipment that utilizes a voter-verified paper record; implement a post-election audit system that provides a high-level confidence in the accuracy of the final vote tally; upgrade election-related computer systems to address cyber vulnerabilities identified through the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) or similar scans or assessments of existing election systems; facilitate cybersecurity training for the state Chief Election Official's office and local election officials; implement established cybersecurity best practices for election systems; and fund other activities that will improve the security of elections for federal office; implement GIS capabilities for SEMS to allow for more accurate redistricting.

Ongoing improvements to voter education programs. As Mississippi's Chief Election Official, the Secretary of State understands the importance of voters being well informed about the election process. The Agency developed and deployed "My Election Day" which allows voters to find their municipal and county polling places; view sample ballots specific to their address; view federal, statewide, state district, county wide, and county district officials who represent them; and track their absentee/affidavit ballots. In addition to My Election Day, the Agency has established the Elections 101 voter education campaign. Elections 101 informs voters about the important processes of election administration including voter roll maintenance, certification of election, voter registration, responsibilities of local election officials, and more. During the 2025 municipal election cycle, the Agency deployed the TextMyGov system to allow citizens to engage with the Secretary of State through text messaging. This includes reaching out to the Secretary of State to ask questions about important election information and the ability for the Secretary of State to distribute election reminders to every voter who signs up for the election reminder text messaging program.

Ongoing Improvements to the Statewide Elections Management System (SEMS).

Maintaining a secure and accurate voter registration system is paramount to our office. The SEMS infrastructure will be enhanced and improved to provide greater continuity, disaster recovery, and an overall hardened security stance against cyber threats. This will be in line with the Department of Information Technology Services' Enterprise Security Policy, and the Agency continues to strive to ensure SEMS is secured at both the State and county levels.

The Agency partnered with a vendor to purchase the state's first statewide point-of-address map of each building in Mississippi. In partnership with PEER, this data will be utilized in conjunction with geospatial maps for more accurate redistricting in SEMS as well as the Legislature. The data will also be shared with other agencies.

After a successful test period to more accurately identify voters who have moved or passed away outside of Mississippi, the Agency began a new procurement process for a long-term contract and entered a partnership to utilize commercial data from more credit bureaus than in previous agreements. This will allow election officials to maintain their voter rolls more accurately.

The Agency is in the process of designing an in-house electronic pollbook for integration with SEMS while requiring less exporting of data to third-party vendors. Not only will this increase

the efficiency and accuracy of processing voter data after elections, but it will also save counties additional costs and fees associated with third party vendors.

Investor Education. Over the past four years, the securities industry has seen an explosion in fraudulent investment scams using current and emerging technologies. To combat this, the Agency increased its investor education outreach as the best prevention for these types of fraudulent scams is education. Through educational materials, speaking engagements, digital marketing campaigns, and targeted investor education, the Agency is continuing to provide tools on how to avoid falling victim to investment scams.

Mississippi Businesses Against Trafficking (MBAT). With a direct connection to all Mississippi corporations, limited liability companies, limited partnerships, charities, and other business and non-profit entities, the Agency launched Mississippi Businesses Against Trafficking in 2022 to raise awareness of human trafficking in Mississippi. Since then, six other southern states have joined Mississippi's efforts to create a force across the Southeast and others are in the initial planning phases.

As the program has expanded, not only does MBAT offer resources and education on the website, monthly webinars, and summits, we have recently partnered with the Department of Homeland Security's Blue Campaign to provide industry specific training and resources for members. We have also collaborated with our state's licensure boards to include human trafficking awareness and training as an option within any existing continuing education requirements. Our 2026 objective year is to launch an anti-trafficking toolkit for businesses to implement within their policies and procedures.

Tackle the Tape. July 2025 marked the five-year anniversary of the Tackle the Tape (TTT) initiative, our efforts to reduce the regulatory burden in Mississippi. As a member of the Occupational Licensing Review Commission (OLRC), we have participated in 152 votes to assist those licensed by any of our state's occupational licensing boards and commissions. Through promotion of licensing reciprocity, elimination of overly restrictive regulations, or those which are anti-competitive, among others, Tackle the Tape has made it easier for individuals to obtain or renew professional licensure and has resulted in new businesses and jobs developing across Mississippi.

To be more proactive in reviewing MS licensing regulations, we launched the 29 by 29 strategic review plan in January 2022. With the goal of reviewing every regulation for all 29 boards and commissions by the year 2029, we have successfully completed the review of all 14 boards from the first four years of the plan.

Conservation Task Force. The Mississippi Conservation Task Force (CTF) is a collaborative initiative convened by Secretary of State Michael Watson in his capacity as Mississippi's State Lands Commissioner. The Task Force brings together leaders from state and federal agencies, conservation organizations, academic institutions, and private partners to coordinate conservation priorities and strengthen collaboration across Mississippi's natural resource community. By serving as a forum for discussion, coordination, and partnership, the CTF helps ensure the state's land, water, and wildlife resources are managed in ways that benefit both current and future generations.

The Task Force focuses on identifying shared conservation priorities and supporting practical solutions for the challenges facing Mississippi's landscapes. This includes fostering collaboration on issues such as prescribed fire, invasive species management, permitting and regulatory coordination, and landscape-scale conservation initiatives such as the Sentinel Landscape proposal. The group also works to connect state efforts with regional initiatives, including partnerships within the SERPPAS framework.

A key goal of the CTF is to help guide the development of a comprehensive statewide conservation plan that aligns the priorities of existing conservation strategies and programs across Mississippi. By bringing together diverse partners and encouraging focused working groups, the Task Force seeks to strengthen cooperation, improve policy alignment, and ensure conservation actions across the state are coordinated, effective, and forward-looking.

5. External / Internal Assessment & Internal Management Systems

5.1 EXTERNAL / INTERNAL ASSESSMENT

- Changes in the economy, whether positive or negative, may affect the number of business filings processed – which may increase or decrease Business Services revenues.
- Legislative directives may change the course of projects and priorities.
- As more database hacking and network insecurities rise, IT costs follow this trend. The Agency has a strong focus on protecting sensitive information and will adopt and implement the latest cybersecurity products and practices needed to secure data in the Agency's custody.

5.2 INTERNAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

Through ongoing quantitative and qualitative assessments, agency leadership determines how well the needs of our constituents have been met. Management policies are in place to closely monitor and address deficits in performance. The Agency has partially implemented paperless systems and automated processes to ensure consistent standards and will continue to develop and deploy technologies and methodologies aiding in this effort.

6. Agency Goals, Objectives, Strategies, and Measures by Program

PROGRAM #1 – BUSINESS SERVICES

➤ BUSINESS SERVICES (BS) GOAL A

To provide a wide range of services to individuals and companies who conduct business in Mississippi, including those starting a business within the state.

BS OBJECTIVE #A1:

Timely and accurately file all corporate, LLC, partnership, and other business documents to allow new and existing businesses to complete business transactions within the state.

Outcome: All corporate business documents filed and posted to the Agency website.

A1.1 STRATEGY

- *Output* – Number of corporate and other business documents filed.
- *Efficiency* – Corporate documents filed on the website within two business days.
- *Explanatory* – To ensure our turnaround time is expeditious, making speed of service and efficiency our top priorities.

BS OBJECTIVE #A2:

Timely and accurately file all Uniform Commercial Code (UCC) documents to allow lenders and borrowers the security necessary to conduct business in Mississippi.

Outcome: All UCC documents filed and posted to the Agency website.

A2.1 STRATEGY

- *Output* – Number of UCC documents filed.
- *Efficiency* – UCC documents posted on website within two business days.
- *Explanatory* – To ensure our turnaround time is expeditious, making speed of service and efficiency our top priorities.

A2.2 STRATEGY

- *Output* – Number of UCC searches requested and completed.
- *Efficiency* – UCC searches completed within two business days.
- *Explanatory* – To ensure our turnaround time is expeditious, making speed of service and efficiency our top priorities.

BS OBJECTIVE #A3

Timely and accurately file other Mississippi business documents submitted to our office.

Outcome: All other business documents completed and returned to customer.

A3.1 STRATEGY

- *Output* – Number of notary and apostille registrations and applications processed.
- *Efficiency* – Notary/Apostille applications processed within two business days.
- *Explanatory* – To ensure our turnaround time is expeditious, making speed of service and efficiency our top priorities.

BS OBJECTIVE #A4

Provide excellent customer service to those doing business in Mississippi.

Outcome: All inquiries answered timely and accurately.

A4.1 STRATEGY

- *Output* – Number of phone calls received.
- *Efficiency* – Answer at least 95% of all business services customer phone calls.
- *Explanatory* – To ensure customers are assisted without delay and are never unnecessarily placed on hold.

A4.2 STRATEGY

- *Output* – Number of work orders (other business searches) requested and completed.
- *Efficiency* – Work orders completed within two business days.
- *Explanatory* – To ensure our turnaround time is expeditious, making speed of service and efficiency our top priorities.

➤ BUSINESS SERVICES (BS) GOAL B

To create an efficient government agency to regulate business-related matters assigned under the Agency's purview: charitable organizations and fundraisers, the sale of securities and securities dealers, scrap metal dealers and processors, the pre-need funeral industry, perpetual care cemeteries, athlete agents and other regulatory matters.

BS OBJECTIVE #B1:

Register and regulate all charitable organizations and fundraisers who solicit contributions in Mississippi.

Outcome: All charity and fundraiser actions posted to the Agency website.

B1.1 STRATEGY

- *Output* – Number of Charity/Fundraiser registrations and renewals processed.
- *Efficiency* – Registrations and renewal status posted to the website as soon as approved.

BS OBJECTIVE #B2: Charities

Investigate charity complaints and/or violations of the State's charitable laws and levy fines or dissolve charities, when necessary. When necessary, work with federal and state prosecuting authorities to investigate violators of the State's charities laws.

Outcome: All examinations and investigations performed timely.

B2.1 STRATEGY

- *Output* – Number of examinations, investigations, and complaints.
- *Efficiency* – Contact complainant within two business days.
- *Explanatory* – Within three business days of receiving complaint, an investigation case is opened.

BS OBJECTIVE #B3: Securities

Register and regulate both the sale of securities and the securities professionals who sell them.

Outcome: All securities registrations and renewals processed timely.

B3.1 STRATEGY

- *Output* – Number of security registrations and renewals (offerings).
- *Efficiency* – Offerings reviewed within five business days of receipt of complete security document package.
- *Explanatory* – To ensure expedient review to facilitate capital formation.

B3.2 STRATEGY

- *Output* – Number of security registrations and renewals (firms/agents).
- *Efficiency* – Firms/agents reviewed within ten business days of receipt of complete security document package.
- *Explanatory* – To ensure expedient review to support new securities business.

BS OBJECTIVE #B4: *Securities*

Investigate securities complaints and/or violations of the State's securities laws and levy fines. When necessary, work with federal and state prosecuting authorities to investigate violators of the State's securities laws.

Outcome: All examinations and investigations performed timely.

B4.1 STRATEGY

- *Output* – Number of examinations, investigations, and complaints.
- *Output* – Number of legal actions (actions, dispositions, or complaints) completed.
- *Efficiency* – Contact complainant within two business days.
- *Explanatory* – To efficiently and effectively initiate investigations and work toward their rapid resolutions.

BS OBJECTIVE #B5: *Regulation and Enforcement*

Register and regulate scrap metal dealers and processors, the pre-need funeral industry, perpetual care cemeteries, and athlete agents. Publish Mississippi Administrative Bulletin and Mississippi Administrative Code.

Outcome: All regulatory documents filed and posted to the Agency website.

B5.1 STRATEGY

- *Output* – Number of scrap metal dealers and processors registered.
- *Output* – Number of pre-need establishments and agents registered.
- *Output* – Number of perpetual care cemeteries registered.

- *Output* – Number of athlete agents registered.
- *Efficiency* – All regulatory documents processed within two days.
- *Explanatory* – To ensure our turnaround time is expeditious, making speed of service and efficiency our top priorities.

BS OBJECTIVE #B6: *Regulation and Enforcement*

Investigate complaints and/or violations involving scrap metal dealers and processors, the pre-need funeral industry, perpetual care cemeteries, and athlete agents. Suspend, deny, and revoke licenses, freeze trust funds, issue cease and desist orders, refer for criminal prosecution, and levy fines when necessary.

Outcome: All examinations and investigations performed timely.

B6.1 STRATEGY

- *Output* – Number of examinations, investigations, and complaints.
- *Efficiency* – Contact complainant within two business days.
- *Explanatory* – To ensure complainants know their complaints are important.

PROGRAM #2 – ELECTIONS

➤ **ELECTIONS GOAL A**

Train local elections officials as required by law.

ELECTIONS OBJECTIVE #A1:

Train local elections officials who run elections in Mississippi.

Outcome: Train local elections officials on responsibilities in conducting elections at the local level.

A1.1 STRATEGY

- *Output* – Number of Election Training Sessions.
- *Output* – Number of Poll Workers to successfully complete online training.
- *Efficiency* – Required attendees to complete training and assessment.
- *Efficiency* – Percentage of poll workers who successfully complete the online training on their first attempt.
- *Explanatory* – Number/Type of elections occurring.

➤ **ELECTIONS GOAL B**

Ensure public access to campaign finance and lobbyist reports filed with the Agency.

ELECTIONS OBJECTIVE #B1:

Timely process and make publicly available all required campaign finance and lobbyist filings and reports.

Outcome: Public access to campaign finance and lobbyist reports.

B1.1 STRATEGY

- *Output* – Number of campaign finance reports.
- *Output* – Number of lobbyist reports.
- *Efficiency* – Percentage of reports posted to the Agency website within two business days of receipt.

➤ ELECTIONS GOAL C

Ensure public access to accurate voter information and elections information.

ELECTIONS OBJECTIVE #C1:

Timely provision of voter and election information to members of the public, as requested.

Outcome: Provide timely and accurate voter and election information to the public.

C1.1 STRATEGY

- *Output* – Number of voter registrations updated on secure online website.
- *Efficiency* – Percentage of elections hotline calls answered within one week of an election.

PROGRAM #3 – COMMUNICATIONS & PUBLICATIONS

➤ COMMUNICATIONS & PUBLICATIONS GOAL A

Produce and distribute official state publications, including the General Laws, Local & Private Laws, House and Senate Journals, and the Judiciary Directory and Court Calendar, as well as the Official and Statistical Register of the State of Mississippi, more commonly known as the Blue Book.

COMMUNICATIONS & PUBLICATIONS OBJECTIVE #A1:

To produce and distribute official state publications, agency publications, and other internal educational and meeting materials in a timely and accurate manner.

Outcome: State officials and the public are updated with the most current publications, materials, and information in a timely and accurate manner.

A1.1 STRATEGY

- *Output* – Number of website/online postings of new materials.
- *Output* – Agency promotions and exhibits.
- *Output* – Non-statutorily required publications and documents produced.
- *Output* – Statutorily required publications and documents produced.
- *Output* – Number of bills chaptered and recorded.
- *Efficiency* – Statutorily required documents published by the established date.

- *Explanatory* – Aligns with our mission of making government more accessible and transparent.

➤ **COMMUNICATIONS & PUBLICATIONS GOAL B**

Oversee educational, outreach, and constituent programs including all external messaging through website, press releases, social media, etc.

COMMUNICATIONS & PUBLICATIONS OBJECTIVE #B1:

Educate Mississippians on Agency services and other outreach topics.

Outcome: Make government more accessible and transparent via all agency websites.

B1.1 STRATEGY

- *Output* – Number of visits to the Secretary of State's website.
- *Efficiency* – New information added to the website within two days.
- *Explanatory* – To ensure Mississippians have easily accessible and accurate information at their fingertips.

PROGRAM #4 – PUBLIC LANDS

➤ **PUBLIC LANDS GOAL A**

To return fair value for state-owned leased land and ensure that current and future generations have access to the State's abundant natural resources through restoration, protection, conservation, and wise development of those resources.

PUBLIC LANDS OBJECTIVE #A1:

Manage the Public Trust Tidelands, including fast lands and submerged lands, through application of conservation, preservation, and protection policies and principles to preserve and maintain their ecosystems and to prevent their despoliation and destruction.

Outcome: Lease Public Trust Tidelands, where appropriate, to generate revenue for the disbursement by the Legislature through the Department of Marine Resources for programs and projects relating to conservation, reclamation, preservation, acquisition, education, and enhancement of public access to the tidelands.

A1.1 STRATEGY

- *Output* – Number of Tidelands leases managed.
- *Efficiency* – Collection of leasehold rents or assessments within thirty days or assess a late penalty.
- *Efficiency* – Collection of leasehold rents or assessments within ninety days or cancel the lease.
- *Explanatory* – Invoice the "For Rent" leases approximately thirty days before the annual rent due date; lessees have thirty days after the due date to pay without penalty or interest. If not paid within thirty days, the agency invoices the rent and penalty. If not paid within the second thirty days, the agency invoices the second

penalty and gives ten days' notice pursuant to the lease terms that the lease will be canceled absent payment of rent and penalties.

PUBLIC LANDS OBJECTIVE #A2:

Oversee management and leasing of more than 640,000 acres of 16th section public school trust lands by 101 local school districts by working cooperatively with the Mississippi Forestry Commission to manage the timber lands.

Outcome: Conserve, preserve, protect, and manage 16th section public lands in Mississippi.

A2.1 STRATEGY

- *Output* – Publish notices of public bids for hunting and fishing leases, agricultural leases, and mineral leases on 16th section public school trust lands.
- *Output* – Number of 16th section leases managed.
- *Output* – Keep property records up to date on the Secretary of State's Office website at www.sos.ms.gov.
- *Efficiency* – Review of leases with an average turnaround time of less than ten business days.
- *Explanatory* – These outputs help to make sure the agency meets objective A2 by staying current with leases and providing school districts with quick turnaround on lease review.

➤ **PUBLIC LANDS GOAL B**

Return properties forfeited to the State for non-payment of taxes to productive use by generating tax revenue for local tax rolls through the sale to individuals, businesses, or state agencies.

PUBLIC LANDS OBJECTIVE #B1:

Return parcels to productive use on the local tax rolls.

Outcome: Timely and accurately process applications for tax-forfeited land purchases.

B1.1 STRATEGY

- *Output* – Number of tax-forfeited applications processed.
- *Output* – 500 tax-forfeited properties sold.
- *Efficiency* – Tax-forfeited parcels from availability to completed sale and patent within sixty days.
- *Explanatory* – The more tax-forfeited properties sold: the better tax income generated for local government.

PROGRAM #5 – SUPPORT SERVICES

➤ **SUPPORT SERVICES GOAL A**

To create and maintain an environment of support to Agency employees, customers, and vendors, while modeling efficient and effective operations and prudent resource management in support of the functions and duties of the Agency.

SUPPORT SERVICES OBJECTIVE #A1:

Provide administrative and technical support to allow Agency employees to function at the highest level.

Outcome: Agency supported by administrative, executive, and technical staff.

A1.1 STRATEGY

- *Output* – Number of payments processed.
- *Output* – Number of technical services help desk requests resolved.
- *Output* – Number of pieces of mail processed.
- *Output* – Support Services less than or equal to 27% Total Agency Expenditures.
- *Efficiency* – Payments processed within an average of less than ten working days of invoice receipt.
- *Efficiency* – Technical help desk calls answered, and tickets closed within an average of less than five business days.
- *Efficiency* – Mail processed within an average of less than one working day of mailroom receipt.
- *Explanatory* – Percentage of agency staff members supported by the Support Services Division.