



Mississippi Secretary of State's Office
FY 2023 Annual Report



Michael Watson
SECRETARY OF STATE

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As Mississippi's Secretary of State, I'm honored to lead a team that has excelled in its many job functions and responsibilities. I continue to stand amazed at the 100+ agency employees across eight divisions who endlessly work to ensure Mississippi thrives today and for generations to come. Through their efforts, we have achieved many notable accomplishments!

Having a strong and informed Mississippi electorate has been a priority since I took my oath of office. Our Elections, External Affairs, and Publications Divisions have created innovative initiatives to encourage new voter registration and education including the *Elections 101* campaign and the launch of the personalized *My Election Day* online portal. This year, we have registered 57,713 new Mississippi voters and over 260,000 since my tenure began.

To further assist Mississippi's business community, we launched the Tackle the Tape (TTT) initiative in July 2020 and continue to expand its depth and reach. Under the umbrella of our Policy and Research Division, TTT contains four major regulation-reducing components: Occupational Licensing Review Commission votes (110 total), the 29 by 29 strategic review plan, legislative changes, and individual community assistance. While we cannot fully quantify the number of Mississippians who have seen their business doors open or licenses granted, we do know TTT is gaining national attention as it was named the recipient of the 2023 National Association of Secretaries of State IDEAS Award.

As State Lands Commissioner, trustee of the state's tidelands, and a lifetime Mississippian, I continue to uphold my duty to safeguard these resources for our posterity and prosperity. Having created the Conservation Task Force, our team continues to strive for a statewide conservation plan to improve our state's natural resources and utilize them in a responsible manner to better Mississippi. Our External Affairs, Public Lands, and Policy & Research Divisions are leading the charge to build this collaborative network to strengthen relationships and break down silos.

Our office continues to find ways to more efficiently and effectively serve Mississippians. We not only pride ourselves on our long-term investments, but also on the daily services we provide our citizens. We invite you to contact us for any information or assistance needed.



Thank you,

Michael Watson
Secretary of State

The Secretary of State's Office targeted key priorities for Fiscal Year 2023 for each of the eight divisions of the Secretary of State's Office. Details for each of these priorities of the Agency are highlighted within this FY 2023 Annual Report.

ABOUT THE SECRETARY OF STATE'S OFFICE

The Secretary of State's Office was first established in our State's original Constitution in 1817. Over the years, the Office has been entrusted with a number of duties, responsibilities, and functions by the Mississippi State Legislature. The Agency's functions range from the oversight of Gulf Coast Tidelands and 16th Section Lands to scrap metal sales; from the registration of pre-need cemetery plans to the registration of corporations; from conducting training for local election officials to conducting investigations of securities firms and charities.

There are eight divisions within the Secretary of State's Office: Business Services & Regulation, Charities, Publications, Elections, Policy & Research, Public Lands, External Affairs and Securities. In addition, the Agency employs executive and administrative staff which help oversee the various functions of the Office. The Secretary of State's Office is dedicated to being both a service and information agency. Our mission is to make government more accessible, cost-effective and transparent while providing the highest level of customer service.

The Secretary of State's Office has locations across the state to better serve Mississippians. An office within the Capitol building in Jackson receives and records executive documents from the Governor. This is part of the Secretary of State's role as "Keeper of the Capitol." Performance measures for each division are collected and reported quarterly.

OFFICE LOCATIONS

400 High Street, Room 105
Jackson, MS 39201
601-359-3123

1141 Bayview Avenue, Suite 100
Biloxi, MS 39530
228-432-0541

401 Mississippi Street
Jackson, MS 39201
601-359-1350

2844 Traceland Drive, Suite 100
Tupelo, MS 38801
662-844-0194

125 S. Congress Street
Jackson, MS 39201
601-359-1350

5779 Getwell Rd., Bldg. D1
Southaven, MS 38672
662-470-1552



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BUSINESS SERVICES & REGULATION

The Business Services & Regulation Division processes the formation of Mississippi corporations, limited liability companies, limited partnerships, and other business and non-profit entities. The Division regulates and approves all notaries public in the State of Mississippi and administers trademark, service mark, and non-profit laws. It is also tasked with regulating pre-need/perpetual care providers, enforcing scrap metal laws in the State, and overseeing administrative procedures for State government.

CHARITIES

The Charities Division registers charitable organizations and professional fundraisers which solicit contributions in the State, in addition to responding to charities complaints and investigating potential charities fraud.

PUBLICATIONS

The Publications Division is responsible for managing the Agency's overall brand and ensuring accurate information is delivered to the public and press in a timely manner. The Division also produces official State and Agency publications in traditional printed format as well as digital versions downloadable from the SOS website.

ELECTIONS

The Elections Division has many roles in ensuring that Mississippians' voices are heard clearly through the election process. These roles include training elections officials, collecting campaign finance and lobbying reports, managing the statewide voter registry, collecting election returns, and assisting local election officials in carrying out their election-related responsibilities. The Division also supports the Secretary of State in his role as Chief Elections Officer for the State.

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

The External Affairs Division develops partnerships with business development entities in the state to facilitate economic growth, connects the resources of the agency to new and existing Mississippi businesses and forms partnerships with K-12 and IHL for educational purposes.

POLICY & RESEARCH

The Policy & Research Division acts as a research and development arm for the Agency, looking for new ways to streamline services and develop potential legislation.

PUBLIC LANDS

The Public Lands Division has the constitutional and statutory authority for enforcement of the 16th Section Public School Trust Lands and Lieu Lands laws, development and implementation of the Public Trust Tidelands Management Programs, sale of lands forfeited to the State for non-payment of ad valorem taxes, inventory of State agency lands and services to the public and governmental subdivisions relating to sales, acquisitions, leasing, and title of the State's real property assets.

SECURITIES

The Securities Division is responsible for regulating both the sale of securities and the securities professionals who sell them. In addition, the Division works with federal and state prosecuting authorities to investigate and bring charges against violators of the State's securities laws. The Division carries out these functions under the authority granted to it by the Mississippi Securities Act.

BUSINESS SERVICES & REGULATION

The Business Services & Regulation Division provides business-related services to anyone interested in doing business in Mississippi.

BUSINESS SERVICES

STARTING A BUSINESS

The Business Services & Regulation Division is the starting point for many entrepreneurs wishing to conduct business in the State. Consumers can search for a unique business name, check their corporate status, order certified documents, and search other companies. The Division assists with the formation of corporations, limited liability companies, foreign business trusts, limited partnerships, and other business structures. State law determines the structure of each business.

UNIFORM COMMERCIAL CODE

Uniform Commercial Code (UCC) filings are also handled through the Business Services & Regulation Division. These secured transactions are recorded and accessible to financial institutions, governmental agencies, and others engaged in commercial lending and trade.

STATUTORY SERVICES

The Division is also responsible for a wide array of statutory responsibilities, including accepting service of process, recording pesticides, registering carnivals, circuses, polygraph examiners, and recording public official bonds.

TRADEMARKS AND SERVICE MARKS

Trademarks and service marks are recorded and approved through the Business Services & Regulation Division. Recent trademarks legislation proposed by the Secretary of State's Office and adopted by the legislature received international recognition as one of the most forward, aggressive trademark laws in the nation.

CHARTERS AND ANNEXATIONS

The Business Services & Regulation Division also files interlocal agreements and municipal charters, and records annexations for all municipalities.

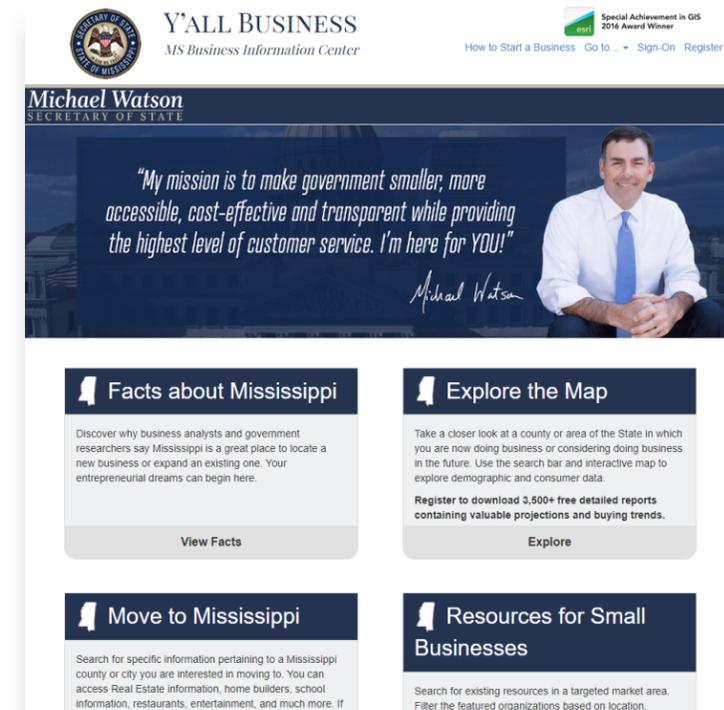
FEE INCOME FY 2023

Corporate Annual Report	\$6,644,000
LLC Annual Reports	\$4,601,500
Uniform Commercial Code	\$2,096,535

78,733	Phone calls for business-related services answered in under 30 seconds by a live person
673,014	Corporate documents and UCC's filed online, making the Division completely paperless
54,888	Formed more than 54,000 new businesses* *Online applications allow citizens to start a business or file an annual report online in a matter of minutes.
641	Issues or renews more than 500 trademarks annually

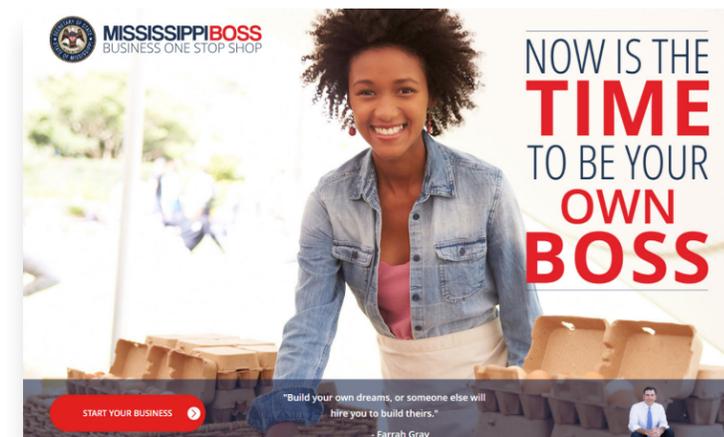
Y'ALL BUSINESS

Y'all Business, a website designed to help small businesses locate or expand in the State of Mississippi, is part of our Agency's continuing effort to promote business in Mississippi. This one-of-a-kind online resource for free Mississippi economic development information includes a mobile interface making it easier to access the site on a cell phone. The website provides a wealth of detailed information you need for your job and your business. Thousands of free business summaries, retail markets, and other reports have been downloaded from the Y'all Business website.



MISSISSIPPI BOSS

Mississippi BOSS (Mississippi Business One-Stop Shop) is a unique tool that is the perfect starting place for Mississippians looking to start a business for the first time. The interactive website walks potential first-time business owners through a series of steps that assist the entrepreneur with everything from choosing the right type of business entity – whether LLC, corporation, or partnership – to alerting the business owner of other state agencies involved in the registration process. As the customer answers the questions in the interactive steps, Mississippi BOSS builds a user profile and helps the customer make essential decisions about their business. The website serves as a helpful resource to aspiring entrepreneurs and first-time business owners.



BUSINESS SERVICES & REGULATION

The Business Services & Regulation Division serves various consumer protection interests with its regulation of pre-need funeral providers, privately-owned cemeteries, and scrap metal dealers and recyclers. These business entities are examined and audited by Division staff to determine if the business is complying with State legislation and regulations designed to protect the consumers' interests. Examinations and audits may be either complaint-based or routine. Violators are subject to administrative fines, suspension of a license, or, in extreme cases, revocation of a license issued by the Division.

REGULATION & ENFORCEMENT

PROTECTING CONSUMERS - PRE-NEED AND CEMETERY PURCHASES

Each year, Mississippi consumers make purchases in the aggregate of approximately \$50 million from funeral homes and cemeteries for pre-need funeral and cemetery goods and services. The purchase of final expense merchandise and services is a unique consumer transaction with the consumer paying for very specific goods and services that will be provided at an undetermined time in the future.

Additionally, consumers usually have limited experience with making such end of life decisions and purchases. For these reasons, the Division is charged with enforcing laws enacted by the Mississippi Legislature to ensure the consumer's funding for pre-need purchases is secure and in place at the time of death and the goods and services meet the level of quality contemplated at the time of purchase.

Closely related to the purchase of pre-need funeral and cemetery goods and services, the Division also monitors and enforces compliance with perpetual care trust laws by for-profit, privately-owned cemeteries. There are 99 for-profit cemeteries in Mississippi which offer and market perpetual care to the public. An important task of the Business Services & Regulation Division is examination of the handling of consumer funds for burial plot purchases to ensure perpetual care trusting required by State law is accomplished. The Division works cases throughout the State to assist consumers.

The Business Services & Regulation Division registers and regulates sellers of pre-need funeral products, perpetual care cemeteries, scrap metal dealers and processors, and athlete agents.

NOTARIES PUBLIC

The Business Services & Regulation Division oversees all notaries public in the State and received over 12,000 notary applications and renewals in FY 2023. The Division investigates all notary complaints. Apostilles and authentications are prepared and attached to documents to verify authenticity or validity. Many of these documents are presented in foreign countries.

FEE INCOME FY 2023

Notaries and Trademarks	\$311,351
Regulation and Enforcement	\$88,400

12,287	Notary applications/renewals and apostille registrations
334	Regulation and Enforcement registrations
340	Regulation and Enforcement examinations/investigations/complaints

RULES AND REGULATIONS

The Business Services & Regulation Division publishes the Mississippi Administrative Bulletin and the Mississippi Administrative Code where all State government rules and regulations are accessible to the public on the Secretary of State's website. The Division supports both public and State agencies with procedural steps for adopting rules and obtaining public comment in the process. For the past year, the Division received and published approximately 850 regulation changes.

ATHLETE AGENTS

Additionally, the Division licenses and monitors the activities of Athlete Agents under the Mississippi Athlete Agent's Act. This Act helps to protect young athletes in the State from falling victim to unscrupulous sports agents who might otherwise attempt to take advantage of an athlete's inexperience when signing with a professional sports agent.

SCRAP METAL DEALERS

In 2008, the Mississippi Legislature tasked the Secretary of State's Office with licensing metal dealers in response to the rampant problem of metal theft throughout the country. All scrap metal dealers who wish to purchase regulated metals must register with the Division and upload information and pictures of all regulated metals purchases to an online database. Division examiners and all law enforcement have access to this database to search for stolen metal property.



SECURITIES

The Securities Division is responsible for enforcing the Mississippi securities laws, as well as the regulation and registration of securities firms, agents, and products.

In addition to enforcing the Mississippi Securities Act, the Securities Division is responsible for the regulation and registration of securities firms, agents, and products, including investment adviser firms. State-level investment adviser firms are those that manage less than \$100 million in customer assets, and this past year, 35 such firms were based in Mississippi and registered with the Division. There were 45 state-firms based in other states that were also registered to do business with Mississippi residents. A total of 1058 SEC-level firms, which are investment advisers that manage more than \$100 million in customer assets, are also notice filed with the Division and can do business in the State. The Division registered 2,591 investment adviser representatives.

In addition, there were 1,336 broker-dealer firms registered in the State (two are Mississippi domiciled and 85 have branches within the State) and 142,222 broker-dealer agents. The Division closed 62 investigations. Other sources for these investigations included complaints and tips of violations from other regulators, investors and the public, exam findings, and registration filings. In addition the Division closed 31 routine exams of broker dealer branches and state-level investment adviser firms.

During FY 2020, the Division added new online filing options through the Electronic Filing Depository: Unit Investment Trusts and Universal Filing Type which includes Registration by Coordination and Qualification, Reg A Tier 2, and Crowdfunding Offerings. This enables firms to more efficiently submit the required documents and enables the Division to reduce the turnaround time for processing these filings. Filings utilizing this online option continues to increase and in FY 2023 the Division processed 25,618 filings in total.

During FY 2023, the Division collected \$8,884,986 in offering-related filings, and \$9,303,200 in registration filings for securities professionals and firms.

The Securities Division protects investors in the State from unscrupulous organizations using the most up-to-date securities laws in the nation.

Under Miss. Code Ann. § 75-71-413, broker-dealers and investment advisers must report suspected financial exploitation of a vulnerable adult to the Securities Division. Once the suspected exploitation is reported, the statute provides safe-harbor protection for the firms to delay transactions within accounts of the vulnerable adult. This is a needed protection while the Division and the Department of Human Services work together to investigate the allegation.

The Secretary of State's Office is focused on investor protection and in FY 2023, the Division worked 16 vulnerable adult cases.

FEE INCOME FY 2023

Securities		\$18,839,108
\$18,188,186	Amount of revenue collected in offering-related filings, registration filings for securities professionals and firms, and administrative enforcement cases	
25,618	Offering-related filings	
127	Administrative enforcement case	
35	State-based investment adviser firms now registered with the Secretary of State's Office	
62	Closed investigations, which included possible securities laws violations	
1,336	Broker-dealer firms registered in the State	

CHARITIES

Through enforcement of the Mississippi Charitable Solicitation Act, the Mississippi Secretary of State's Charities Division is responsible for protecting donors in the State by ensuring their hard-earned dollars are used for the purpose intended.

THE CHARITIES ACT

The Charities Act requires the registration of every nonprofit soliciting contributions and having fundraisers with the Charities Division. The Charities Act does allow certain organizations to be exempted from this registration requirement. However, this exemption is not automatic. The organization must request the exemption by submitting the online notice of exemption form.

The Charities Act not only strengthens the Agency's ability to enforce laws against dishonest charities, but also gives the Charities Division the authority to subpoena witnesses and documents during investigations and to bring actions in Chancery Court to stop illegal activities, collect fines, and remove charitable corporate status. Through the strong enforcement of the Charities Act, Mississippi donors can have more confidence in their charitable giving. Citizens are able to check the status of charities by clicking the "Search Charities" on the Charities Home Page located on the website.

To protect Mississippi donors, a key priority of the Agency is to make it more difficult for organizations to misappropriate charitable dollars. The Agency will continue working with charitable organizations in the state to maximize the amount of funds allocated for actual charitable purposes. Increasing the transparency in charitable organizations and providing this information to Mississippians allows our citizens to have peace of mind in charitable giving.

The Charities Division protects Mississippi donors from unscrupulous charities who might prey on our citizens.

FOR YOUR PROTECTION

Under "Search Charities," the percentage of funds spent on all expenses are listed (program services, fundraising, and administrative). The Charities Renewal Filing Date is same as charity filing date with the Internal Revenue Service. Armed with the most up-to-date Charities laws in the nation to protect Mississippians, charity complaints can be filed with the Division on the Secretary of State's website.

CHECK YOUR CHARITY

An annual #CheckYourCharity campaign lets you know how your donations are spent. The Charities Division encourages Mississippians to check their supported charities with the Secretary of State's Office before they donate. The Charities Division can serve as a valuable resource in vetting disaster relief charities after devastations caused by hurricanes, tornadoes, and other disasters. Donors can check the registration status and financial practice of disaster relief charities before donating.

FEE INCOME FY 2023

Charities		\$543,820
12,144	Total number of Charities registered or exempted with the Charities Division	
7,188	Charity registrations/filings (initial and renewal) and exemptions processed	
154	Charities examinations, investigations, and complaints completed	
540	Charities legal actions	

ELECTIONS

The role of the Elections Division continues to include training county and municipal election officials, providing elections-related support to the counties and municipalities, receiving election returns, assisting local elections officials in carrying out their election-related responsibilities, and collecting campaign finance and lobbying reports.

Y'ALL VOTE

The Y'all Vote website is an online voter information center aimed at preparing voters to cast a ballot on Election Day. Information on election dates, voter registration, military voters, voter ID, and more can all be found on the Y'all Vote website (yallvote.ms).

Mississippi voters are able to:

- Electronically update name and address information online
- Determine whether they are registered to vote
- Locate their polling place



CAMPAIGN FINANCE

The Elections Division receives campaign finance reports from candidates and Political Action Committees (PACs). Candidates and PACs may file by user-friendly Excel spreadsheets that allows users to input contributions and disbursements over time. Additionally, contributions and disbursements may also be manually typed on the forms specifically for each reporting period. These forms are available on our website. All reports filed are searchable by candidate or PAC name. Campaign finance reports, reporting schedules, and late-filers may be viewed online by the general public on the Secretary of State's website.

8,962	Voter IDs issued as of June 30, 2023
3,509	Campaign finance reports
1,358	Voter registration updates via secure online website
821,000	Of the 1,923,745 registered voters cast a ballot for Governor in the 2023 General Election
18 observers	In 43 counties in the 2023 General Election
17 observers	In 44 counties in the 2023 Primary Election

LOBBYIST REGISTRATION

Mississippi law requires all lobbyists to register with the Secretary of State's Office in order to conduct business in the State. Lobbyists' and Lobbyists' Clients reports may be viewed online by the general public on the Secretary of State's website.

CERTIFICATION OF ELECTION RESULTS

The Secretary of State's Office is responsible for certifying statewide elections and multi-county elections.

SEMS

The Elections Division works with election officials of counties and municipalities to assist in maintaining a statewide voter registration database, known as the Statewide Elections Management System, or "SEMS." The Division provides education and the tools available to the appropriate election officials in order to maintain accurate voter rolls.

TRAINING

The Elections Division provides certification programs and continuing education training programs to county and municipal Election Commissioners and executive committees. Training programs address substantive law as well as technical aspects of the Statewide Elections Management System and the Statewide Voting Machine System. Training is provided to election officials on how to operate specific voting devices, as well as how to train individual poll managers for Election Day responsibilities. The Division is focused on utilizing current technology, such as webinars and online poll manager training, to make our training accessible to election officials throughout the State.

The Elections Division works for fair, unbiased elections through accountability and training as Mississippi citizens exercise their right to vote.

82-COUNTY TOUR

Upon taking office, Secretary Watson made a commitment to meet with Circuit Clerks and Election Commissioners in all 82 counties. The goal of the tour was to build strong relationships, discuss voting-related issues and brainstorm ideas to help strengthen the overall elections process. The Secretary completed the tour in February 2023 with his last visit at his home county, Jackson County.



FEE INCOME FY 2023

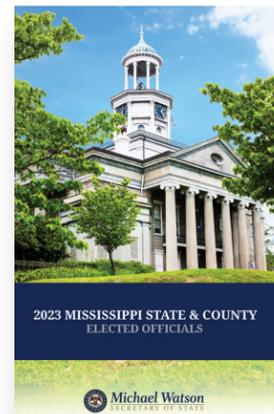
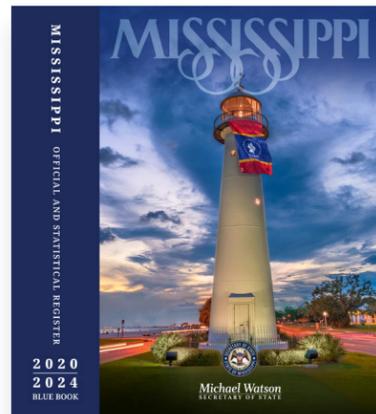
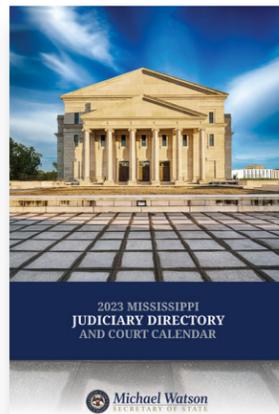
Lobbying Registrations, Civil Penalties from Lobbying, Candidate Qualifying Fees		TOTAL: \$ 44,375
3,236	Lobbying reports	
1,346	County and Municipal Election Officials trained	
594	Poll Workers completed online training	

PUBLICATIONS

The Publications Division is responsible for managing the Agency’s overall brand and ensuring accurate information is delivered to the public and press in a timely manner. The Division also produces official State and Agency publications in traditional printed format as well as digital versions downloadable from the SOS website.

PUBLICATIONS

- AGENCY BROCHURES
- BLUE BOOK
- CHARITIES REPORT
- GENERAL LAWS
- GUIDE TO THE MAGNOLIA STATE
- HOUSE JOURNAL
- JUDICIARY DIRECTORY AND COURT CALENDAR
- LOCAL AND PRIVATE LAWS
- MY MISSISSIPPI COLORING BOOK
- SENATE JOURNAL
- STATE & COUNTY ELECTED OFFICIALS DIRECTORY



STAY CONNECTED
 Facebook: @MississippiSecretaryOfState
 Twitter: @MississippiSOS
 Instagram: @Mississippi_SOS

9,890,800	Number of visits to the Secretary of State’s website (includes visits to Y’all Vote)
107,803	Number of visits to the Y’all Business website
116	Number of press releases issued
27	Agency publications produced

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

The External Affairs Division develops partnerships with business development entities in the state to facilitate economic growth, connects the resources of the agency to new and existing Mississippi businesses, forms partnerships with K-12 and IHL for educational purposes, and outreach for legislative affairs.



Promote the Vote is an annual, nonpartisan voter education program sponsored by the Secretary of State’s Office to educate Mississippi students in Kindergarten through Grade 12 about the political process and civic duties. The 2023 theme, "Voting-The Power to Change the Future!" encourages students to realize the impact voting has for today and generations to come. In March 2023, students from across the state were selected as 2022 Promote the Vote contest winners and recognized during a special awards ceremony at the Two Mississippi Museums.



In January of 2022, the Welcome to Business Webinars were launched in cooperation with the Mississippi Small Business Development Centers (SBDC) and the Mississippi Development Authority (MDA) to give new businesses the opportunity to learn about the free resources available through the Secretary of State’s Office and other state entities to help their business succeed. These bi-monthly 60-minute live webinars introduce new startups to free resources available in Mississippi. In March of 2023, the Secretary of State’s Office was awarded the prestigious International Merit Award by IACA for this initiative.



The Mississippi Secretary of State Student Ambassador Program is a cooperative program between high school seniors and the Secretary of State’s Office. Through the program, students with a passion for leadership and state government are equipped to return to their schools as proponents of voter education and awareness. Participants attended a one-day fall semester summit at the Mississippi State Capitol, along with visits to the University of Mississippi and University of Southern Mississippi’s Marine Research Center. Students who complete the program will get a first-hand account of state government in action. This year, 67 students were selected from 42 counties and 47 schools.

MS SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CENTER/UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI MCLEAN INSTITUTE STARTUP EVENTS

External Affairs partners with the Mississippi Small Business Development Centers (SBDC) and the University of Mississippi McLean institute to conduct training events for potential new business owners in economically disadvantaged areas of the state. Participants are taken step by step through the process of registering their business and filing their annual report with the Secretary of State’s Office and the additional resources available on our site.

CEU PROGRAM FOR EDUCATORS

External Affairs has partnered with the Mississippi Council on Economic Education and the University of Southern Mississippi to provide training and curriculum for teachers based on our MS Boss and Y’all Business platforms. Three training events have been conducted in 2023 with educators from across the state.

CONSERVATION TASK FORCE

In November 2021, the Division launched the Conservation Task Force (CTF) comprised of conservation leaders and experts from 25 organizations in the public and private sectors. The goal of the CTF is to promote and enhance conservation efforts through strategic planning, responsible funding, and education. The CTF met twice in 2023 and there were several sub-group meetings discussing the timber industry and the Sackett v EPA ruling. CTF stakeholders are also heavily involved in the Mississippi Outdoor Stewardship Trust Fund.

BROADWATER MARINA RESTORATION PROJECT

The historic Broadwater Marina is 30 acres of prime public trust tidelands property in Biloxi, MS. The marina was destroyed by Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and has received subsequent damage from coastal hurricanes in recent years. The External Affairs division put together grant requests and was awarded \$8.7 million in funding to restore the marina to a state of safe public access and to incentivize further economic development on the site. Construction is slated to begin in early 2024 and should be completed in 2025.

PUBLIC LANDS

The Public Lands Division continues to fulfill the constitutional and statutory duties regarding the stewardship of 16th Section Public School Trust Lands and Lieu Lands, the Public Trust Tidelands, and Tax-Forfeited properties.

16TH SECTION LANDS

The Secretary of State serves as supervisory trustee overseeing the management and leasing of more than 640,000 acres of 16th Section Public School Trust Lands by 99 local school districts. The Public Lands Division strives to improve leasing practices on 16th Section Lands.

The Division maintains a map on the Agency website showing the approximate location of all hunting and fishing leases across the State, with rental information and contact information for managing school boards.

The Agency website also publishes public bid notices for hunting and fishing leases, agricultural leases, sales of timber and other forest products, and oil and gas leases.

The Secretary of State's Office and Mississippi Forestry Commission maintain a cooperative partnership with local school districts to manage timber assets. The Division maintains pre-sale inventories of timber sold by lump-sum sale, monitors current timber harvest operations, inspects properties for proper usage and waste, and assists businesses by emerging markets for renewable energy in determining the availability and type of resources available on public school trust lands.

FEE INCOME FY 2023

<table border="1"> <tr> <td>Tidelands</td> <td>\$13,072,064</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Tidelands Assessment</td> <td>\$3,020,060</td> </tr> </table>		Tidelands	\$13,072,064	Tidelands Assessment	\$3,020,060
Tidelands	\$13,072,064				
Tidelands Assessment	\$3,020,060				
14,318	16th Section Land leases				
\$56.3 million	Revenues from 16th Section leases* <i>*All 16th Section land revenue stays with the local school district.</i>				
\$24.8 million	Revenue from surface leasing				
\$11.0 million	Sales of timber/forest products				
\$6.26 million	Oil and gas royalty payments				
94	94 school districts reporting for FY 2023* <i>*The Public Lands Division strives to improve leasing practices for 16th Section land in order to receive the maximum rate of return for schools.</i>				

PUBLIC TRUST TIDELANDS

Public Trust Tidelands and submerged lands are under water lands naturally subject to tidal influence. The inland boundary is the mean high tide line established over 19-years epochs, and the seaward boundary is the State boundary, approximately 10 miles south of the barrier islands. These Tidelands are owned by the State in trust for the citizens of Mississippi. The Secretary of State is the trustee of this great public trust.

It is declared to be the public policy of this State to favor the preservation of the natural trust of the public tidelands and their ecosystems and to prevent the despoliation and destruction of them, except where a specific alteration of specific public trust tidelands would serve a higher public interest in compliance with the public purpose of the public trust in which such tidelands are held. (Miss. Code Ann. § 29-15-3)

With regard to the Public Trust Tidelands and submerged lands held by the State in trust, the focus of the Division is to:

- Protect public use and public access
- Acquire property for preservation and protection in the coastal preserve system
- Support the restoration of degraded public wetlands
- Develop the use of Public Trust Tidelands for recreational and educational purposes which meet the higher purpose for which the trust was established



Secretary of State Michael Watson, on behalf of the Gulf Coast legislative delegation, presented Mississippi Department of Marine Resources Executive Director Joe Spraggins with a check for \$11,455,247 representing the Public Trust tidelands Fund and Public Trust Assessment Fund total for Fiscal Year 2023.

Revenue for the Tidelands Trust Fund is generated by leases on lands owned by the State in trust for the people of Mississippi, and assessment for onshore gaming operations. Generated funds are disbursed to MDMR to be spent by the legislature for programs and projects geared toward conservation, reclamation, and preservation of Mississippi's tidelands, and the increase of public access areas on the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

PUBLIC LANDS

TAX-FORFEITED PROPERTY

All properties for which ad valorem taxes are past due are subject to sale by the county in which the lands are located. Any lands not purchased at the local tax sale are stricken from local tax rolls, and transferred to the State, subject to sale by the Secretary of State's Office pursuant to applicable statutes. The Secretary of State's Office works to sell these lands and return parcels to productive use. Through private ownership, these lands once again produce property tax revenues for the counties and municipalities in which they are located. Currently, the State holds more than 9,000 tax-forfeited lands valued at approximately \$40 million.

ONLINE AUCTIONS

Online bidding on tax-forfeited property auctions is available on the Secretary of State's website. To place a bid, the user must register online. Users are able to view property details such as parcel location, pictures, and an auction map. Other information such as auction dates, bid notices, and bid amounts are also available. Successful bidders are notified by email.

The "Buy It Now" feature allows bidders to pay a "Buy It Now" price on any parcel in order to purchase a property immediately instead of waiting until the end of the auction.

FEE INCOME FY 2023

Land Sales (Tax-Forfeited) **\$2,989,325**
 Land Sales Application Fees (Tax-Forfeited) **\$33,436**

12,000	Tax-Forfeited applications processed
1,800	Tax-Forfeited patents issued
\$3 million	More than \$3 million in FY 2023 property sales* <small>*Tax-forfeited lands can be transferred to governmental entities without cost for public use.</small>

AGENCY LANDS

The continued goal of the Public Lands Division is to provide the members of the legislature, agency officials, county officials, and the general public accurate land information to allow proper utilization and management, and, where the legislature deems appropriate, transfer parcels so they may be transitioned back onto the county property rolls.

An inventory of tax-forfeited lands owned by the State is available on the Secretary of State's website at sos.ms.gov.



POLICY & RESEARCH

The Policy and Research Division is the research and development engine of the Mississippi Secretary of State's Office. The Division develops potential legislation, coordinates partnerships and innovative solutions to challenges facing the State, oversees the Public Records Request process, directs the Agency's involvement in the Occupational Licensing Review Commission, and supports the Conservation Task Force.

The Division developed legislation adopted by the Mississippi legislature during the 2023 regular session to reform laws governing election integrity, the runoff process, campaign finance reporting, business services, and land records preservation as summarized below.

HOUSE BILLS

HOUSE BILL 1101

Amended sections of Title 79 of the Mississippi Code of 1972 to allow our Business Services division to serve determination notices and certificates of administrative dissolution on corporations and limited liability companies by email to the registered agent as indicated.

HOUSE BILL 1276

Amended sections of Title 23 and Title 7 of the Mississippi Code of 1972 to provide a runoff mechanism, which would conform to the mandate in the amended version of Miss. Const. Section 140.

HOUSE BILL 1306

Amended sections of Title 23 of the Mississippi Code of 1972 to accomplish three things. The law expands penalties for noncompliance with campaign finance laws to all offices, including candidates who lose their elections. The law also rectifies a legal inconsistency by eliminating the mandate that judicial candidates file annual reports on election years. It also creates a penalty for the fraudulent request for absentee ballots by classifying such as "vote fraud".

HOUSE BILL 1310

Created, deleted, and amended sections of Title 23 of the Mississippi Code of 1972 to authorize the Secretary of State to audit election procedures in the general elections of 2023, 2024, 2026, and 2027. The law allocated monies from the Elections Support Fund to fund cybersecurity measures to protect election integrity and voter information. The bill created a mechanism for cleaning voter rolls and amended the voters' proof of citizenship law passed in 2022 to ensure the entire statewide election management system is reviewed and voter privacy is upheld.

SENATE BILLS

SENATE BILL 2514

Amended sections of Title 7 of the Mississippi Code of 1972 to clarify the authority of the Secretary of State to transfer land records to the Department of Archives and History to ensure proper record preservation.



The Secretary of State's Office continued to create meaningful change for small businesses and consumers through the Tackle the Tape initiative, which sets out to cut regulations that are anti-competitive and do not substantially further the safety of Mississippi citizens. The Agency has always served as a premier resource for the business community, and Secretary Watson understands the impact burdensome red tape has on the state's economy.

Since launching the Tackle the Tape initiative in July of 2020, the Secretary of State's Office has seen tremendous success in regulation reform. To ensure efficient review of all 118,000+ regulations in Mississippi's regulatory code, the Division implemented a comprehensive strategic plan called "29 by 29." This plan serves as a roadmap within the Tackle the Tape initiative with an end goal of reviewing every regulation for all 29 occupational licensing boards and commissions by the year 2029. The Secretary of State's Office and its partners conducted a joint evaluation of the regulations using metrics like fines, fee structure, and penalties. The Mississippi State Board of Cosmetology, the Mississippi State Board of Barber Examiners, and the Mississippi State Board of Architecture were the three boards evaluated in 2022, and the Division made recommendations for removal of regulatory burdens to each board and to the Occupational Licensing Review Commission. Under 29 by 29, the Agency and its partners will examine the regulations of the Mississippi Board of Nursing, Mississippi Board of Public Accountancy, and the Mississippi Board of Examiners for Licensed Professional Counselors this fiscal year.

TACKLE THE TAPE

Michael Watson
SECRETARY OF STATE

THE PLAN THE TAPE THE STATS THE SUCCESS REPORT A REGULATION

Rid the RED in Mississippi

Tackle the Tape sets out to cut regulations that are anticompetitive and do not substantially further the safety and well-being of our citizens. The Secretary of State's Office has always served as a premier resource for the business community, and Secretary Michael Watson understands the impact burdensome red tape regulations have on our state's economy. Tackle the Tape will help increase economic opportunities for all Mississippians by promoting competition and encouraging innovation and job growth.

THE PLAN

29 by 29

To efficiently review all 118,000 regulations in Mississippi's regulatory code, we have outlined a comprehensive strategic plan called 29 by 29.

This review plan will serve as a roadmap within the Tackle the Tape initiative with an end goal of reviewing every regulation for all 29 occupational licensing boards and commissions by the year 2029. Click [here](#) to see the full plan.

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Michael Watson
SECRETARY OF STATE

Dedicated to being both a service and information agency.