

WEEKLY REPORT

MISSISSIPPI LEGISLATURE RETURNS TO PACKED WEEK AMID STORM RECOVERY

Last week marked one of the busiest stretches of the 2026 session, so far. Committee rooms were packed as chairmen and members worked to move bills ahead of tomorrow's key deadline. With general bills required to pass out of committee by tomorrow, the pace will only increase from here. PBM reform, the Medicaid Tech bill, several "debanking" proposals, and a handful of other high-profile measures have not yet come before committee. But if they do and pass before end of day on February 3, they will become some of the most hotly debated bills of the session. Meanwhile, the state is still recovering from the winter storm that hit much of North Mississippi, affecting travel, utilities, and agency operations. The work of government hasn't slowed, but the storm's impact continues to be felt.

HB 3 AWAITS GOVERNOR REEVES SIGNATURE

The CON reform bill passed both chambers unanimously and now heads to the governor's desk. HB 3 excludes language from last year's vetoed bill that would have granted a Certificate of Need to a specific behavioral health hospital in Jackson. The revised bill raises the cost thresholds that trigger CON review and limits the University of Mississippi Medical Center's exemption to its main campus and the Jackson Medical Mall. Lawmakers said they plan to continue working on broader CON reform proposals this session, especially to address rural hospital needs. The Governor has until February 4th to sign the bill.

FEDERAL COURT STRIKES DOWN MISSISSIPPI'S HOME HEALTH MORATORIUM

In a significant decision, U.S. District Judge Carlton Reeves ruled this week that Mississippi's longstanding moratorium on new home health agency licenses is unconstitutional. The court found that the state's refusal to even consider applications violated the 14th Amendment's Due Process Clause.

The lawsuit was brought by Charles Slaughter, a licensed physical therapist who sought to open a home health agency but was blocked by a statutory moratorium in place since 1983. Mississippi law had prohibited the Department of Health from issuing any new Certificates of Need (CONs) for home health agencies during that period, with no formal review process available.

The court struck down both the relevant statute and administrative rule that codified the moratorium. While the case focused on home health services, the opinion noted that the moratorium language applied to multiple types of "health care facilities" as defined by state law.

The broader implications for other facility types remain to be seen. The state has not yet indicated whether it will appeal the decision.

TECHNOLOGY, CYBERSECURITY, AND ONLINE SAFETY LEGISLATION

The House Technology committee met last week and advanced several technology and cybersecurity-related bills, reflecting continued legislative focus on election security, artificial intelligence, and statewide IT modernization.

House Bill [1619](#), the Walker Montgomery Children's Online Safety Act, was opened for the purpose of future consideration. Lawmakers indicated the bill is being held in place in the event a future U.S. Supreme Court ruling prompts states to revisit children's online safety standards.

House Bill [1687](#), requested by the Secretary of State, would establish uniform cybersecurity standards for election systems statewide, with a compliance deadline initially set for January 2027. The bill directs the use of available federal funds to assist counties with required cybersecurity audits. An amendment adopted by the House extends the compliance timeline by an additional year to allow more time for implementation.

House Bill [1723](#) establishes a statutory definition of artificial intelligence intended to provide clarity and consistency, though many caution that fixed definitions may struggle to keep pace with rapidly evolving AI technologies and could create unintended implementation challenges.

House Bill [1724](#) updates state information technology governance by modernizing how IT services are managed across agencies. The legislation establishes an IT optimization bond to support and expand shared services, providing agencies with a practical funding path to adopt enterprise-level systems, improve interoperability, and reduce long-term costs.

House Bill [1727](#) establishes a centralized Cyber Security Operations Center to strengthen Mississippi's overall cybersecurity posture. The bill creates a unified statewide operating model for threat detection, monitoring, and incident response, while separating strategic policy oversight from day-to-day operations. It requires all state agencies to promptly report suspected cybersecurity incidents and cooperate with the operations center on monitoring, response, and remediation. Supporters say the approach is designed to improve coordination, accountability, and baseline security standards across state government.

HIGHER ED COMMITTEE EYES FINANCIAL AID UPDATES, NONTRADITIONAL STUDENT SUPPORT

SB [2368](#) and SB [2522](#) both passed out of the Senate Universities and Colleges Committee this week. SB 2368 would broaden eligibility for the HELP Grant by removing an outdated curriculum requirement, expected to open the program to about 20 more students. SB 2522 would establish the "Upskill Mississippi" program, a new last-dollar grant aimed at helping working adults over 24 earn credentials in high-need technical fields. Another bill, SB [2344](#), would require all community college and IHL students to complete a financial literacy module before graduation. The goal is to help students manage loan debt, understand credit, and build a foundation for financial independence.

HOUSE AND SENATE ADVANCE SCHOOL CELLPHONE RESTRICTIONS

Momentum is building behind cellphone bans in Mississippi classrooms. The Senate Education Committee passed [SB 2099](#), which would require each district to adopt a cellphone restriction policy. A similar measure cleared the House Education Committee this week. Supporters cited studies linking phone use to distraction and mental health concerns. Lawmakers pointed to local examples, like Marshall County, where locking pouches led to stronger student engagement. If passed, Mississippi would join more than 30 states with classroom cellphone limits.



CAMPAIGN FINANCE OVERHAUL GETS A PUSH

Secretary of State Michael Watson and Senator Jeremy England are championing [SB 2558](#), which would make Mississippi's new online campaign finance filing system mandatory starting in 2027. The bill also limits cash and corporate contributions and requires campaign bank accounts to be registered with the Secretary of State's office. Watson said recent scandals in Jackson and the Delta show the need for greater transparency. Enforcement authority would shift from the Ethics Commission to the Secretary of State and Attorney General's offices. The bill passed out of the Senate elections committee and now heads to the full Senate for a vote.

BILL TARGETING OPIOID SETTLEMENT CONFLICTS ADVANCES

Senator Mike Seymour introduced [SB 2889](#) that would prohibit members of the Mississippi Opioid Settlement Fund Advisory Council from influencing funding decisions that benefit organizations they are affiliated with. The change follows criticism last year that several members lobbied for grants tied to their own employers. While current rules prevent voting on those grants, the new bill would bar lobbying and indirect influence altogether. Supporters say the change is necessary to restore trust in the \$300 million fund's allocation process.

PUSH TO ELECT ALL SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS ADVANCES IN THE HOUSE

Legislation that would require all school board members in Mississippi to be elected rather than appointed is moving forward. HB [1292](#), authored by Rep. Jansen Owen, passed out of the House Education Committee this week. The bill also includes a new provision allowing the public to remove school board members through a recall vote.

Under current law, many school boards in the state are made up of appointed members, either by local boards of supervisors or city councils. Some districts use a hybrid model, with a mix of elected and appointed members. Owen's bill would standardize the process, requiring all members statewide to stand for election every four years, timed with either a presidential or statewide cycle.

The bill now heads to the House floor for debate. Similar efforts have stalled in past years but are gaining momentum amid growing parent involvement in education issues.

WORKFORCE AND CHILDCARE SUPPORT EXPANSION

The Senate Economic and Workforce Development Committee advanced [SB 2419](#), which expands the duties of the Office of Workforce Development to include the creation and oversight of a new Employee Childcare Tuition Assistance Partnership Program. The bill does not appropriate specific funds but gives the office clear authority to design and manage a program that could help employees afford childcare. The goal is to address workforce barriers tied to childcare costs, a growing concern for employers and working families alike. The legislation builds on Mississippi's existing workforce structure without altering its governance, and continues the office's recent focus on career coaching, industry training, and labor participation.

MIDWIFERY SCOPE OF PRACTICE BILLS FILED

[HB 418](#) and [SB 2553](#) would change current law by eliminating the requirement that certified nurse midwives maintain written collaborative agreements with physicians, allowing them to practice independently. Proponents argue that the change could affect access to maternity care in certain parts of the state, particularly in rural areas with limited obstetric services. Opponents have raised concerns in prior sessions about patient safety, care coordination, and the removal of physician oversight in higher-risk pregnancies. Similar proposals have not advanced in previous years, though the issue has resurfaced this session alongside broader discussions about maternal health outcomes and pending legal challenges to existing licensure requirements.

BALLOT INITIATIVE FRAMEWORK RETURNS, BUT PATH UNCLEAR

[SB 2919](#) brings forward all code sections related to the state's defunct ballot initiative process, likely as a placeholder for eventual amendment. Since the Mississippi Supreme Court struck down the initiative process in 2021, restoring it has been a recurring legislative promise. This year may offer the best shot in some time, but tensions remain over signature thresholds, eligible topics, and whether initiatives can change statutes or the Constitution. Senate Elections Chairman Jeremy England has taken a lead role, proposing a 10 percent signature requirement drawn from all four congressional districts. The House may counter with a lower threshold or broader scope. Whether lawmakers can compromise before the end of session remains to be seen.

GOVERNOR REEVES ISSUES WINTER STORM UPDATE

Governor Tate Reeves provided an update over the weekend as the state continued its response to the severe winter weather that impacted large portions of Mississippi. State officials confirmed 23 storm-related deaths across multiple counties.

Conditions across the state have begun to improve as temperatures trend upward. Utility crews and state and local partners continue restoration and recovery efforts, with progress being made as conditions allow. Counties across Mississippi have submitted requests for assistance, and the state continues to coordinate personnel and resources to support local response needs.

The Mississippi Department of Transportation continues monitoring and treating state-maintained roads where needed. Motorists are encouraged to remain cautious and check current conditions through the MDOT Traffic app or at MDOTtraffic.com.

The Governor has extended the Mississippi National Guard deployment to support ongoing recovery efforts. Guard members remain engaged in a range of missions, including road clearance, logistical support, and assistance to local governments.

State agencies and volunteer organizations continue coordinated recovery operations, providing medical support, debris removal, welfare checks, feeding operations, and other critical services as communities transition from response to recovery.



LOOKING AHEAD

This week marks one of the most critical deadlines of the 2026 session. Tuesday, February 3, is the final day for general bills and constitutional amendments to be reported out of their original committees. Bills that do not make it out by the deadline are effectively dead for the year. As legislation moves out of committee, it is added to the House and Senate calendars, which list bills that have advanced to the floor but have not yet been taken up. You can find those calendars [here](#). Floor debate will begin to ramp up shortly thereafter, with original floor action required by Thursday, February 12.

As always, Clare and the team are keeping a close eye on the bills that matter to you. In the meantime, we continue to pray for all those affected by last week's storm. Our thoughts are with our friends in North Mississippi.
