



2026

Policy Agenda

Mississippi Legislative Black Caucus Values Statement

As a caucus, we are united by our commitment to serve the people who sent us here. We listen, we collaborate, and we respect one another, knowing our strength is in our shared purpose. We act with integrity, keep our promises, and work to ensure equity and inclusion in all we do. We speak openly, stand courageously for our values, and bring fresh ideas to the table. Above all, we honor the trust placed in us by using our time, influence, and resources to make a lasting difference.

Vision Statement

A state where Black Mississippians thrive through effective leadership and equitable policymaking that strengthens communities, protects rights, and ensures dignity and opportunity for every generation.

Mission Statement

The mission of the Caucus is to represent, serve, and advocate for legislation and issues of public policy that impact the well-being of Black Mississippians - creating and expanding pathways to equitable, just, and accessible opportunities to thrive.

2025–2027 MLBC Executive Officers

- **Chair:** *Rep. Kabir Karriem*
- **Vice Chair:** *Sen. Rod Hickman*
- **Treasurer:** *Rep. Oscar Denton*
- **Secretary:** *Rep. Zakiya Summers*
- **Assistant Secretary:** *Rep. Tamarra Grace Butler-Washington*
- **Parliamentarian:** *Rep. John Faulkner*
- **Sergeant at Arms:** *Rep. Robert Sanders*
- **Chaplain:** *Sen. Gary Brumfield*

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Advancing Education Equity and Protecting Public Schools

Emphasizing pre-K and childcare access and defending public funding for public education.

Preparing the next generation of Mississippians for success is essential to the state's economic future and community well-being. Ensuring that every child—regardless of where they live—has access to high-quality education is a longstanding priority of the Mississippi Legislative Black Caucus (MLBC).

Education and workforce development span the full continuum of learning and preparation, from early childhood programs to K–12 public schools, higher education, career training, and adult skills development. Across this continuum, Mississippi faces shared challenges: teacher shortages, resource inequities, school performance disparities, and gaps in access to information about available academic supports.

As Mississippi works to build a skilled workforce capable of meeting the needs of a changing economy, education and workforce development must remain tightly connected. From fully funding the new student formula to expanding postsecondary pathways and workforce training, MLBC continues to focus on policies that ensure every student has the opportunity, support, and preparation needed to succeed in school, careers, and life. Our charge is clear: To defend public education by rejecting any form of school choice and prioritizing equitable investment in Mississippi's public school system.

Specific measures include support for after school programs, remediation services in schools, (re)instituting civics and financial literacy curriculum, literacy coaches for grades 4-8, school building assessments, full funding of drivers' education, addressing conflict resolution and parental accountability strategies, prohibiting hair discrimination in schools with The Crown Act, and strengthening opportunities within STEM with the utilization of AI.

Reforming the Criminal Legal System

Promoting justice, fairness, and rehabilitation throughout Mississippi's courts and correctional systems.

Mississippi's criminal justice system continues to produce harsh and disproportionate outcomes, particularly for Black Mississippians. MLBC is committed to reforming sentencing practices—especially habitual offender laws and juvenile life-without-parole cases—and expanding release opportunities for individuals convicted of nonviolent offenses. The caucus further supports improving facilities to ensure safe, humane conditions and reforming marijuana laws to reflect changes in Mississippi's medical cannabis program by treating simple possession as a civil, not criminal, offense, while opposing any action to abolish cash bail.

These reforms reflect a commitment to fairness, proportionality, and rehabilitation while also reducing the long-term social and economic harms caused by over-incarceration.

Expanding Access to Quality, Affordable Healthcare

Ensuring comprehensive, affordable healthcare for all Mississippians with special emphasis on Black Maternal Health.

Mississippi ranks last or near last in most major health indicators, with the nation's highest infant mortality rate and persistent disparities in maternal and child health. Lack of insurance, hospital closures, provider shortages, and maternity care deserts contribute to poor outcomes, particularly among Black women and Black infants. MLBC prioritizes expanding comprehensive, affordable healthcare statewide—including prenatal, postpartum, mental health, and chronic disease care—and addressing inequities in access and quality.

Black maternal health remains a core focus. MLBC highlights the urgent need for strengthened perinatal care systems, implicit-bias training, improved behavioral health supports, and investments that reduce preventable maternal and infant deaths. Ensuring equitable access to high-quality care is essential to creating a healthier and more just Mississippi.

Increasing Workforce Participation and Opportunity

Creating pathways to employment, job training, and economic mobility.

Education and workforce development must function as a continuous pipeline that equips Mississippians for a changing economy. MLBC supports expanding career and technical education, enhancing postsecondary pathways, strengthening adult skills training, and ensuring that workforce programs are aligned with high-demand industries across the state.

Economic justice is also central to workforce opportunity. The caucus will continue to advance efforts to increase the minimum wage, establish child care tax credits, and utilize TANF to prepare recipients to successfully participate in the workforce through adequate training and skills development supplement child care assistance, and create summer work programs for youth and young adults.

Rectifying Budget Inequities and Ensuring Equitable Resource Allocation

Building a state budget that reflects and supports the priorities of Black Mississippians.

Mississippi's budget must reflect the needs of the people it serves. MLBC advocates for equitable allocation of state resources, particularly in communities that have historically faced disinvestment. The caucus has emphasized the need for equity in education funding formulas, HBCU appropriations, infrastructure investments, childcare funding, TANF administration, and community-based services.

Ongoing concerns about the misuse of TANF dollars underscore the need for transparent, community-centered budget oversight. MLBC proposes the creation of a governing board to ensure TANF and CCDF funds are allocated equitably, effectively, and in partnership with community-based organizations.

Proactively Redistricting to Protect and Strengthen Democracy

Safeguarding fair representation and electoral integrity across the state.

Fair redistricting is essential to ensuring communities can elect candidates who reflect their needs and interests. Mississippi's history of racial gerrymandering and federal oversight underscores the importance of transparent, equitable map-drawing processes. MLBC supports redistricting reforms that strengthen representation, comply with the Voting Rights Act, account for demographic changes, and prevent the dilution of Black political power at every level of government.

Restoring a strong ballot initiative and referendum process—one that reflects the state's current congressional districts—further supports democratic participation and accountability.

Protecting and Expanding Voting Rights

Advancing policies that ensure full access to the ballot and strengthen democratic participation.

Voting rights remain at the heart of MLBC's mission. The caucus supports creating early voting, restoring voting rights for individuals with felony convictions once their incarceration ends, and modernizing voter registration by implementing online registration statewide. In addition, the MLBC intends to enshrine the same types of protections against racial discrimination in voting via a State Voting Rights Act that mirrors the federal legislation.

These policies reduce barriers, expand participation, and align Mississippi with national best practices. MLBC notes that protecting the right to vote is fundamental to protecting all other rights—and essential to ensuring that the government remains accountable to the people.

Strengthening Social Safety Nets and Nutrition Supports

Protecting programs like SNAP, rehabilitation services, senior nutrition, and DHS supports.

Mississippi's social safety net is vital to family stability, economic mobility, and community health. MLBC continues to advocate for strong protections for SNAP benefits, child care and senior nutrition services, TANF supports, and rehabilitation programs. The caucus emphasizes restoring trust and equity within the TANF system through oversight and transparency, as well as establishing a food security tax force to address the gaps in food access and delivery across the state.

Reforming these systems ensures that vulnerable families receive timely and adequate support, that child care providers are strengthened, and that the state's federal dollars are used as intended—to stabilize families and strengthen communities.

Environmental & Climate Justice

Advancing safe, stable and healthy communities

Environmental conditions and climate-related risks significantly shape the health and stability of communities across Mississippi. Many rural, low-income, and majority-Black communities face a combination of environmental burdens such as proximity to industrial facilities, waste sites, and pollutant-emitting operations. Areas like Gloster, Mississippi, illustrate ongoing concerns about air and water quality, permitting transparency, and the placement of facilities near residential neighborhoods.

Mississippi also experiences frequent severe weather events—hurricanes, tornadoes, flooding, and extreme heat—that can intensify existing environmental challenges. These disasters often hit hardest in communities with aging infrastructure, limited emergency resources, and longstanding environmental stressors. Impacts include property damage, disrupted access to healthcare, contaminated water, and prolonged recovery periods.

Environmental justice and disaster resilience together represent critical issues for community well-being. Ensuring that vulnerable communities have clean air and water, adequate infrastructure, transparent environmental reporting, and strong disaster preparedness systems remains an important area of focus. These challenges underscore the importance of monitoring environmental conditions, supporting at-risk communities, and strengthening statewide resilience efforts.

HBCU Advocacy

Advancing equitable funding, addressing infrastructure needs, ensuring accountable leadership

Mississippi's Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) are central to the state's educational ecosystem, workforce pipeline, and cultural identity. For generations, they have served as engines of social and economic mobility—particularly for first-generation, low-income, and Black students—while anchoring the civic and economic health of their surrounding communities. HBCUs produce graduates in high-demand fields such as education, healthcare, public service, STEM, business, and criminal justice, and their mission-driven, holistic student support models are critical to persistence and completion.

Despite this impact, Mississippi's public HBCUs continue to face structural challenges rooted in historic underfunding. Persistent disparities in state appropriations, deferred maintenance and capital needs, limited research capacity, enrollment volatility, and gaps in student support services constrain institutional growth. Leadership stability is also a key concern; transparent and inclusive search processes are essential to building trust, ensuring accreditation compliance, strengthening fundraising, and aligning institutional priorities with community needs.

MLBC maintains a longstanding commitment to strengthening HBCUs through scholarships, legislative advocacy, policy oversight, and community partnerships. MLBC prioritizes equitable funding formulas, capital investment for aging infrastructure, transparent leadership selection, and expanded research and workforce-aligned academic capacity. By advancing equitable investments and accountable governance, Mississippi can ensure its HBCUs continue to thrive, innovate, and expand opportunity for future generations—benefiting the state's entire education and workforce economy.



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*Advancing Equity, Justice, and Opportunity for African Americans
in the Magnolia State*

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