



Mississippi Secretary of State's Office

FY 2020 Annual Report



Michael Watson
SECRETARY OF STATE



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The Secretary of State's Office targeted key priorities for Fiscal Year 2020 and for each of the seven divisions of the Secretary of State's Office. Details for each of these priorities of the Agency are highlighted within this FY 2020 Annual Report.

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.

The Agency's list of responsibilities lengthens each year, with one goal in mind: protecting and serving the citizens of Mississippi. We continue to look for additional ways to reduce costs, provide transparency, and enhance the overall customer experience, whether in-person or online. The 2020 Fiscal Year included a reconstruction of several divisions to boost the Agency's overall efficiency and the addition of a new division: External Affairs. The External Affairs Division will serve to extend our services around the state and to promote Mississippi as an ideal place for investment with an eager workforce.

Even during unprecedented times, our Business Services team helped form more than 38,000 new businesses. The Policy & Research Division launched our Tackle the Tape initiative, which quickly gained support from White House officials and government leaders across the country. Our Elections Division conducted safe and fair statewide elections while navigating through the challenges of an ongoing pandemic. Additionally, our Charities & Securities Divisions kept the public informed of infamous scams and took legal action when necessary.

We are proud of the daily services we provide to our citizens and invite you to contact us for any information or assistance you may need.

Thank you,

Michael Watson
Secretary of State



ABOUT THE SECRETARY OF STATE'S 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. There are seven divisions within the Secretary of State's Office: Business Services & Regulation, Charities, Communications & Publications, Elections, Policy & Research, Public Lands, 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 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

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

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

1701 24th Avenue
Gulfport, MS 39501
(228) 864-0254

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.

COMMUNICATIONS & PUBLICATIONS

The Communications & 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 produces and distributes official state publications, such as the Official Statistical Register of the State of Mississippi, more commonly known as the Blue Book, and oversees educational, outreach, and constituent programs, including the Promote the Vote voter education program for Mississippi's K-Grade 12 students.

ELECTIONS

The Elections division has many roles in assuring 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.

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 Sixteenth 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.

FINANCIAL SUMMARY

CHARITIES, SECURITIES, AND BUSINESS SERVICES & REGULATION

EFFICIENCIES

- Provide online services for businesses and corporations
- Maintain turnaround times of less than 24-48 hours for customer filings
- Provide more opportunities and methods for enforcement education
- Increase registration of scrap metal dealers

CATEGORY	OUTPUT
UCC documents filed	331,991
Telephone calls received	62,000
Other corporate documents filed	263,261
Corporate annual reports filed	46,261
LLC annual reports filed	106,473
Notary registration/renewals apostilles	34,370
Charity registrations (initial and renewal) and exemptions	4,304
Trademarks	517
UCC searches	646
Charities examinations, investigations, and complaints completed	355
Charities legal actions	276
Securities registrations and renewals (firms/agents)	117,865
Securities registrations and renewals (offerings)	25,822
Securities legal actions (dispositions and opinions)	56
Regulation and Enforcement registrations	596
Regulation and Enforcement examinations/investigations/complaints	294

FEE INCOME: FY 2020

Charities	\$447,697
Corporations	\$5,774,454
LLC Annual Reports	\$3,656,614
Notaries and Trademarks	\$274,680
Regulation and Enforcement	\$100,925
Securities	\$16,767,072
Uniform Commercial Code	\$2,872,407
TOTAL:	\$30,013,087

COMMUNICATIONS & PUBLICATIONS

EFFICIENCIES

- Provide publications required by statute
- Provide accessibility of publications to constituents
- Compile and provide statistical statewide information
- Increase Agency transparency

CATEGORY	OUTPUT
Number of visits to the Secretary of State's website	11,624,982
Number of visits to the Y'all Vote website	87,097
Number of visits to the Y'all Business website	37,269
Number of press releases issued	45
Agency publications produced	18

ELECTIONS

EFFICIENCIES

- Promote fair and honest elections by providing accurate election reports
- Streamline campaign finance and lobbyist filings and reports
- Provide election training to county and municipal election officials
- Promote increased voter registration and turnout

CATEGORY	OUTPUT
Lobbying reports	4,234
Campaign finance reports	3,446
Election training sessions	20

FEE INCOME: FY 2020

Lobbying Registrations
Civil Penalties from Lobbying
Candidate Qualifying Fees
TOTAL: \$76,394

PUBLIC LANDS

EFFICIENCIES

- Conserve, preserve, protect, and manage the public lands of Mississippi
- Make all records of real property belonging to or under the control of the State of Mississippi available to the public
- Streamline the electronic environment for sales and collection of data on public lands

CATEGORY	OUTPUT
16th Section leases managed	13,435
Tax-Forfeited applications processed	5,610
Tax-Forfeited patents issued	1,292

FEE INCOME: FY 2020

Land Sales (Tax-Forfeited)	\$1,492,016
Land Sales Application Fees (Tax-Forfeited)	\$9,424
Tidelands	\$6,079,878
<u>Tideland Assessment</u>	<u>\$2,604,160</u>
TOTAL:	\$10,185,478

ADMINISTRATION

EFFICIENCIES

- Monitor and improve internal controls/procedures to increase accountability for property and monies received
- Upgrade technological systems to provide better constituent services

CATEGORY	OUTPUT
Parcels of mail processed	34,832
Help Desk requests completed	2,802
Payment vouchers processed	2,364
Additional Efficiencies: Turnaround Time	
Vendor payments	12 days

BUSINESS SERVICES & REGULATION

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

62,000

Phone calls for business-related services answered in **under 30 seconds** by a live person

34,370

Notary applications/renewals and apostille registrations

595,252

Corporate documents and UCC's filed online, making the Division completely paperless

38,395

Forms more than 38,000 new businesses annually

Online applications allow citizens to start a business or file an annual report online in a **matter of minutes**

500

Issues or renews more than 500 trademarks annually

12,000

Provides documents to more than 12,000 customers annually

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.

NOTARIES PUBLIC

The Business Services & Regulation Division oversees all notaries public in the State and receives nearly 9,500 notary applications and renewals per year. 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.

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.

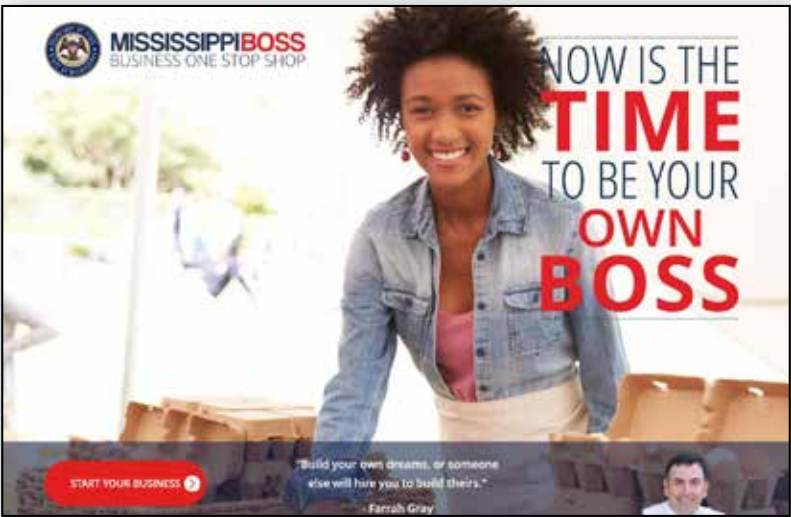
Y'ALL BUSINESS

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 summary, retail market, 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 randomly selected. Violators are subject to administrative fines, suspension of a license, or, in extreme cases, revocation of a license issued by the Division.

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.

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 Regulation and Enforcement 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 approximately 100 for-profit cemeteries in Mississippi which offer and market perpetual care to the public. An important task of the Regulation and Enforcement 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 worked cases throughout the State to assist consumers.

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 more than **1,000** regulation changes.

Administrative Bulletin Search

Agency Search:

Search Rule Summaries:

Does not search rule text

Order By:

System Number

Ascending

Descending

Filing Type:

All

Final

Proposed

Search Date:

To

Final Date

Proposed Date

Effective Date

Withdrawal Date

Search

Reset

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. In connection, the Secretary of State’s Office, in partnership with the Mississippi Department of Agriculture, law enforcement, farming interests, and metal dealers created the Mississippi Ag Theft Task Force to address the unique challenges of deterring and solving metal theft crimes in Mississippi’s agricultural sector.

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.

\$16,426,946.10

Amount of revenue collected in offering-related filings, registration filings for securities professionals and firms, and administrative enforcement cases

117,865

Professional filings

25,822

Offering-related filings

56

Administrative enforcement cases

40

State-based investment adviser firms now registered with the Secretary of State's Office

26

Conducted investigations, which included possible securities laws violations

1,297

Broker-dealer firms registered in the State

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, 40 such firms were based in Mississippi and registered with the Division. There were 46 state-firms based in other states that were also registered to do business with Mississippi residents. A total of 974 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 2,613 investment adviser representatives. In addition, there were 1299 broker-dealer firms registered in the State (2 are Mississippi domiciled and 91 have branches within the State) and 113,870 broker-dealer agents.

In FY 2020, the Division performed routine exams on 30 broker-dealer and investment adviser firms and conducted 26 securities investigations. Sources for these investigations included complaints and tips of possible securities laws violations from both investors and the public, exam findings, and registration filings. The Division also completed 56 enforcement cases. The Division ordered \$79, 805.70 in Fines & Penalties.

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. All total in FY 2020, the Division processed 3,238 paper filings and 22,621 electronic filings.

During FY 2020, the Division collected \$9,140,090.40 in offering-related filings, \$7,217,050 in registration filings for securities professionals and firms, and \$69,805.70 in administrative enforcement cases. This revenue came from 117,865 professional filings, 25,822 offering-related filings, and 49 administrative enforcement cases, all of which were processed by the Division.

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

In July 2017, a new vulnerable adult statute took effect. 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 2020, the Division worked 11 vulnerable adult cases.

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 "charities search" tab 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.

10,700 (approximately)

Charities registered or exempted with the Charities Division

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

FOR YOUR PROTECTION

An annual #CheckYourCharity campaign lets you know how your donations are spent. 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

The Secretary of State's Office promotes a #CheckYourCharity campaign during the holiday season. 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.

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.

8,065
Voter IDs issued as of June 30, 2020

4,234
Lobbying reports

3,446
Campaign finance reports

682
County and Municipal Election Officials trained

424
Poll Workers completed online training

2,459
Voter registration updates via secure online website

884,911
Of the **1,909,460** registered voters cast a ballot in the 2019 General Election

29 observers
In **65** counties in the 2019 General Election

15 observers
In **34** counties in the 2019 Primary Election

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 maintains the Campaign Finance website allowing filers to download user-friendly Excel spreadsheets, input contributions and disbursements over time, and upload the information into the online report before deadline days. Contributions and disbursements can also be manually typed in the report online. The website has a second residual impact on the wider public: all reports filed online through the new system are searchable by candidate or political committee name, office, expenditure, or contribution. Late-filer reports are also available on the website. Campaign finance reports may be viewed online by the general public on the Secretary of State's website.

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

LOBBYIST REGISTRATION

Mississippi law requires all lobbyists 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.

INITIATIVES

All proposed amendments to the Mississippi Constitution must be registered with the Elections Division of the Secretary of State's Office. The official ballot title and summary are prepared by the State Attorney General. Initiatives are only valid for one year, during which time a petition must be circulated to gather signatures to place the measure on the next statewide general election ballot.

82-COUNTY TOUR

Shortly after his inauguration, Secretary of State Michael Watson made a commitment to meeting with Circuit Clerks and Election Commissioners in all 82 counties. The goal of the tour is to build strong relationships, discuss voting-related issues and brainstorm ideas to help strengthen the overall elections process. Even during unprecedented circumstances, the Secretary managed to visit 26 counties in FY20. Keep up with Secretary Watson's 82-County Tour on our website, sos.ms.gov.



COMMUNICATIONS & PUBLICATIONS

The Communications & Publications Division of the Secretary of State's Office produces State and Agency documents in traditional paper-and-ink publications, as well as digital versions on the Agency's website. Interim updates are also made to the digital versions of traditionally formatted print publications.

SALUTE TO SENIORS

The COVID-19 pandemic prompted schools to alter, postpone, or cancel in-person commencement ceremonies for the Class of 2020. The Communications & Publications Division launched a virtual "Salute to Seniors" campaign to celebrate the thousands of Mississippi students who excelled in the face of uncertainty. Salute to Seniors allowed students, parents, teachers and administrations an opportunity to highlight the various accomplishments of graduating seniors across our State. The campaign concluded with a virtual commencement ceremony featuring Secretary Watson and graduating law students from the Agency's internship program.

2020 CENSUS

Although the Secretary of State's Office has no role in conducting the census, our Communications & Publications Division played a significant role in boosting participation across the State for the 2020 Census. The Division organized a monthly call with Mississippi Municipal League (MML) members to discuss the importance of census data and offer census outreach efforts relative to that specific county. With assistance from our External Affairs Division, the Division encouraged legislators to push out 2020 Census reminders within their home districts. Additionally, the Division designed and distributed outreach materials to the general public and kept the public informed of significant changes to the 2020 Census deadline through social media and traditional media, such as TV and radio advertisements.

PROMOTE THE VOTE

Promote the Vote is an annual 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 goal is to encourage students to become informed citizens and voters as adults. The program includes classroom activities, grade-level art and essay contests, and a statewide mock election preceding every statewide general election.

The 2019 Promote the Vote theme, "MY vote is MY voice," highlighted the importance of their voices being heard with the act of voting. More than 160 students participated in the PTV art and essay contests. Winners were recognized during a ceremony at the State Capitol in March 2020. First, second, and third-place winners received award money sponsored by banks across the State, as well as one free entry to the Mississippi Museum of History and the Mississippi Civil Rights Museum. Teachers also received \$50 per winning entry to spend on their classrooms. Additionally, winning art entries were displayed in Jackson State University's Downtown Gallery from March to August.



PUBLICATIONS

The Communications & Publications Division designs and prints several State and Agency publications in-house, including the Magnolia Book (Guide to the Magnolia State), Promote the Vote materials, Agency brochures, and Voter ID materials. In addition to publishing both print and digital versions of the Judiciary Directory and Court Calendar, the Elections Calendar, and the Directory of State and Local Officials, the Division oversees the chaptering, indexing, and distribution of all adopted legislation and compiles the information annually for publication of the General Laws and Local and Private Laws of the State. The Division also publishes House and Senate Journals for each legislative session.

BLUE BOOK

CHARITIES REPORT

DIRECTORY OF STATE AND COUNTY OFFICIALS

ELECTIONS CALENDAR

GENERAL LAWS

HOUSE JOURNAL

JUDICIARY DIRECTORY AND COURT CALENDAR

LOCAL AND PRIVATE LAWS

MAGNOLIA BOOKLET

MISSISSIPPI CONSTITUTION

MY MISSISSIPPI COLORING BOOK

SENATE JOURNAL



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, timber, and the Public Trust Tidelands.

13,435

16th Section
land leases

\$51.0 million

Revenues from 16th
Section leases **

\$16.2 million

Revenue from
surface leasing

\$8.8 million

Sales of timber/forest
products

\$6.02 million

Oil and gas royalty
payments

**85 of 99 school
districts reporting
as of December 13,
2019.**

**** All 16th Section
land revenue stays
with the local school
district.**

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 100 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.

The Public Lands Division strives to improve leasing practices for 16th Section land in order to receive the maximum rate of return for schools.

In 2018, the Secretary of State's Office, as State Land Commissioner, accepted an initial deed to a portion of 17,816 acres of land in Warren and Issaquena Counties. The property forms an "L-shape" around the Mahannah Wildlife Management Area; the Steele Bayou Flood Control Structure is located adjacent to the property. The State initially acquired approximately 10,000 acres with The Nature Conservancy acquiring the rest.

In 2019, In 2019, former Secretary of State, Delbert Hosemann, accepted the next phase purchase from The Nature Conservancy of 2,246 acres.

In 2020, Secretary Watson accepted the second phase of approximately 2,263 acres.

The cost of the acquisition was paid through Federal Grant Money and private donations.

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 ten 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 (MDMR) Executive Director Joe Spraggins with a check for \$7,349,277.00, representing the Tidelands Trust Fund amount turned back for Fiscal Year 2020.

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 on shore 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.

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 11,000 tax-forfeited lands valued at approximately \$50 million.

More than **\$2 million** in FY 2020 property sales

Held **three** online auctions for tax-forfeited properties.

Tax-Forfeited lands can be transferred to governmental entities **without** cost for public use.

AGENCY LANDS

The continued goal of the Tax-Forfeited Property 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.

TAX FORFEITED LAND SEARCH

Mobile

Application Instructions

Log In

County

Select A County

Adams

Alcorn

Amite

Attala

Benton

Bolivar

Calhoun

Cannell

Chickasaw

Choctaw

Clarke

Clay

Coshoma

Copiah

Covington

DeSoto

Forrest

Franklin

George

Greene

Grenada

Hancock

Harrison

Property Address

Address Line 1

Address Line 2

City

Subdivision

Zipcode

Contains

Exact

separate words with one space

Property Information

Parcel Number

PPIN

Market Value Range (\$)

Assessed Owner

Legal Description

Contains

Exact

separate words with one space

Property Location

Section

Township

Range

North

South

East

West

Tax Forfeited Inventory Download

Search

Clear

Current Auctions

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.

FY 2020 AUCTIONS

Rankin County Auction

Start date: June 26, 2019 – Closing date: July 24, 2019

Harrison County Auction

Start date: August 7, 2019 – Closing date: September 4, 2019

Forrest County Auction

Start date: September 18, 2019 – Closing date: October 16, 2019



POLICY & RESEARCH

The Policy & 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 process, and directs the Agency's involvement in the Occupational Licensing Review Commission.

The Division developed legislation adopted by the Mississippi Legislature during the 2020 Regular Session to reform Mississippi's public lands, notary, Limited Liability Corporations, elections, and securities laws.

HOUSE BILLS

HOUSE BILL 1332

This bill amends Section 29-1-81, Mississippi Code of 1972, to revise the amount of the fee collected by the Secretary of State for the filing of a patent for the conveyance of state land.

HOUSE BILL 1156

This bill enacts and repeals various sections of Title 89 and Title 25 of the Mississippi Code of 1972 as it relates to notarial acts and fees for notarial services and is to be known as the "Revised Mississippi Law on Notarial Acts."

HOUSE BILL 1439

This bill amends Sections 29-1-3 and 29-3-82, Mississippi Code of 1972, to require school district officials to report information on the management of sixteenth section land leases as requested by the Secretary of State and revises the information that must be included in such reports.

HOUSE BILL 1440

This bill amends Section 75-71-305 and 75-71-310, Mississippi Code of 1972, to revise certain provisions regarding securities registration filings and fees.

HOUSE BILL 1521

This bill amends various sections of Title 23, Chapter 15 of the Mississippi Code of 1972 to revise the procedures and timeline for mailing and receiving absentee ballots.

SENATE BILLS

SENATE BILL 2510

This bill amends Section 79-29-1021, Mississippi Code of 1972, to revise the grounds for administrative revocation of the registration of a foreign limited liability company.

TACKLE THE TAPE

The Secretary of State's Office recently launched our Tackle the Tape initiative, which sets out to cut regulations that are anti-competitive and do not substantially further the safety and well-being of our citizens. Our agency 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.



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Regulation & Enforcement
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Securities
(601) 359-1334

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Jackson Offices
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New Capitol Building
(601) 359-3123

Coast Office
(228) 864-0254

DIVISION TOPICS

16th Section Land
(601) 359-6377

Apostilles/Notary
(601) 359-1615

Campaign Finance
(601) 359-1358

Cemeteries
(601) 359-9055

Charity Lookup
(601) 359-1599

Corp./LLC/UCC
(601) 359-1633

Elections Hotline
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General Laws
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Governor's Commissions
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Lobbying
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Public Records Request
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Scrap Metal
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Secretary of State's Office - FY 2020 Annual Report

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Dedicated to being both a service and information agency.



Michael Watson
SECRETARY OF STATE

