

**BRIEFING ON
GOVERNMENT
EFFICIENCY
AND
EFFECTIVENESS**



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INTRODUCTION

OBJECTIVES - Section 1.2

This briefing is created to provide the Mississippi Legislature with opportunities to reduce legislative errors, increase efficiency in constituent services, increase government transparency, reduce lawmaker's reliance on lobbyists, and reduce backroom policy decisions and to increase government efficiency. The objective of this briefing is to provide insight into what is necessary for good government practice by the Mississippi Legislature. This briefing analyzes the structures, practices, and services used by the Mississippi Legislature.

This brief is created to engage our community stakeholders for the purpose of creating a structure and environment our office needs to serve the best interest of the constituents of Mississippi's 110th House District. The broader use of this briefing will serve as a guide for all Mississippians who seek a government that can efficiently serve all of their needs. It is our belief that most Mississippians desire a government and lawmakers who are accountable to them. One that connects with the people and acts in their best interest instead of the interest of big corporations and their lobbyists. We believe decisions about Mississippi and her future should be made with the consideration of all Representatives tasked with the functioning of our great state not just by a small few in a backroom.

The graphs throughout this briefing are survey results from a (17) question poll we conducted over the course of a week's time. The results range politically, demographically and racially.



INTRODUCTION [CONTINUED]

SUMMARY - Section 1.3

The following section provides key findings in this briefing and recommendations:

- **[Finding #1]** A broken process in need of an overhaul.
 - **[Recommendation #1]** The voters elect lawmakers with the expectation that they will represent the people's interest, particularly those of their direct constituency, as they propose and debate legislation with the goal of creating laws and policies that benefit all Mississippians as equitably as possible. We recommend the Mississippi Legislature become less dependent on special interest groups and lobbyists. Lobbyists have far too much influence and power over the legislative process, effectively cutting out the voice of many hardworking Mississippians. Unfortunately, also cutting out the voices of the lawmakers not in positions of leadership.



INTRODUCTION [CONTINUED]

SUMMARY - Section 1.3

- **[Finding #2]** The Mississippi Legislature lacks transparency, public engagement and paid staff. There are far too many backroom deals being made between lobbyists and a handful of lawmakers to shape the future of Mississippi. The Legislature should focus more efforts on engaging the public in the process by making all sessions and committee meetings more public.
 - **[Recommendation #2]** We believe each lawmaker should have paid staff to help keep watch over the public's affairs. What if every lawmaker had paid aides to help them draft, propose and track legislation? What if every bill was vetted by every lawmaker's office? Might there be an end to the mistakes and backroom dealings? We believe they would, at least, be curtailed. We further recommend that votes are scheduled, and that schedule is made available to lawmakers and the general public several hours before the vote is conducted.

- **[Finding #3]** Non-Existent or extremely limited Constituent Services; lawmakers operate three months out of the year.
 - **[Recommendation #3]** We recommend that the legislature set aside a small budget for each legislator's office to assist in constituent services such as monies for district offices, constituent case management software and town halls. However, our belief is that the absence of these services hurt our community and state.



FINDINGS

LEGISLATIVE PROCESS - Section 1.2A: A broken process in need of an overhaul.

Mississippi's legislative process is broken, inefficient and opaque, and is a breeding ground for bad government. The voters elect lawmakers with the expectation that they will represent the people's interest, particularly those of their direct constituency, as they propose and debate legislation with the goal of creating laws and policies that benefit all Mississippians as equitably as possible. That's a reasonable expectation. The unreasonable reality is that many bills are crafted out of state by groups such as the American Legislative Exchange Council and sent to legislative leadership as "model legislation" that advances a solely conservative agenda. Of those drafted locally, the only ones to see the light of day are those favored by the legislative leadership. The decisions of which bills are debated and which bills languish in the committee are made by less than a handful of people. The rank and file members of the House and Senate often do not know which bills will appear on the floor for debate on any given day. A committee chairman will stand up, explain dozens of bills, some of which are hundreds-of -pages long, in a matter of minutes. There will be a few minutes of hurried debate and a vote will be taken.

And then, and often only then, will the general public, and all too often the lawmakers finally learn what's in the bill. Too many times, the contents and consequences of a bill aren't as they were initially purported.

Legislative leaders are quick to point out that all the bills are posted on the legislative website and the floor debates are streamed over the internet.



FINDINGS [CONTINUED]

LEGISLATIVE PROCESS - Section 1.2A: A broken process in need of an overhaul.

That looks good on paper. But... Each year there are thousands of bills and resolutions filed and posted on the Mississippi Legislature website. This past session, House members alone filed 1752 bills and another 236 resolutions. Now, many of them are not controversial, i.e., commendations for a high school sports team, exceptional citizens and other sources of civic pride. Some are, to put it kindly, just too goofy for serious consideration. Then there are those that are deceptively titled, where the devil is found in the details, and the details are often buried beneath page after page of legalese.

And yet, the reasonable expectation is that each lawmaker should have time to have read, studied and digested each bill that he or she votes on. But, as has been shown, that is not a practical possibility for a single lawmaker with no staff. Lawmakers are in session most of the day. There just aren't enough hours in a day for a single person to research and question even the most important pieces of legislation. So, they must rely on the committee chairmen and other leaders to explain the bills on the fly, often on the House or Senate floor.

Do you expect your lawmaker to read EVERY bill passed by the House of Representatives? *

Number of participants: 15

12 (80.0%): yes

3 (20.0%): no





FINDINGS [CONTINUED]

LEGISLATIVE PROCESS - Section 1.2A: A broken process in need of an overhaul.

The results have been spotty. Backroom deals have chosen winners and losers when it comes to economic development. History has proven that economic development money has not been spread equally across the state. But those deals are often approved in a special session, more or less, under the gun.

Then there are the unintended consequences of bills. In 2018, a bill “accidentally” froze the number of intellectual and developmental disability waivers that let recipients live at home while still receiving comprehensive therapies and classes targeted to their disabilities. That left more than a thousand Mississippians on a waiting list for desperately needed services and therapies.

The “freeze” wasn’t in the original bill. It was inserted in the fracas known as conference weekend, a last-minute push to wrap up all the pending legislation at the end of the session. Bad things often happen during that weekend, mostly because there is such a rush to the finish line that many bills go unread and others aren’t fully vetted.

While in the aforementioned instance, it appears to have been an honest mistake, but that isn’t always the case. Just this past session, someone inserted language in a teacher pay raise bill to add more money for private school vouchers after those opposed to the move thwarted earlier attempts to expand the vouchers. It wasn’t in the summary given on the House floor and the opponents didn’t know it was in the bill until after it passed. Clearly, that slippery move circumvented the will of the Legislature.

Furthermore, it was then discovered that the money for the vouchers was earmarked for a nonexistent account in the state treasury calling into question the legality of voucher spending.



FINDINGS [CONTINUED]

LEGISLATIVE PROCESS - Section 1.2A: A broken process in need of an overhaul.

Even if giving taxpayer money to private schools was a good idea, if that spending was vetted in public, not in the offices of the leadership, such mistakes would not occur. That is the purpose of government transparency; to make sure the taxing public knows how state and local officials are spending their money. In Mississippi, too often, the taxpayers do not.

These are not isolated incidences. Sports betting, which allow Casino patrons to wager on sporting events, came into being because someone removed a section of the gaming code that forbade it. Maybe wagering on sporting events was a good idea, and one the lawmakers should have considered through a proper vetting process. The troubling thing is, the removal came during the drafting of a bill to legal the lottery in Mississippi.

Many who voted yes on the lottery were surprised to learn they voted to allow sports betting as well. Another passage in the lottery bill would have opened the state to the ubiquitous truck stop gambling parlors, which plague other states and which could have harmed the Coast's vibrant casino industry. Fortunately, because a dozen or so politically active Mississippian's were on the lookout for such shenanigans, that plan was exposed and defeated.



FINDINGS [CONTINUED]

LEGISLATIVE PROCESS - Section 1.2B: We recommend more transparency, public engagement and a paid legislative staff.

These are not by any means isolated incidents. Lawmakers casting ballots that they neither know nor understand is not a rarity. We believe all lawmakers, and by extension, their constituents should have a real voice. Not just the few who cozy up to leadership. We think as many proposals as possible, not just those by Republicans, should have a fair, impartial and public airing.

We believe committee agendas should be available to lawmakers and the public at least the day before the meetings so all will know if the committee will discuss issues of importance to them. Few individuals outside the silo of Jackson have the luxury of watching every session, every meeting, in hopes a bill that has been sitting idly on the calendar might come up for discussion.

Should all committee meetings during the Mississippi Legislative Session be streamed online? *

Number of participants: 15

15 (100.0%): **yes**

- (0.0%): **no**





FINDINGS [CONTINUED]

LEGISLATIVE PROCESS - Section 1.2B: We recommend more transparency, public engagement and a paid legislative staff.

We believe each lawmaker should have paid staff to help keep watch over the public's affairs.

Imagine if we all had “lobbyists” working for us. What if every lawmaker had paid aides to help them draft, propose and track legislation? What if every bill was vetted by every lawmaker’s office? Might there be an end to the mistakes and backroom dealings? We believe they would at least be curtailed.

Do you see value in your lawmaker having a staff to help govern and vet legislation before they vote? *

Number of participants: 15

14 (93.3%): **yes**

1 (6.7%): **no**





FINDINGS [CONTINUED]

LEGISLATIVE PROCESS - Section 1.2B: We recommend more transparency, public engagement and a paid legislative staff.

Now, some would rather the system proceed as it is. They argue it is working fine as is. And it is working fine... for them.

Some would argue that this is an expansion of government that is too expensive for a state so strapped for money.

We would argue that a state near the bottom of so many rankings can ill afford to continue business as usual. We would argue that we can build a better, more efficient system for conducting the people's business, one that opens it up to the people and their ideas.

Those efficiencies, if undertaken prudently, could lead to better lawmaking, better policies and a more accountable government, and that alone would be worth the price.



FINDINGS

CONSTITUENT SERVICES - Section 1.3A: Introduction.

Constituent service encompasses a wide array of non-legislative activities undertaken by the member of the Legislature or his or her staff, and it is commonly considered a representational responsibility. As an elected official, it is our duty to provide service to the constituents of the district we serve. These constituent services go beyond simply fighting for the interests of our constituency. Constituent services can present an opportunity for the Representative's office to engage in outreach and provide education about state and federal government functions and services. While many officials have links to the offered services on their official websites requests from constituents may provide the necessary feedback for members of the Legislature about how government programs are working and what issues need to be addressed through formal oversight or legislation.



FINDINGS

CONSTITUENT SERVICES - Section 1.3A: Introduction

What are the top 5 services you are most interested in receiving from your lawmaker? *

Number of participants: 15

11 (73.3%): Bill Tracking

14 (93.3%): Town Halls

11 (73.3%): Help with State Agency & Resources

7 (46.7%): Weekly Newsletters

3 (20.0%): Grant Work

7 (46.7%): Business with State Government

3 (20.0%): Internships

3 (20.0%): House Page Program (High School Students)

- (0.0%): Capitol Tours

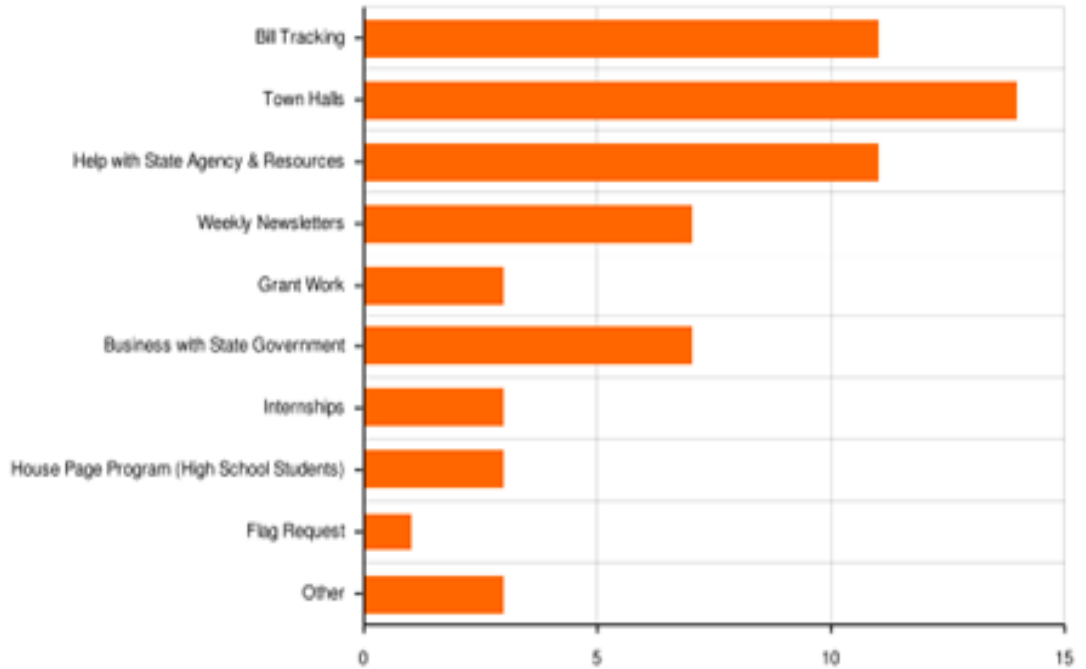
1 (6.7%): Flag Request

- (0.0%): Commemorations & Recognitions

3 (20.0%): Other

Answer(s) from the additional field:

- Current issues
- Change the flag of Mississippi
- Voting with party platform





FINDINGS [CONTINUED]

CONSTITUENT SERVICES - Section 1.3A: Introduction.

Four services in which our constituents have expressed a desire to have access to in the district are: government help, opportunities for students, capitol tours, and commemorations and recognition. I will detail, as well as explain how we will provide said services in the most effective and meaningful manner. This is not intended to be an all-encompassing list of constituent services provided by the office, as each lawmaker's office should have the opportunity to be fully capable of shaping their constituent service operations to suit their own representational priorities or the needs of their constituents. However, our belief is that the absence of these services hurt our community and state.

CONSTITUENT SERVICES - Section 1.3B: Government Help.

Sometimes constituents seek information about state government. It could be parents seeking information about state and federal financial aid, or small business owners seeking government contracts. In these instances, the office would usually relay publicly accessible information, such as websites, office locations, phone numbers or forms to their constituents.

Other times, constituents need assistance with what is commonly referred to as casework. Casework is defined at the discretion of the member's office and is subject to Senate and House rules and statutes. We consider casework as the liaison activities between the state and local governments or businesses concerned with the effects of legislation or regulation. We also consider it as the liaison between constituents and their government.



FINDINGS [CONTINUED]

CONSTITUENT SERVICES - Section 1.3B: Government Help.

While members and staff are limited in how much they can directly intervene in an agency's decision-making process on behalf of a particular case, government agencies are typically responsive to legislative concerns. The office can request information related to a case, urge prompt consideration, arrange for appointments or interviews, express judgments or call for the reconsideration of an administrative response.

Other services involve business dealings with the government. It could be information on requirements to meet in order to be considered for government contracts or grant availability. As of now, most offices are purely informational in this. They find out about the grants or contracts and give out the appropriate websites and requirements to be eligible for consideration. We feel that in order to truly serve the community we need to be able to go a step further by holding workshops and getting hands-on facetime with the people we serve.

The workshops are designed to educate the people on what is needed, as well as, to help ensure they have everything required to act independently next time. The current structure does not afford the Representative the opportunity to truly give back to the community in this way.



FINDINGS [CONTINUED]

CONSTITUENT SERVICES - Section 1.3C: Opportunities for Students.

The Legislative Page Program has been around for quite some time, and it is generally open to 13- or 18-year-old students. We accept Pages while the legislature is in session, January to April. My office offers internship opportunities, which are primarily educational in nature. We offer internship opportunities for college and professional degree students three times a year: (spring) January-May, (summer) May-August and (fall) August-December. While interns can provide additional, temporary assistance in any office, their roles cannot negate the need for regular staff members.

This office believes that giving our young constituents the opportunity to see first hand how things operate within the Legislature will encourage their passion to grow for investing in the community, and allow a more educated, engaged and dedicated voting populous.

Many constituents want to take a tour of the Capitol, which can be arranged by the Representative's office. The staff-led tours are different from those provided by the state, because this one will be tailored to reflect the interests of the constituent, providing them the most enjoyable experience.



FINDINGS [CONTINUED]

CONSTITUENT SERVICES - Section 1.3D: Commemorations and Recognitions.

Often times, members of the Legislature will write letters recognizing constituents' public distinctions or achievements, subject to House or Senate rules. The most common reasons for recognition include: public office appointments or elections; acts of heroism or citizenship; or key honors or awards. The staff members will stay engaged in the community and update the member on outstanding achievements that demand recognition.



CONCLUSION/EFFICIENCY PILOT

Conclusion

We believe that the majority of Mississippians desire a more transparent, efficient and accountable government. Our office is committed to working towards ensuring that all Mississippians have access to those things. This is why using the findings and recommendations from this briefing, we have created the Transparent, Efficient and Accountable Mississippi (T.E.A.M.) Initiative. T.E.A.M. is designed to help increase government oversight, promote transparency, increase government efficiency and accountability in the Mississippi Legislature:

- We believe that our constituents should have access to a central location in their district where they can seek and get help with their issues.
- We believe that lawmakers should have their own staff to help vet legislation and determine the impact it will have on their district. This in return, reduces the reliance on lobbyists who represent special interest groups and corporations.
- We believe that lawmakers should provide annual case management reports to their constituents detailing: how many constituents they have served in that year, how many cases were resolved and how many constituent cases they were unable to resolve.
- We believe that public relations and constituent services should be the most important function of an individual lawmaker.
- We believe that the Legislature should work tirelessly to increase its transparency by improving its online presence, live streaming of committee meetings and scheduling of bills, at a minimum of 24 hours before they are to be voted on, so that the public and lawmakers know what is on the agenda for the day.
- Furthermore, we believe that lobbyists in Mississippi have entirely too much leverage and control over lawmakers, making them entirely dependent on lobbyists. We will use our pilot to push for aggressive lobbying reform so that lawmakers can free themselves, and actually serve the people of their districts instead of heavy pocket lobbyists and corporations.



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