

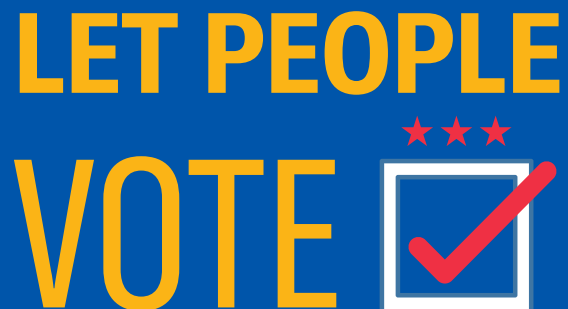


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ADVOCACY TOOLKIT



Dear Activist:

The ACLU of Mississippi is dedicated to guaranteeing more participation in the democratic process. We are immensely grateful for your support and willingness to advocate for voting rights in our state. We hope that this voting rights toolkit will empower you to reach out to your family, friends, colleagues, acquaintances, strangers, and most importantly, your legislators, to raise awareness and promote activism around these issues.

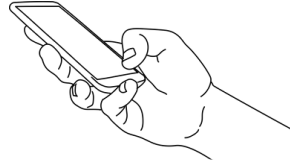
Mississippi has a long and troubled history with regard to voting rights. Shortly after the Civil War and during the Reconstruction Era, a lack of federal government oversight allowed Mississippi and other Southern states to institute Jim Crow laws that effectively took the right to vote away from millions of African Americans. These discriminatory laws lasted from the late 19th century up until the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. Minorities trying to exercise their constitutional right to vote were faced with illegal literacy tests, poll taxes, and in many cases, violence. In 1965, the Voting Rights Act forced Southern states to do away with these racially biased voter laws. Within five years, the number of registered black voters in Mississippi rose from 7% to 67%.

However, there is much work to be done to right the wrongs of the past and ensure greater participation in the democratic process. The vestiges of discriminatory voting laws still remain in Mississippi and other Southern states. Measures such as allowing voters to register online and ensuring the right to vote by early ballot for all voters help legitimize elections by increasing voter turnout.

This toolkit provides an overview of the issues, fact sheets, sample social media posts, and talking points for you to use in your activism. Importantly, we provide a list of recommended action steps, such as meeting with your legislators, to raise public awareness for passage of no-excuse early voting and first-time online voter registration. Please let us know of any activism you undertake with the help of this toolkit, and ways we may be able to help! Any feedback on this toolkit or activism steps is very helpful. Should you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact us by email at office@aclu-ms.org or by phone at 601-354-3408.



SAMPLE SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS



FOR TWITTER

- Voting should be an accessible, clear, and safe process for all. Mississippi needs online voter registration. #letpeoplevote
- Online registration should be available for all Mississippi voters. #letpeoplevote
- More registered voters means more voter turnout and a more legitimate democratic process. Mississippi needs online voter registration. #letpeoplevote
- We have online registration in MS to change and update voter information. Why not for 1st time voters? #letpeoplevote
- MS needs more young people voting. We need online voter registration for everyone. #letpeoplevote
- Online voter registration helps MS leap into the 21st century. #letpeoplevote



FOR FACEBOOK

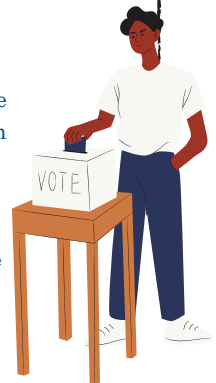
- Voting should be an accessible, clear, and safe process for all. Mississippi needs online voter registration.
- Mississippi allows people to update or change voter registration online. Shouldn't we have this option for first-time voters to register online?
- Mississippi has one of the lowest percentages of young people registered to vote. Let's make the process easier by allowing first time voters to register online.
- Young adults do everything online. Why not allow them to register to vote online, too?
- Online registration reduces the number of errors in voter registration. Let's allow anyone who wants to register to vote have the option of filling out the application online.
- It is easier to open a Facebook account than to register to vote in Mississippi. We need online voter registration now.

Our democracy hinges on everyone's ability to vote. In fact, the voting is such a valuable freedom that it is mentioned more times than any other right in the U.S. Constitution. Yet, there is no explicit affirmative "right to vote" in either the federal or Mississippi Constitution. Courts and legislatures do not always treat the vote as a fundamental right when deciding cases or passing laws, especially for people most directly impacted. Like other fundamental rights that never disappear, the right to vote should be guaranteed without exception. No person should be denied the fundamental right to vote.

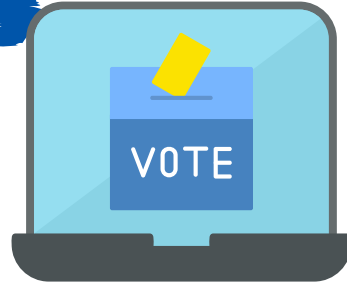
Neither Mississippi nor the United States has yet subscribed to true universal suffrage. Women and African Americans were granted the right to vote long after our democracy was established. Moreover, assuring the right is a reality has been an uphill climb because of measures such as poll taxes and literacy tests, and, more recently, voter ID laws designed to limit rather than open access to the polls.

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 prohibited Mississippi and other states that had previously engaged in discriminatory voting practices from enacting barriers to the ballot box by requiring federal review and approval of all voting law changes. However, in 2013 the Supreme Court struck down key provisions of the Voting Rights Act, including the part that required federal approval for any voting law changes.

In 2013, Mississippi passed a strict ID law that requires voters to present an approved, valid photo ID to vote. Legislators have not been shy about introducing other voter suppression bills. In addition, no meaningful reforms have passed the Mississippi legislature, unlike other states. Mississippi severely limits the ability to vote absentee, requiring an "excuse" in every case, and there is no state constitutional amendment recognizing the right to vote that would make voting more accessible and promote democratic ideals in Mississippi.



ONLINE VOTER REGISTRATION



Mississippi does not have online registration. Under the current system, potential voters are required to complete a paper registration form and either mail it in or take it to the circuit clerk's office directly. This process creates a greater possibility for errors – either when the individual is filling in the forms or when a worker is inputting the data from the form – than a process that allows the applicant to input the information directly.

Online voter registration helps ease the burden on election officials. Applicants entering their own data would increase efficiency and decrease costs in the circuit clerk's office. As it stands, circuit clerk employees lose valuable time inputting the information of registration applications.

An online mechanism already exists for previously registered voters via the Secretary of State's office. The system for online registration already exists in the form of the Y'all Vote website set up by the Secretary of State's office. This website allows current voters to update their information online. Since there is already a website in place for voters to change their registration, expanding the system to include online voter registration would be cost effective.

Online voter registration would lead to more registered voters. The ease of registering to vote online would encourage many voters to do so, particularly young voters. According to 2016 Census data, 78% of Mississippians are registered to vote, but only 55% of those 18 to 24 are registered. Allowing first-time voters to register online would likely increase voter participation, particularly for younger voters.

Online voter registration is cost effective. Studies have shown that states experience a significant reduction in costs after implementing online voter registration. When Arizona implemented online voter registration, its registration costs dropped from 83 cents per paper registration to 3 cents per online registration (Source: National Conference of State Legislatures). Most states recoup the implementation costs of an online registration system within the first two years

ONLINE VOTER REGISTRATION



Who is currently allowed to register online to vote in Mississippi?

No one in Mississippi is allowed to register online to vote. Those registering for the first time must fill out a paper registration form and turn it into their circuit clerk's office. Through the Secretary of State's Y'all Vote website, individuals who are changing or updating their registration may do so online.

Why is online voter registration important?

The more people who vote in an election, the greater legitimacy that election has. We work toward getting as many people as possible to participate in the democratic process. Allowing online voter registration turns a process that could take several days into a matter of minutes.

What are the benefits of online voter registration?

Online registration cuts down on clerical errors and saves circuit clerk's offices time and resources by having voter applicants input their own personal data. Making the voter registration process easier will also help to register new voters, particularly in the 18-29 age group.

A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO TAKE ACTION



1

Meet with your state legislator and ask them to actively support these voting reforms.

2

Urge local officials, particularly county circuit clerks and election commissioners, to release public statements in support of these key voting reforms. Some circuit clerks have opposed no-excuse early voting on grounds of increased workloads. Help them see that eliminating excuses will reduce the paperwork burden and save time and money.

3

Meet with elected officials and their staff, gather and deliver petition signatures, speak out at public meetings and town halls, organize protests, make phone calls, and send letters to legislators. It's very important that state elected officials, particularly those that serve on the House Apportionment and Elections Committee and on the Senate Elections Committee, hear from you. Gather petition signatures in high-traffic public locations and at local events like farmers' markets, as well as canvass for these signatures by going door-to-door in your neighborhood, discussing the importance of early voting and online registration with members in your community.

4

Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper to raise public awareness about how these voting reforms expand access for all Mississippians.



FACT SHEET: ONLINE VOTER REGISTRATION

The Problem: Mississippi has no online registration for first-time voters. In addition, paper-based voter registration is the biggest election administration problem in Mississippi. The current system relies on forms with illegible and/or incomplete information. These kinds of registration issues contribute to more problems on Election Day because poll workers waste time searching for names in poll books that may have been left off or misspelled. In addition, voters, with registration problems often must case affidavit ballots, which takes more time and forces poll workers to divert their attention away from assisting other voters.

The Solution: Expand the existing online voter update website (Secretary of State's Y'all Vote) to accept online voter registration.

Online voter registration will reduce voter registration errors. Something as simple as bad handwriting can cause delays for a circuit clerk's office while an employee tries to contact the person who filled out the registration form. Even if the circuit clerk can read the applicant's writing, they may still make a clerical input error.

Allowing potential voters to register online would lead to more voter registrations and higher election turnout. Both California and Hawaii saw their voter turnout rise after instituting online voter registration (Source: National Conference of State Legislatures). Having a greater number of Mississippians registered likely means that more people will vote on Election Day. The more people that vote in an election, the greater the legitimacy of that election.

We should be making it easier for people to participate in the democratic process. Only people who register to vote can vote. To increase voter participation, we should make it as easy as possible to register to vote. Allowing online voter registration will allow a voter to register in a matter of minutes.