



Mississippi Secretary of State's Office

FY 2022 Annual Report



Michael Watson
SECRETARY OF STATE

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As your Secretary of State, I'm honored to lead a team that has excelled in their many job functions and responsibilities. I continue to stand amazed at the 100+ agency employees across eight divisions who endlessly work to ensure Mississippi is a better place for the next generation. Through their efforts, we have achieved many notable accomplishments over the past year!

Having a strong and informed Mississippi electorate has been a priority since I took my oath of office. Our Elections, External Affairs, and Publications Divisions have created innovative initiatives to encourage new voter registration including the statewide Voter Registration Road Trip and SOS Ambassador voter registration drives. This year alone, we have registered 53,748 new Mississippi voters and over 205,000 since my tenure.

We have also seen tremendous success in regulation reform since we began our Tackle the Tape initiative in July 2020. To take a more proactive approach, this year our Policy and Research Division assisted in launching a comprehensive strategic plan called 29 by 29 to efficiently review all 118,000+ regulations in Mississippi's regulatory code. This review plan will serve as a roadmap within the Tackle the Tape initiative with an end goal of reviewing every regulation for all 29 occupational licensing boards and commissions by the year 2029.

Serving as State Lands Commissioner and trustee of the state's tidelands, the need for a concerted effort to preserve Mississippi's greatest assets has become a top priority. I recently assembled a Conservation Task Force which is comprised of some of the brightest minds in the country who serve as experts on wildlife and natural resources. The goal is to develop a statewide conservation plan and explore viable funding options for improvements across the state. Our External Affairs and Public Lands Divisions are leading the charge to build this collaborative network to strengthen relationships and break down silos.

Our office continues to find ways to more efficiently and effectively serve Mississippians. We not only pride ourselves on our long-term investments, but also on the daily services we provide our citizens. We invite you to contact us for any information or assistance needed.



Thank you,

Michael Watson
Secretary of State

The Secretary of State's Office targeted key priorities for Fiscal Year 2022 for each of the eight divisions of the Secretary of State's Office. Details for each of these priorities of the Agency are highlighted within this FY 2022 Annual Report.



Michael Watson
SECRETARY OF STATE

ABOUT THE SECRETARY OF STATE'S OFFICE

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.

There are eight divisions within the Secretary of State's Office: Business Services & Regulation, Charities, Publications, Elections, Policy & Research, Public Lands, External Affairs 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 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.

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

1141 Bayview Avenue, Suite 100
Biloxi, MS 39530
228-432-0541

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

2844 Traceland Drive, Suite 100
Tupelo, MS 38801
662-844-0194

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

5779 Getwell Rd., Bldg. D1
Southaven, MS 38672
662-470-1552

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.

PUBLICATIONS

The 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 also produces official State and Agency publications in traditional printed format as well as digital versions downloadable from the SOS website.

ELECTIONS

The Elections Division has many roles in ensuring 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.

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

The External Affairs Division develops partnerships with business development entities in the state to facilitate economic growth, connects the resources of the agency to new and existing Mississippi businesses and forms partnerships with K-12 and IHL for educational purposes.

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 16th 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

FEE INCOME: FY 2022

Charities	\$549,070
Corporations	\$3,520,018
LLC Annual Reports	\$4,285,250
Notaries and Trademarks	\$175,399
Regulation and Enforcement	\$89,895
Securities	\$17,938,475
Uniform Commercial Code	\$1,625,774
TOTAL:	\$28,183,881

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
UCC documents filed	294,610
Telephone calls received	77,056
Other corporate documents filed	86,950
Corporate annual reports filed	44,904
LLC annual reports filed	158,818
Notary registration/renewals apostilles	12,511
Charity registrations (initial and renewal) and exemptions	6,991
Trademarks	319
UCC searches	341
Charities examinations, investigations, and complaints completed	156
Charities legal actions	476
Securities registrations and renewals (firms/agents)	144,052
Securities registrations and renewals (offerings)	26,728
Securities legal actions (dispositions and opinions)	74
Regulation and Enforcement registrations	334
Regulation and Enforcement examinations/investigations/complaints	340

CATEGORY	OUTPUT
Number of visits to the Secretary of State's website (includes visits to Y'all Vote)	9,500,034
Number of visits to the Y'all Business website	170,918
Number of press releases issued	86
Agency publications produced	27

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

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
Lobbying reports	4,478
Campaign finance reports	1,132
Election training sessions	8

FEE INCOME: FY 2022

Lobbying Registrations	
Civil Penalties from Lobbying	
Candidate Qualifying Fees	
TOTAL: \$ 56,470	

CATEGORY	OUTPUT
16th Section leases managed	14,149
Tax-Forfeited applications processed	13,500
Tax-Forfeited patents issued	2,200

FEE INCOME: FY 2022

Land Sales (Tax-Forfeited)	\$3,128,846
Land Sales Application Fees (Tax-Forfeited)	\$39,558
Tidelands	\$10,189,537
Tideland Assessment	\$2,275,910
TOTAL:	\$15,633,851

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	91,548
Help Desk requests completed	4,689
Payment vouchers processed	2,906

BUSINESS SERVICES & REGULATION

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

BUSINESS SERVICES:

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.

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 trademark 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.

77,056
Phone calls for business-related services answered in under 30 seconds by a live person

39,869
Notary applications/renewals and apostille registrations

686,271
Corporate documents and UCC's filed online, making the Division completely paperless

56,448
Formed more than 56,000 new businesses

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

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 summaries, retail markets, 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 routine. Violators are subject to administrative fines, suspension of a license, or, in extreme cases, revocation of a license issued by the Division.

REGULATION & ENFORCEMENT:

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 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 Business Services & Regulation 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 works cases throughout the State to assist consumers.

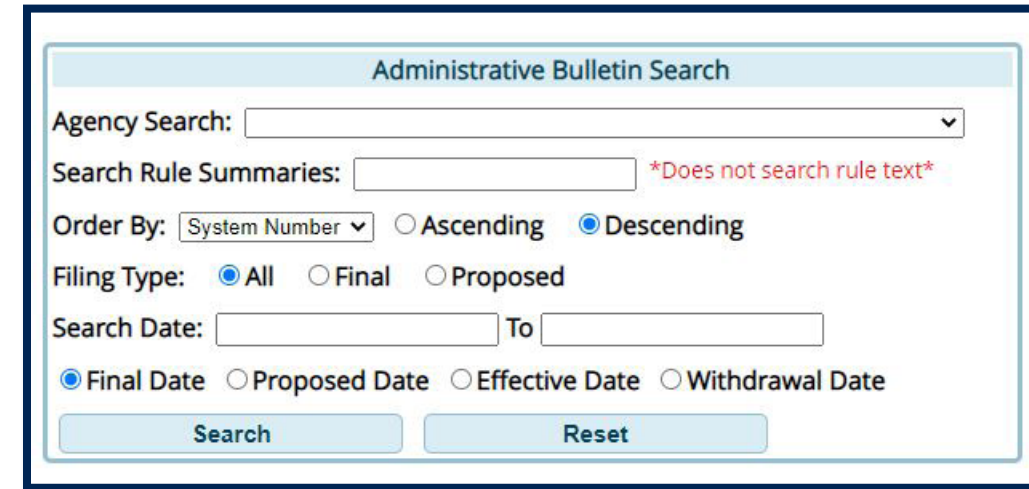
The Business Services & Regulation Division registers and regulates sellers of pre-need funeral products, perpetual care cemeteries, scrap metal dealers and processors, and athlete agents.

NOTARIES PUBLIC

The Business Services & Regulation Division oversees all notaries public in the State and receives nearly 11,000 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.

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.



The screenshot shows a search interface titled "Administrative Bulletin Search". It includes a dropdown menu for "Agency Search", a text input for "Search Rule Summaries" with a red asterisk and the text "*Does not search rule text*", and "Order By" options: "System Number" (dropdown), "Ascending", and "Descending" (selected). There are also "Filing Type" options: "All" (selected), "Final", and "Proposed". A "Search Date" section has two date input fields separated by "To". Below this are radio buttons for "Final Date" (selected), "Proposed Date", "Effective Date", and "Withdrawal Date". At the bottom are "Search" and "Reset" buttons.

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.

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.

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, 37 such firms were based in Mississippi and registered with the Division. There were 49 state-firms based in other states that were also registered to do business with Mississippi residents. A total of 1058 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 2653 investment adviser representatives.

In addition, there were 1313 broker-dealer firms registered in the State (two are Mississippi domiciled and 92 have branches within the State) and 138,838 broker-dealer agents. The Division closed 74 investigations. Other sources for these investigations included complaints and tips of violations from other regulators, investors and the public, exam findings, and registration filings. In addition the Division closed 29 routine exams of broker dealer branches and state-level investment adviser firms.

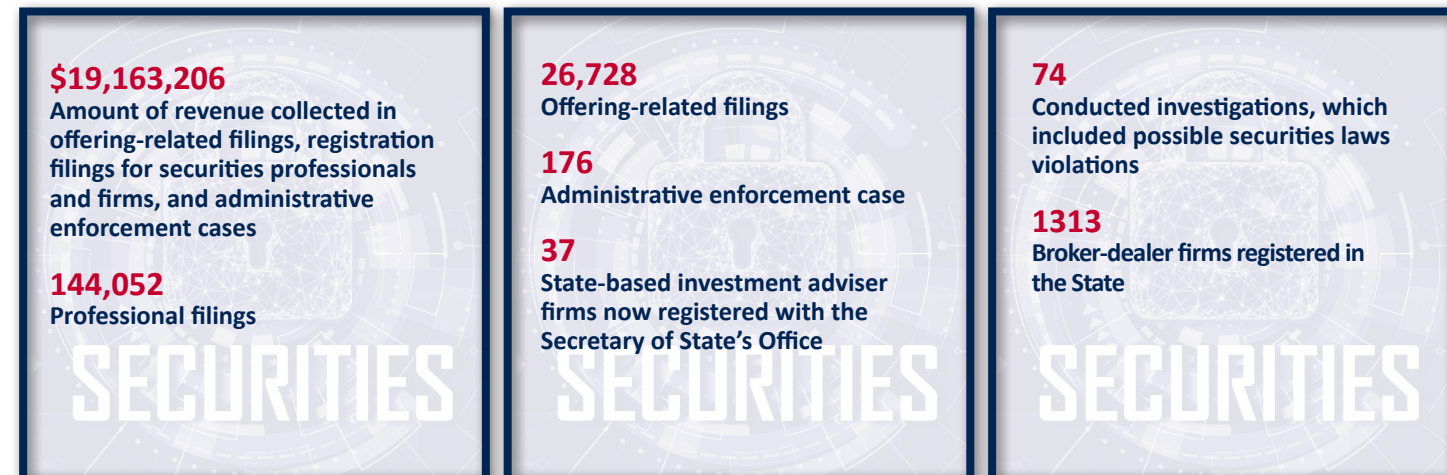
During FY 2020, the Division added new online filing options through the Electronic Filing Depository: Unit Investment Trusts and Universal Filing Type which includes Registration by Coordination and Qualification, Reg A Tier 2, and Crowdfunding Offerings. This enables firms to more efficiently submit the required documents and enables the Division to reduce the turnaround time for processing these filings. Filings utilizing this online option continues to increase and in FY 2022 the Division processed 26,728 filings in total.

During FY 2022, the Division collected \$9,399,119.71 in offering-related filings, and \$8,602,850 in registration filings for securities professionals and firms.

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

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 2022, the Division worked 28 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 “Search Charities” 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.

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

FOR YOUR PROTECTION

Under “Search Charities,” the percentage of funds spent on all expenses are listed (program services, fundraising, and administrative). 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

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

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).

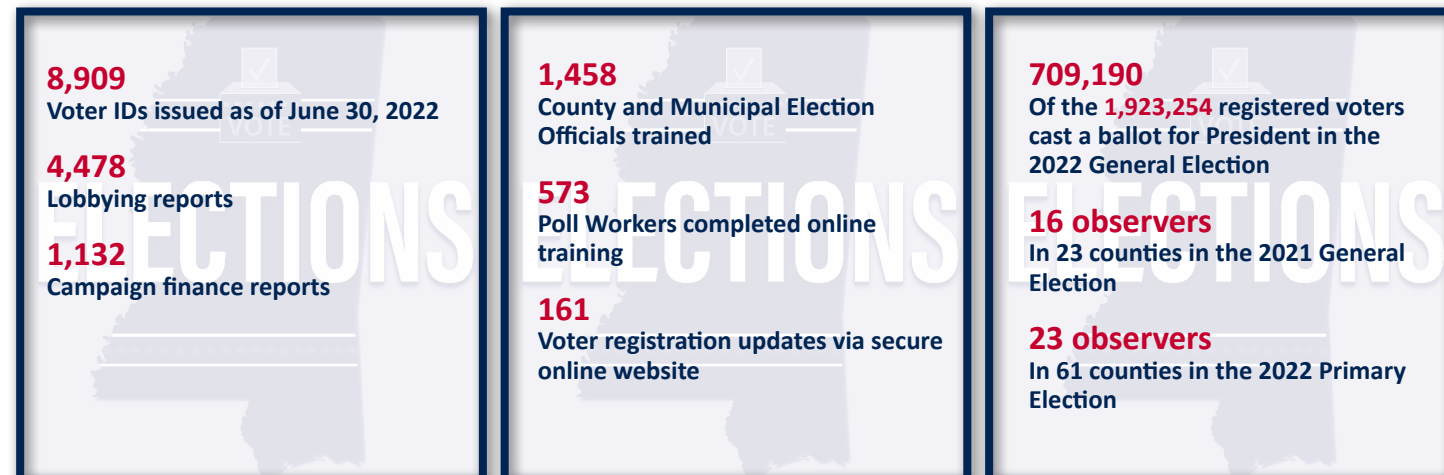
Mississippi voters are able to:

- 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.



LOBBYIST REGISTRATION

Mississippi law requires all lobbyists to 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.

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

82-COUNTY TOUR

Upon taking office, Secretary Watson made a commitment to meet 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. In his three years in office the Secretary has visited 80 counties, with the goal of completing the remaining counties in the next few months.

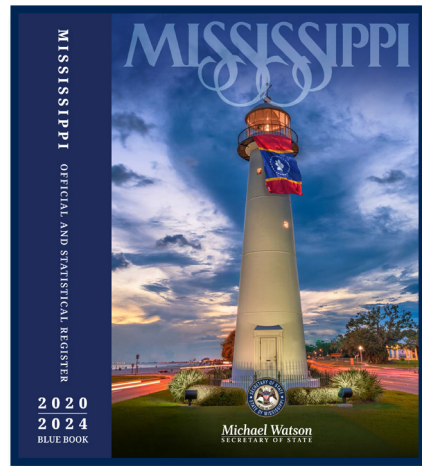
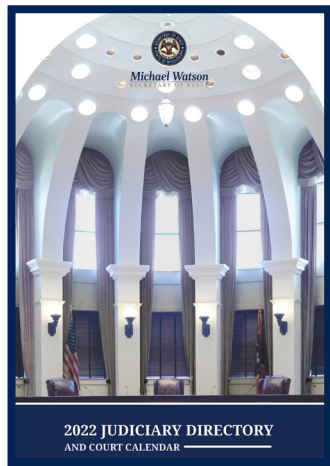


PUBLICATIONS

The 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 also produces official State and Agency publications in traditional printed format as well as digital versions downloadable from the SOS website.

PUBLICATIONS

- AGENCY BROCHURES
- BLUE BOOK
- CHARITIES REPORT
- GENERAL LAWS
- GUIDE TO THE MAGNOLIA STATE
- HOUSE JOURNAL
- JUDICIARY DIRECTORY AND COURT CALENDAR
- LOCAL AND PRIVATE LAWS
- MY MISSISSIPPI COLORING BOOK
- SENATE JOURNAL
- STATE & COUNTY ELECTED OFFICIALS DIRECTORY



EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

The External Affairs Division develops partnerships with business development entities in the state to facilitate economic growth, connects the resources of the agency to new and existing Mississippi businesses, forms partnerships with K-12 and IHL for educational purposes, and oversees legislative affairs.



Promote the Vote is an annual, nonpartisan 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 2021 theme, “Vote Local,” encouraged students to consider the importance of voting and how it corresponds to their beliefs and values. In March 2022, 25 students from across the state were selected as 2021 Promote the Vote contest winners and recognized during a special awards ceremony at the Two Mississippi Museums.



In January of 2022, the Welcome to Business Webinars were launched in cooperation with the Mississippi Small Business Development Centers (SBDC) and the Mississippi Development Authority (MDA) to give new businesses the opportunity to learn about the free resources available through the Secretary of State’s office and other state entities to help their business succeed. These bi-monthly 45-minute live webinars introduce new startups to free resources available in our state.



The Mississippi Secretary of State Student Ambassador Program is a cooperative program between high school seniors and the Secretary of State’s Office. Through the program, students with a passion for leadership and state government are equipped to return to their schools as proponents of voter education and awareness. Participants attended a one-day fall semester summit at the Secretary of State’s Office in Jackson. Students who complete the program will get a first-hand account of state government in action. This year, 56 students were selected from 28 counties and 44 schools.

MS SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CENTER/UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI 10 STEPS TO ESTABLISHING A BUSINESS

Each month the division partners with the Mississippi Small Business Development Centers (SBDC) and the University of Mississippi to lead a special training event for potential new business owners in economically disadvantaged areas of the state. Participants are taken step by step through the process of registering their business and filing their annual report with the Secretary of State’s Office and the additional resources available on our site.

CEU PROGRAM FOR EDUCATORS

External Affairs has partnered with the Research and Curriculum Unit in Starkville as well as the Mississippi Council on Economic Education to provide training and curriculum for teachers based on our MS Boss and Y’all Business platforms. Four training events have been conducted in 2022 with over 500 educators in attendance and the feedback from educators has been very positive.

CONSERVATION TASK FORCE

In November 2021, the Division launched the Conservation Task Force (CTF) comprised of conservation leaders and experts from 25 organizations in the public and private sectors. The goal of the CTF is to promote and enhance conservation efforts through strategic planning, responsible funding, and education. The CTF met three times in its inaugural year and there were numerous sub-group meetings addressing Carbon-capture, climate change, and coastal freshwater intrusion.

BROADWATER MARINA RESTORATION PROJECT

The historic Broadwater Marina is 30 acres of prime public trust tidelands property in Biloxi, MS. The marina was destroyed by Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and has received subsequent damage from coastal hurricanes in recent years. The External Affairs division put together grant requests and was awarded \$8.7 million in funding to restore the marina to a state of safe public access and to incentivize further economic development on the site. Construction is slated to begin in early 2023 and should be completed in 2024.

STAY CONNECTED

Facebook: @MississippiSecretaryOfState

Twitter: @MississippiSOS

Instagram: @Mississippi_SOS

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, the Public Trust Tidelands, and Tax-Forfeited properties.

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.

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, 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.

In 2021, Secretary Watson accepted the final phase of approximately 2,225 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



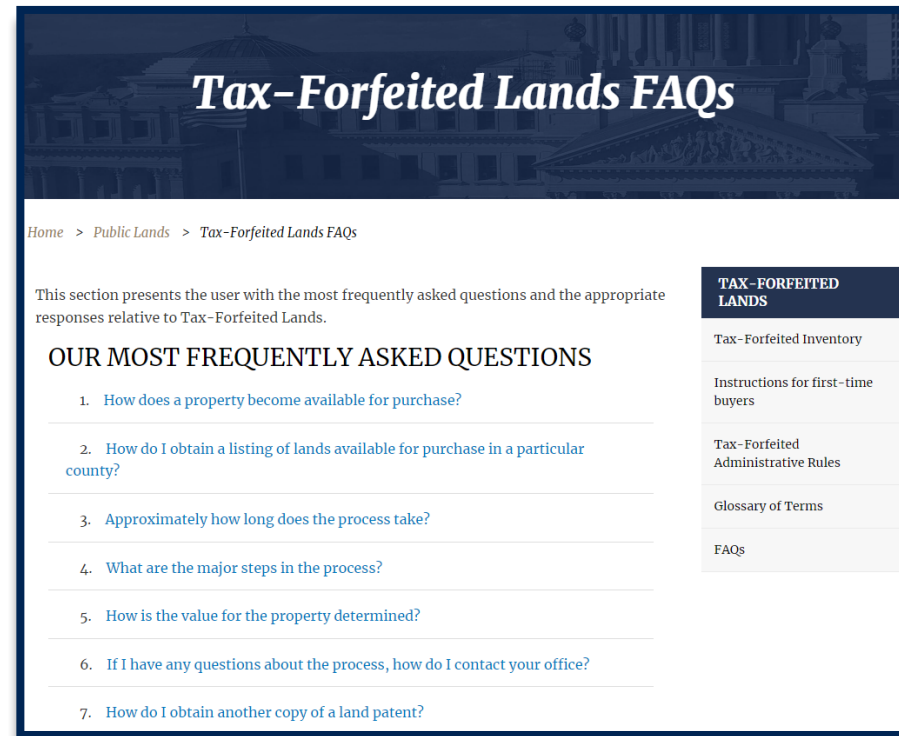
Secretary of State Michael Watson, on behalf of the Gulf Coast legislative delegation, presented Mississippi Department of Marine Resources Executive Director Joe Spraggins with a check for \$10,314,561 representing the Public Trust tidelands Fund and Public Trust Assessment Fund total for Fiscal Year 2022.

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 onshore 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.

PUBLIC LANDS

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.



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.

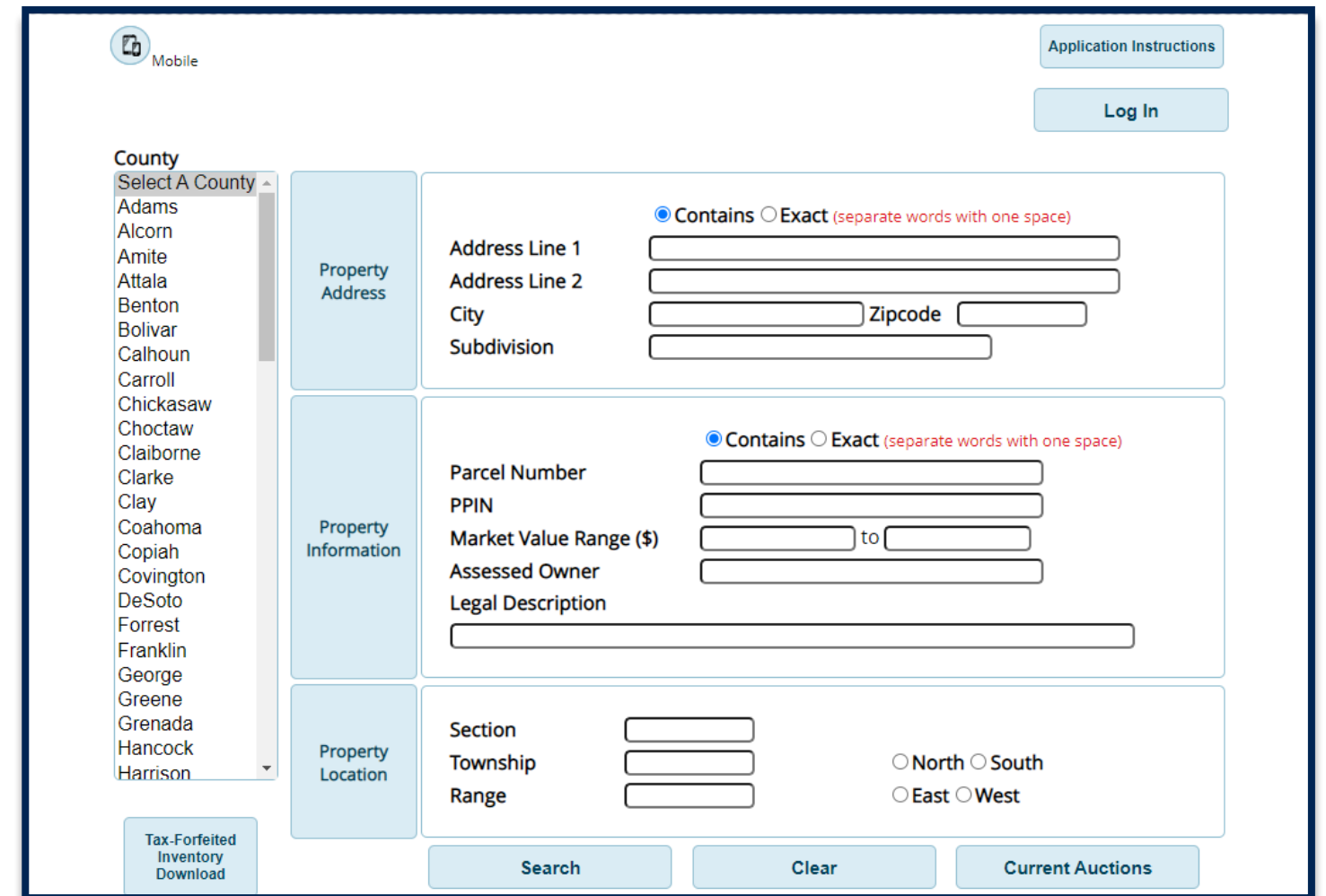
The "Buy It Now" feature allows bidders to pay a "Buy It Now" price on any parcel in order to purchase a property immediately instead of waiting until the end of the auction.



AGENCY LANDS

The continued goal of the Public Lands 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.



POLICY & RESEARCH

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

The Division developed legislation adopted by the Mississippi Legislature during the 2022 Regular Session to reform laws governing charities' classification, collegiate athletes' compensation, election integrity, and voting machine modernization as summarized below.

HOUSE BILLS

HOUSE BILL 590

Amended various sections of Title 79 of the Mississippi Code of 1972 to revise the definition of Charitable Organizations as it pertains to religious institutions and clarified notice requirements to establish consistency with the Mississippi Registered Agent Act.

HOUSE BILL 1510

Amended and repealed various sections of Title 23 of the Mississippi Code of 1972 to authorize election officials to compare the Statewide Election Management System with state and federal databases to ensure that only United States citizens register to vote in Mississippi. HB 1510 also revised the disbursement of funds from the Election Support Fund by increasing the amount counties receive by twenty percent (20%).

SENATE BILLS

SENATE BILL 2690

Amended various sections of Titles 37 and 73 of the Mississippi Code of 1972 to revise the Mississippi Intercollegiate Athletics Compensation Rights Act with regard to Name, Image and Likeness Agreements for Student-Athletes.

SENATE BILL 2879

Enacted and repealed various sections of Title 23 of the Mississippi Code of 1972 to create the Mississippi Voting Machine Modernization Act for the purpose of modernizing voting systems in the state. The act created the Voting Modernization Grant Program to be administered by the Secretary of State for the purpose of reimbursing counties or disbursing funds to counties for the purchase of modern voting systems.



The Secretary of State's Office continued to create meaningful change for small businesses and consumers through our Tackle the Tape initiative, which sets out to cut regulations that are anti-competitive and do not substantially further the safety of our citizens. The Agency has always served as a premier resource for the business community, and Secretary Watson understands the impact burdensome red tape has on our state's economy.



Since launching the Tackle the Tape initiative in July of 2020, the Secretary of State's Office has seen tremendous success in regulation reform. To ensure efficient review of all 118,000+ regulations in Mississippi's regulatory code, we implemented a comprehensive strategic plan called "29 by 29." This plan serves as a roadmap within the Tackle the Tape initiative with an end goal of reviewing every regulation for all 29 occupational licensing boards and commissions by the year 2029. Eight partners have agreed to assist in a joint evaluation of the regulations using metrics like fines, fee structure, and penalties. The MS State Board of Cosmetology, the MS State Board of Barber Examiners, and the MS State Board of Architecture were the three boards evaluated in the year 2022.

A screenshot of a webpage titled 'Rid the RED in Mississippi'. The page features the 'Tackle the Tape' logo in the top left and the 'Michael Watson SECRETARY OF STATE' logo in the top right. A navigation bar includes 'THE PLAN', 'THE TAPE', 'THE STATS', 'THE SUCCESS', and 'REPORT A REGULATION'. The main content area has a large image of a stack of papers with a red ribbon and a portrait of Michael Watson. Below the image, the text reads: 'Tackle the Tape sets out to cut regulations that are anticompetitive and do not substantially further the safety and well-being of our citizens. The Secretary of State's Office 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.' Below this, a section titled 'THE PLAN' contains the text: 'To efficiently review all 118,000 regulations in Mississippi's regulatory code, we have outlined a comprehensive strategic plan called 29 by 29. This review plan will serve as a roadmap within the Tackle the Tape initiative with an end goal of reviewing every regulation for all 29 occupational licensing boards and commissions by the year 2029. Click here to see the full plan.'

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Michael Watson
SECRETARY OF STATE

Dedicated to being both a service and information agency.