

# Parole is Working to Advance Public Safety and Boost Mississippi's Economy & Workforce

Mississippi's parole law is advancing public safety and boosting our state's economy and workforce. By continuing our state's current parole law, we are safely reducing our state's prison population. Parole is an evidence-based policy that gives incarcerated people the opportunity to demonstrate their rehabilitation and make their case to the Governor-appointed parole board. Currently, Mississippi has the highest imprisonment rate in the country.<sup>1</sup> Mississippi taxpayers will spend more than \$400 million this year to operate the state's prison system with little return for public safety.

## The Parole Statute Is Set To Be Repealed This Year

This session, the entire parole statute will be repealed if no action is taken by the legislature. This would mean that no one sentenced to prison would be eligible for parole in the future, leading program participation to plunge, greatly undermining public safety, and costing taxpayers millions by driving up the prison population even more.

This legislative session, lawmakers must ensure that Mississippi's current parole law remains intact and remove the repealer so it does not continue to be threatened in the future.

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### How does parole work?

- After reviewing a person's file, and receiving input from crime victims, law enforcement, and family members, the Parole Board decides on a case-by-case basis whether the person will be granted parole.
- If a person is granted release on parole, they will serve the remainder of their sentence on supervision, meaning they report to a parole officer and follow other specific conditions.

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### Who is eligible for parole?

- The majority of people in prison are eligible to be considered for parole, though people convicted of certain offenses, including murder, sex offenses, and habitual offenses, are never eligible for parole.<sup>2</sup>
- Mississippi's current parole law is in line with other states like Texas, Utah, and Louisiana that have taken measured steps to expand parole eligibility without compromising public safety.

# Parole Strengthens Mississippi

## Parole improves public safety and reduces recidivism

- Between 2009 and 2019, 37 states experienced reductions in both crime and imprisonment, with crime falling *faster* in states that reduced imprisonment than in states that increased imprisonment.<sup>3</sup>
- Allowing people to earn their way home makes them more likely to follow prison rules and provides an effective incentive to participate in rehabilitative programs that reduce recidivism and prepare them to rejoin the workforce.
- People released on parole are supervised by parole officers who monitor compliance with the terms of their release and can help connect them to necessary services to successfully return to their communities.

## Mississippi voters endorse parole

- Nearly 90% of Mississippi voters from across the political spectrum, including 87% of Republican voters, support allowing people to earn their way home through the parole process, according to a recent poll from Public Opinion Strategies.<sup>4</sup>

## Parole can help people return to the workforce and boost the state economy

- Mississippi has the lowest labor force participation rate in the country, with nearly two job openings for every person actively looking for work.<sup>5</sup> Even if every single person actively seeking employment were hired today, an additional 40,000 positions would go unfilled.<sup>6</sup>
- At a time when Mississippi businesses are struggling to meet their workforce needs, parole presents an opportunity for people to return to the workforce and for small business owners and larger companies to hire reliable and motivated staff members for their businesses.<sup>7</sup> Workforce development programs led by AccelerateMS, as well as training programs offered within correctional facilities, help people to reenter the workforce with employable skills.

## Parole saves taxpayer dollars

- The state's prison system currently costs taxpayers more than \$400 million. The high costs of running Mississippi's prison system drain taxpayer dollars and yield a poor public safety return.
- Release policies like parole allow Mississippi to rein in spending and focus limited resources on other investments that promote public safety and economic development for the state.
- The Department of Corrections has one of the highest budgets in the state, and it will keep growing due to Mississippi's long sentences and the increasing cost of medical care. Two thirds of people in prison in Mississippi are serving a sentence of at least 10 years or longer, far more than the national average.<sup>8</sup>
- Ensuring the current parole eligibility rules stay in place allows state lawmakers to reduce inefficient prison spending while prioritizing public safety and economic growth long into the future.

<sup>1</sup> E. Ann Carson, Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice, "Prisoners in 2022 - Statistical Tables," November 2023, <https://bjs.ojp.gov/document/p22st.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Miss. Ann. Code § 47-7-3. Individuals with certain convictions predating July 1, 1995 may retain parole eligibility under prior statutory language.

<sup>3</sup> Nolan Center for Justice, American Conservative Union Foundation, "Protecting Public Safety and Improving the Criminal Justice System," February 2023, <https://conservativejusticereform.org/cpac-supports-protecting-public-safety-and-improving-the-criminal-justice-system/>.

<sup>4</sup> Public Opinion Strategies, "New Poll Shows Strong Bipartisan Support for More Criminal Justice Reform in Mississippi," November 2023, <https://pos.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/FWD-MS-poll-memo-full-V3.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> FWD.us, "The Cost of Doing Business: Why Criminal Justice Reform is the Right Investment to Strengthen Mississippi's Economy & Workforce," June 2023, <https://www.fwd.us/news/ms-workforce-brief/>.

<sup>6</sup> Joshua Wilson, Mississippi Business Journal, "Advocacy group: Criminal justice reform an 'economic development issue,'" September 20, 2023, [https://www.djournal.com/mbj/advocacy-group-criminal-justice-reform-an-economic-development-issue/article\\_992a14e2-5802-11ee-9009-331baa6b8013.html](https://www.djournal.com/mbj/advocacy-group-criminal-justice-reform-an-economic-development-issue/article_992a14e2-5802-11ee-9009-331baa6b8013.html).

<sup>7</sup> Society for Human Resource Management, "2021 Getting Talent Back to Work Report," [https://www.gettingtalentbacktowork.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/2021-GTBTW\\_Report.pdf](https://www.gettingtalentbacktowork.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/2021-GTBTW_Report.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> FWD.us, "High Cost, Low Return: Mississippi's Ongoing Incarceration Crisis," November 2022, <https://www.fwd.us/news/mississippi-ongoing-incarceration-crisis/#2>.