



# Center for Effective Lawmaking

## Highlights from the 2020-2023 Mississippi Legislature Legislative Effectiveness Scores

Craig Volden and Alan E. Wiseman, Co-Directors, Center for Effective Lawmaking

Paige Higginson-Rollins, Program Director for State Legislatures, Center for Effective Lawmaking

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### Executive Summary

The Center for Effective Lawmaking (CEL) is pleased to announce the release of the State Legislative Effectiveness Scores (SLES) for the recently completed 2020-2023 Mississippi Legislature legislative session. This report offers highlights from our initial analyses of these scores, including:

- We identify the top-10 most effective lawmakers in each party in the House of Representatives and State Senate, including many who continued their patterns of highly effective lawmaking from the previous legislative sessions.
- We identify those lawmakers with the longest streaks of being in our prestigious “Above Expectations” category, as well as first-term lawmakers in this category.
- We find that, consistent with our published research findings, there is an overall lawmaking benefit from being in the majority party. Although some individual minority-party legislators achieved high lawmaking effectiveness, their average scores remain lower than their majority-party counterparts due to structural barriers that they face in trying to advance their agendas.
- Across both chambers, serving as a committee chair is related to greater lawmaking effectiveness. In addition, lawmaking effectiveness is a consistent trait among legislators, with several legislators appearing among the top-10 most effective lawmakers for both the 2020-2023 and 2016-2019 legislative sessions.

### Introduction and Methodology

The State Legislative Effectiveness Scores discussed here are based on the combination of fifteen metrics capturing the bills that each member of each state legislature sponsors, how far their bills move through the lawmaking process, and how substantial their policy proposals are. The scores are normalized to an average value of 1.0 in both the House of Representatives and the State Senate in each legislative session. More on our [methodology](#) and [scores](#) can be found at our website.

For each member of the House of Representatives and State Senate, we also identify a Benchmark Score, based on the average lawmaking effectiveness of legislators who share that legislator's majority- or minority-party status, level of seniority, and chair position on a committee. Controlling for these considerations is important in order to describe legislators on a more level playing field. For example, in the 2020-2023 Mississippi House of Representatives, minority-party lawmakers had an average SLES of 0.47, compared to 1.33 for majority-party members, while committee chairs had an average SLES of 2.13. In the State Senate, those averages were 0.49 in the minority party, 1.24 in the majority party, and 1.22 among committee chairs.

We then label each lawmaker as "Above Expectations" for those outperforming their benchmark scores by 50% or more, "Below Expectations" for those below 50% of their benchmark, and "Meeting Expectations" for all other legislators.

Finally, within each party, we rank each member according to their SLES. This ranking is used to generate the top-10 lists highlighted in the tables below. Given the substantial lawmaking benefit that follows from being in the majority party, ranking the entire Mississippi State Legislature together would be inappropriate, but these comparisons within each party are quite informative.

### **Highly Effective Republican Lawmakers in the 2020-2023 Mississippi House of Representatives**

The following table identifies the ten highest-scoring Republicans in the 2020-2023 House of Representatives. Eight of the top ten were committee chairs.

#### **Top Ten List—House Republicans (2020-2023 Legislative Session)**

	<u>Name</u>	<u>LES</u>	<u>Committee Chair</u>
<b>1.</b>	<b>John Read (District 112)</b>	21.91	Chair
<b>2.</b>	<b>John Lamar (District 8)</b>	8.03	Chair
<b>3.</b>	<b>Rob Roberson (District 43)</b>	4.30	Chair
<b>4.</b>	<b>Nick Bain (District 2)</b>	3.92	Chair
<b>5.</b>	<b>Jerry Turner (District 18)</b>	3.24	Chair
<b>6.</b>	<b>Philip Gunn (District 56)</b>	3.24	None
<b>7.</b>	<b>Richard Bennett (District 120)</b>	2.82	None
<b>8.</b>	<b>Henry Zuber (District 113)</b>	2.66	Chair
<b>9.</b>	<b>Scott Bounds (District 44)</b>	2.58	Chair
<b>10.</b>	<b>Becky Currie (District 92)</b>	2.56	Chair

At the top of the list is John Read from District 112 (Jackson County) with a score of 21.91. In the 2020-2023 legislative session, he introduced 277 bills, 269 received action in committee and action beyond committee, 267 passed the House, and 238 became law. He has served in the Mississippi House of Representatives since 1992. He received his degrees from Northeast Louisiana University and Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College. He served as councilman and mayor

of the city of Gautier. Four Republican Representatives on our current list were also among the top-10 highest scores in the 2016-2019 legislative session: Representative John Read (District 112), Representative Jerry Turner (District 18), Representative Philip Gunn (District 56), and Representative Richard Bennett (District 120).

### **Highly Effective Democratic Lawmakers in the 2020-2023 Mississippi House of Representatives**

The following table identifies the top ten highest-scorers in the 2020-2023 House of Representatives among minority-party Democrats.

#### **Top Ten List—House Democrats (2020-2023 Legislative Session)**

	<u>Name</u>	<u>LES</u>	<u>Seniority</u>
<b>1.</b>	<b>Thomas Reynolds (District 33)</b>	1.72	11
<b>2.</b>	<b>Bryant Clark (District 47)</b>	1.50	5
<b>3.</b>	<b>John Hines (District 50)</b>	1.16	6
<b>4.</b>	<b>Zakiya Summers (District 68)</b>	1.14	1
<b>5.</b>	<b>Earle Banks (District 67)</b>	1.12	7
<b>6.</b>	<b>Omeria Scott (District 80)</b>	0.93	7
<b>7.</b>	<b>Christopher Bell (District 65)</b>	0.91	2
<b>8.</b>	<b>Jeffery Harness (District 85)</b>	0.85	2
<b>9.</b>	<b>Oscar Denton (District 55)</b>	0.74	3
<b>10.</b>	<b>Orlando Paden (District 26)</b>	0.74	2

Topping our list is Representative Thomas Reynolds of District 33 (Grenada, Tallahatchie, and Yalobusha counties), with a State Legislative Effectiveness Score of 1.72. He introduced 63 bills in the 2020-2023 legislative session, 22 received action in committee and action beyond committee, 22 passed the House of Representatives, and 13 became law. Prior to being elected to the Mississippi state legislature, Representative Reynolds worked as an attorney. He received his bachelor's degree and J.D. from the University of Mississippi. He was first elected to the Mississippi House of Representatives in 1980. Five Democratic Representatives on our current list were also among the top-10 highest scores in the 2016-2019 legislative session: Representative Thomas Reynolds (District 33), Representative Bryant Clark (District 47), Representative John Hines (District 50), Representative Earle Banks (District 67), and Representative Omeria Scott (District 80).

## Highly Effective Republican Lawmakers in the 2020-2023 State Senate

### Top Ten List—Senate Republicans (2020-2023 Legislative Session)

	<u>Name</u>	<u>LES</u>	<u>Committee Chair</u>
1.	<b>Briggs Hopson (District 23)</b>	12.84	Chair
2.	<b>Josh Harkins (District 20)</b>	3.30	Chair
3.	<b>Dennis DeBar (District 43)</b>	1.80	Chair
4.	<b>Kevin Blackwell (District 19)</b>	1.80	Chair
5.	<b>Joey Fillingane (District 41)</b>	1.79	Chair
6.	<b>Brice Wiggins (District 52)</b>	1.79	Chair
7.	<b>Walter Michel (District 25)</b>	1.48	Chair
8.	<b>David Parker (District 2)</b>	1.44	Chair
9.	<b>Angela Burks Hill (District 40)</b>	1.43	Chair
10.	<b>Nicole Boyd (District 9)</b>	1.26	None

Among Republicans in the State Senate, Sen. Briggs Hopson from District 23 (Issaquena, Warren, and Yazoo counties) was ranked first in terms of his SLES score, with a score of 12.84. He was also among the top-10 most effective Republican lawmakers in the State Senate in the 2016-2019 legislative session. In the 2020-2023 session he introduced 314 bills, 292 received action in committee, 291 received action beyond committee, 289 passed the Senate, and 257 became law. He has represented the 23<sup>rd</sup> District in the State Senate since 2008. He earned a bachelor's degree and J.D. from the University of Mississippi. He is a former adjunct professor of law at Mississippi College of Law and is a law partner with a focus on litigation, business law, school law, and healthcare law.

In the 2020-2023 legislative session, we also find that nine of the top-10 Republican State Senators are also committee chairs. Four Senators on the list were also among the top-10 highest scoring Democrats in the 2016-2019 legislative session. These Senators are Sen. Briggs Hopson (District 23), Sen. Joey Fillingane (District 41), Sen. Brice Wiggins (District 52), and Sen. David Parker (District 2).

## Highly Effective Democratic Lawmakers in the 2020-2023 State Senate

### Top Five List—Senate Democrats (2020-2023 Legislative Session)

	<u>Name</u>	<u>LES</u>	<u>Seniority</u>
1.	<b>Derrick Simmons (District 12)</b>	1.09	3
2.	<b>Juan Barnett (District 34)</b>	0.99	2
3.	<b>Angela Turner-Ford (District 16)</b>	0.90	2
4.	<b>Hob Bryan (District 7)</b>	0.84	10
5.	<b>David Blount (District 29)</b>	0.78	4

Sen. Derrick Simmons from District 12 (Bolivar, Coahoma, and Washington counties) had the highest SLES for Senate Democrats in the 2020-2023 legislative session, with a score of 1.09. He introduced 330 bills, 10 received action in committee, 8 received action beyond committee, 7 passed the Senate, and 3 became law. Sen. Simmons has been representing the 12<sup>th</sup> District since 2011 and became the minority leader in 2017. Sen. Simmons earned a bachelor's degree from Jackson State University, and an M.B.A. and J.D. from Howard University. He worked as a law clerk then became an assistant public defender. He later established his own law firm then became the municipal court judge for Sunflower, Mississippi and Moorhead, Mississippi from 2009 to 2011.

Turning to the Democratic Senators in the 2020-2023 legislative session, we find that there is substantial overlap between the highest performers on the top-5 list for the 2020-2023 legislative session and the preceding top-10 list for Democratic legislators in the 2016-2019 legislative session, with two Senators appearing on both lists, Senator Derrick Simmons (District 12), and David Blount (District 29).

### Lawmakers with Long-Standing Patterns of Above Expectations

Those who significantly exceed their benchmark score (which is calculated based on their seniority and status as a majority party member and/or committee chairperson) are identified as being in our “Above Expectations” category. The lists below identify the Representatives and Senators with the longest active streaks of exceeding expectations in consecutive sessions continuing through (and including) the 2020-2023 legislative session.

### State Representatives with Longest Streak of “Above Expectations” (through the 2020-2023 Legislative Session)

	<u>Name</u>	<u>Streak</u>	<u>SLES (2020-2023)</u>	<u>Seniority</u>
1.	<b>Thomas Reynolds (D-33)</b>	4 Legislative Sessions	1.72	11 Legislative Sessions
2.	<b>Bryant Clark (D-47)</b>	3 Legislative Sessions	1.50	5 Legislative Sessions

3.	<b>John Hines (D-50)</b>	3 Legislative Sessions	1.16	6 Legislative Sessions
4.	<b>Omeria Scott (D-80)</b>	3 Legislative Sessions	0.93	7 Legislative Sessions
5.	<b>Nick Bain (R-2)</b>	3 Legislative Sessions	3.92	3 Legislative Sessions

Representative Thomas Reynolds (D) of District 33 (Grenada, Tallahatchie, and Yalobusha counties) had the longest streak of “Above Expectations,” 4 legislative sessions, with a SLES score in the most recent Legislative Session of 1.72.

### **State Senators with Longest Streak of “Above Expectations” (through the 2020-2023 Legislative Session)**

	<u>Name</u>	<u>Streak</u>	<u>SLES (2020-2023)</u>	<u>Seniority</u>
1.	<b>David Blount (D-29)</b>	4 Legislative Sessions	0.78	4 Legislative Sessions

Turning to the State Senate, Senator David Blount (D) of District 29 (Hinds County) exceeded expectations for 4 consecutive legislative sessions. He has represented the 29<sup>th</sup> District since 2008 and is the current Vice Chairman of the Senate Democratic Caucus. He studied at Davidson College. Before running for office, he was a real estate broker. During the 2020-2023 legislative session, he introduced 90 bills, 17 of which received action in committee and action beyond committee, 18 of which passed the Senate, and 8 became law.

### **High-Performing Freshmen**

One way to identify future legislative leaders is to identify freshmen Representatives and Senators who earned an “Above Expectations” rating in their first term. For freshman legislators, their initial scores are compared to benchmarks for newcomers—so when a freshman outperforms their cohort, it can reveal strong political acumen, the ability to navigate legislative procedures quickly, and skill in coalition-building or policy entrepreneurship. These traits often correlate with future leadership roles. Our research on the U.S. Congress suggests that legislators who perform well early on are more likely to be selected for committee chairs or leadership positions, and influence major legislation in subsequent terms. Hence, identifying high-performing freshmen can offer early signals of who might rise through the ranks.

### **Freshmen Representatives “Above Expectations” (2020-2023 Legislative Session)**

	<u>Name</u>	<u>SLES (2020-2023)</u>
1.	<b>Lee Yancey (R-74)</b>	2.24

2.	<b>Missy Warren McGee (R-102)</b>	1.78
3.	<b>Zakiya Summers (D-68)</b>	1.14
4.	<b>Kent McCarty (R-101)</b>	1.05
5.	<b>Kevin Felsher (R-117)</b>	1.02
6.	<b>Shanda Yates (D-64)</b>	0.67

The State Representative with the highest “Above Expectation” score during his freshman term was Representative Lee Yancey (Rankin County) with a score of 2.23. He earned a bachelor’s degree in religion from Mississippi College and a master’s degree in divinity and a doctorate in leadership administration from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. During the 2020-2023 legislative session, he introduced 81 bills, 28 of which received action in committee and action beyond committee, 25 of which passed the House, and 14 became law.

### **Freshmen Senators “Above Expectations” (2020-2023 Legislative Session)**

	<u>Name</u>	<u>SLES (2020-2023)</u>
1.	<b>Sarita Simmons (D-13)</b>	0.36
2.	<b>Rod Hickman (D-32)</b>	0.27

The top-performing freshman in the State Senate was Senator Sarita Simmons (D) from District 13 (Bolivar, Sunflower, and Tallahatchie counties), with a SLES score of 0.36. She earned a bachelor’s degree from Alcorn State University. Prior to running for office, she worked as the general manager for a family-owned restaurant. During the 2020-2023 legislative session, she introduced 48 bills, 6 of which received action in committee and action beyond committee, 6 of which passed the Senate, and 5 became law.

### **Conclusion**

The 2020-2023 Mississippi legislative session demonstrated consistent patterns in legislative effectiveness, with experienced legislators, committee chairs, and majority-party members continuing to hold a distinct advantage in advancing their policy agendas. Across both chambers, many of the most effective lawmakers continued their high performance from previous sessions, indicating a durable capacity for lawmaking among key figures. These findings underscore the importance of institutional positions and experiences in shaping legislative outcomes in Mississippi.