CENTER FOR CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS

LOBBY WATCH MISSISSIPPI

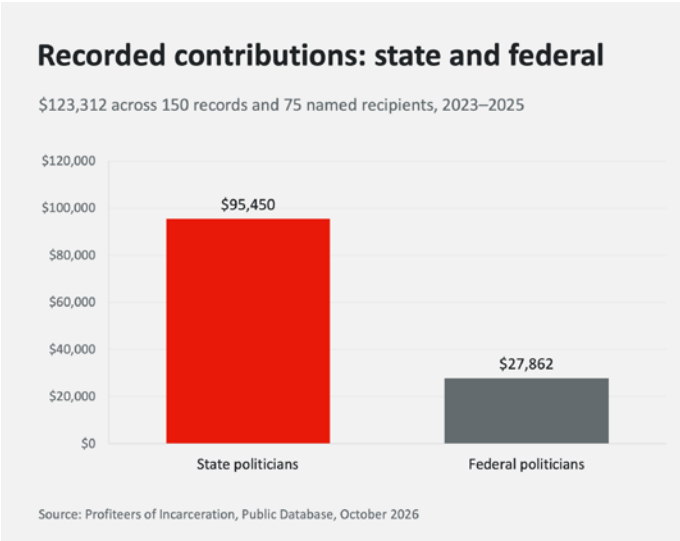
THE PROFITEERS OF INCARCERATION

How Private Prisons and the Cash Bail Industry Fund Mississippi Politics

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Mississippi has one of the most punitive criminal legal systems in the country and the highest per capita incarceration rate of any state.[1] Racial disparities exist throughout the system, and Black people are significantly overrepresented at every stage.[2] To hold, manage, and control tens of thousands of people daily, the state relies extensively on private businesses that profit handsomely from incarceration, pretrial detention, and punishment. Commercial bail companies profit when courts set cash bail that people cannot afford, leaving them with the choice to stay in jail or pay a bondsperson a nonrefundable 10%. Meanwhile, private prison companies profit by contracting with the government to confine people for state prisons, federal detention facilities, county jail placements, and out-of-state transfers.

These "profiteers of incarceration" contribute heavily to the campaigns of the state officials who write criminal legal policy, approve budgets and contracts, oversee prisons, administer campaign finance rules, and determine whether the state pursues claims against contractors. LobbyWatch Mississippi's review of public campaign finance records and lobbying reports identified over a hundred thousand dollars in reported contributions between 2023-2025 from the Mississippi Bail Agents Association (MBAA), private prison corporations Management & Training Corporation (MTC), CoreCivic, GEO Group, and associated political action committees or executives. The recipients include 75 Mississippi state and federal politicians.



In a state where political races are often inexpensive and uncontested, and the pay for lawmakers is relatively low, even a modest contribution can have a significant impact. Partly as a result of contributions, industries that benefit from detention and incarceration have ready access to lawmakers and statewide officials, while people most affected by jail, prison, and unaffordable bail do not. That imbalance helps to produce government policy that benefits private companies and harms people caught up in the criminal legal system as well as the broader public good.

The research identified five key takeaways:

1. Many Mississippi lawmakers receive significant financial contributions from companies that profit from incarceration in Mississippi.
2. These contributions create conflicts which threaten the public good and the civil rights of Mississippians.
3. Cash bail shifts burdens disproportionately onto low-income families and communities, by predicating release on ability to pay in violation of state and federal constitutions.
4. Weak laws around campaign finance disclosure and even weaker state oversight are exacerbating these problems.
5. These systemic failures extend across party lines.

INTRODUCTION

How much does it take for an industry to gain access to a Mississippi politician? As little as $250, $500, or $1,000. Those amounts may appear modest compared with national campaign spending, in part because Mississippi campaign finance law dictates that businesses can only contribute a maximum of $1000 a year to elected officials (Individuals and political committees have no contribution limit).[3] But in Mississippi many races are inexpensive, many incumbents face little or no opposition for decades, and some candidates report only a handful of contributions in a year, if even that many. A relatively small industry check can therefore be important to state officials and carry far more weight than its face value suggests.

This report uses the term "profiteers of incarceration" to describe the businesses and associations whose revenue depends directly on incarceration or the threat of incarceration. The term includes private prison companies such as MTC, CoreCivic, and the GEO Group, as well as the MBAA, which represents the commercial bail bonds industry.

Private prisons make money through government contracts and occupied beds. Bail agents make money when a court sets a bond amount that a person or family cannot pay in full and must instead purchase a commercial surety bond, generally for a nonrefundable percentage plus fees.

These industries operate at different points in the criminal legal system but share a basic financial interest in preserving a system that arrests, detains, and prosecutes a large number of people and relies heavily on private intermediaries.

At the front end of the criminal legal system, cash bail can keep a legally innocent person in jail solely because that person cannot pay the bail amount. At the back end, private prison contracts convert prolonged incarceration into a revenue stream for corporations. Both arrangements ensure that private profit influences policy decisions involving liberty, punishment, public safety, and the public's money.

Mississippi's reliance on these systems makes political spending by the industries especially important. The state uses private facilities for people sentenced through the Mississippi Department of Corrections (MDOC), federal and immigration detainees, people transferred from other states or territories, and some people awaiting trial in county custody. At the same time, cash bail remains a routine part of pretrial practice, even though Mississippi law and the Constitution say that release should be the default in most cases and that excessive bail should not be required.[4] The Mississippi Supreme Court instructs courts to use the least onerous conditions necessary to ensure future court appearances and public safety.[5]

The findings in this report demonstrate that industries with a direct financial stake in incarceration are using political contributions and lobbying to cultivate relationships with the officials responsible for regulating, funding, and overseeing them. These relationships help drive the highest incarceration rate in the nation.[6]



METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

LobbyWatch Mississippi and the Center for Constitutional Rights reviewed publicly available annual campaign finance reports for 2023, 2024, and 2025 filed with the Mississippi Secretary of State by state legislators and statewide elected officials. The review included the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Secretary of State, Attorney General, State Auditor, State Treasurer, Commissioner of Agriculture, Commissioner of Insurance, members of the Mississippi House and Senate, and federal officials identified in the course of the research.

The researchers searched for contributions associated with CoreCivic, Management & Training Corporation, the GEO Group, the Mississippi Bail Agents Association, and related political action committees, executives, and identifiable representatives. The analysis also drew on publicly available lobbying reports and on legislative and policy materials.[7] The recipient list in Appendix A standardizes the names and contribution entries from that draft.

The resulting totals should be treated as conservative minimums rather than a complete accounting because Mississippi's disclosure system is fragmented and difficult to search. Many reports are handwritten or scanned. Some officials do not file itemized annual reports, some reports may be missing from the online system entirely, and contributions at or below the statutory reporting threshold may not appear. Variations in donor names, abbreviations, addresses, or PAC names can also make searches incomplete.

The report also relies on the facts, dates, totals, legal citations, and legislative descriptions contained in reporting and other source material. Those items should be checked against the underlying campaign finance reports, lobbying filings, statutes, court rules, contracts, and legislative records before further assertions are made.

The report does not attempt to prove a quid pro quo or make a specific allegation that any recipient violated campaign finance, ethics, civil or criminal law. A reported contribution establishes a financial relationship, not the recipient's motive or the effect of the contribution. The analysis instead spotlights patterns of giving, the policy interests of the donors, and the official responsibilities of recipients, revealing conflicts-of-interest that pose risks to both public confidence and public policy.



BACKGROUND

Cash Bail and Pretrial Detention

Cash bail operates before a person has been convicted of a crime, when the person is still legally presumed to be innocent.[8] After arrest, a judge may set conditions for release while a case is pending.

Mississippi law and court rules recognize that pretrial detention should not be used as punishment and that, for pretrial defendants, courts should use the least onerous conditions needed to ensure appearance in court and protect public safety.[9] The Eighth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and Article 3, Section 29 of the Mississippi Constitution also prohibit excessive bail. [10]

In practice, however, release often turns on one's ability to pay. The Mississippi Supreme Court has stated that release should be available to criminal defendants but also proposes ranges for cash bail in their Rules of Criminal Procedure.[11] Proposed dollar amounts, even for the lowest level offenses, always start with the defendant paying some amount for their freedom.[12] Since cash bail amounts are recommended by the Mississippi Supreme Court for all offenses, cash bail is the default and regularly set by Mississippi courts. When a court sets a cash bail amount that a defendant cannot afford, they will remain in jail even though they have not been convicted. A higher bail amount does not necessarily reflect a greater ability to pay. For a low-income defendant (almost 80% of criminal defendants charged with felonies in Mississippi are indigent),[13] even a comparatively modest bond can be out of reach.

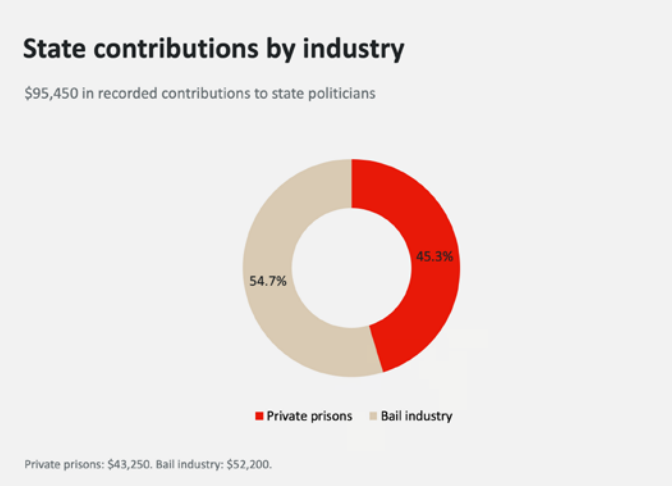
Enter commercial bail. A bail agent or bonds company generally charges a nonrefundable percentage of the bail amount, set at 10 percent under Mississippi law,[14] plus fees, and then posts a surety bond that allows the defendant to leave jail. Families may have to borrow money, use savings, pledge property, or ask relatives and friends for help. Unlike money deposited directly to a court, the fee paid to a bonds company is generally the price of the service and is not returned simply because the person appears in court.[15] If, on the other hand, a person can pay the full bail amount to the court, they will get it back so long as they show up for all future court hearings.

When defendants cannot pay the amounts imposed by the court but can cover the 10% through a bonds company, the commercial bail market expands. The industry's policy interests therefore intersect directly with local and national debates over pretrial detention, judicial discretion, and bail reform.

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Pretrial detention also carries consequences beyond the criminal case. Even a short jail stay can cause a person to lose a job, miss a rent payment, lose transportation, interrupt medical care, lose custody of a child or fail to fulfill family responsibilities.[16] Longer detention can magnify those harms. Harsh conditions during pretrial detention in Mississippi jails also cause people to take plea deals they would not have taken if they were not detained.[17]

Testimonies highlight the experience of people who remained jailed for months because they could not afford the cash bail, as well as the alternative role of community-based bail funds that raise money to secure release without charging a commercial fee.[18]



The Mississippi Bail Agents Association

The Mississippi Bail Agents Association (MBAA) is a professional membership organization for the state's commercial bail industry. Its stated mission is to protect, promote, and preserve the bail industry, and its website notes that it has worked with lawmakers, judges, sheriffs, and clerks on changes to Mississippi bail law for decades.[19]

The association's political activity is consistent with that mission, including an active public communications strategy opposing cashless bail and other reforms, as well as direct engagement with elected officials, campaign events, lobbying, and campaign contributions. The MBAA reported paying two lobbyists in 2025, including compensation and reimbursements totaling more than $30,000.[20]

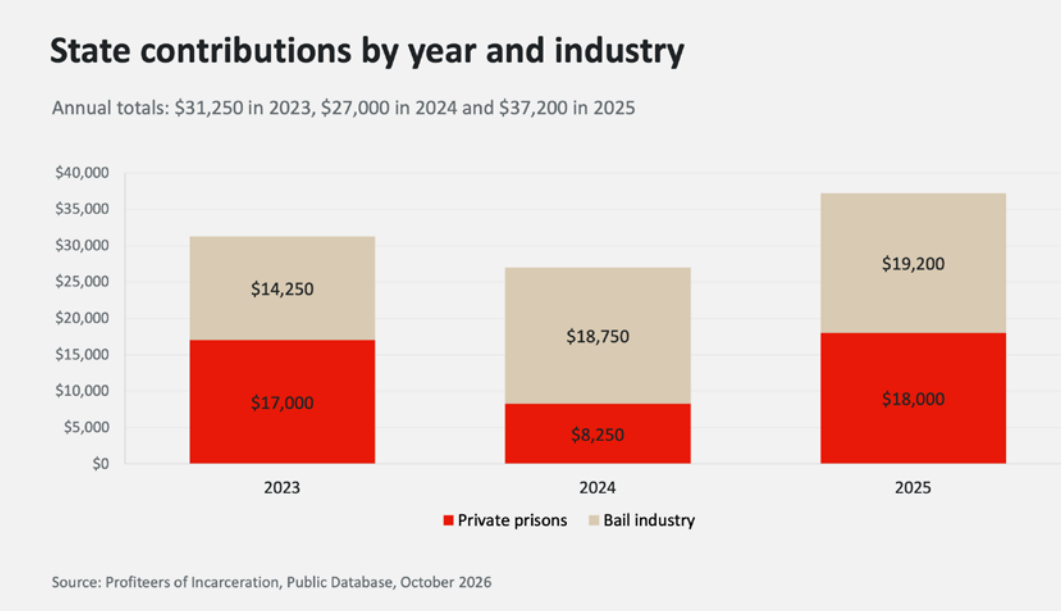
Its campaign finance strategy differs from that of the private prison companies examined in this report.

Rather than relying primarily on a few large contributions, the MBAA distributes many smaller checks across the legislature and political parties, often in $250, $500, or $1,000 increments. Between 2023 and 2025, the research identified at least $52,200 in MBAA contributions to at least 66 Mississippi politicians. Those amounts represented a meaningful share of some lawmakers' reported fundraising for the year.

Private Prisons in Mississippi

Private prison companies occupy a different point in the criminal legal system. They contract with governments to operate prisons and detention facilities, and their revenue depends on public contracts for the custody of incarcerated or detained people. Mississippi private prison facilities hold people in the custody of MDOC state prisons, federal detainees, people held for immigration purposes, county jail detainees, and people transferred from other jurisdictions.[21] The companies enter into contracts with different levels of government to hold people in their custody for an agreed upon rate per day.[22]

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This report identifies four private prisons operating in Mississippi during the period examined. Two are part of the MDOC system: East Mississippi Correctional Facility and Wilkinson County Correctional Facility, both operated by Management & Training Corporation (MTC).[23] CoreCivic owns and operates Tallahatchie County Correctional Facility, which houses detainees and incarcerated people under contracts involving counties, federal agencies, other states, and U.S. territories.[24] The Adams County Correctional Center in Natchez is another CoreCivic-operated facility used by the Department of Homeland Security and ICE for immigration detention.[25] All four private prisons in Mississippi have faced scrutiny in recent years for documented incidents of violence, abuse, neglect, and poor living conditions.[26]

Between 2023-2025 the private prison industry donated at least $71,112 in campaign contributions to at least 21 Mississippi politicians.

Management & Training Corporation (MTC)

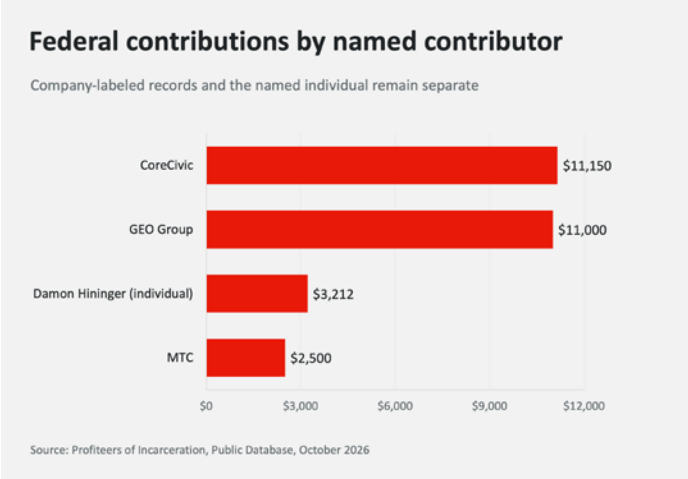
MTC is a Utah-based private corrections and workforce-services company and one of the largest private prison contractors in the United States.[27] In Mississippi, its role is especially significant because it operates East Mississippi Correctional Facility and Wilkinson County Correctional Facility under state contracts.

Those facilities have faced longstanding allegations and findings of understaffing, deadly violence, inadequate supervision, and unconstitutional living conditions.[28] Mississippi has previously required MTC to return money after failing to meet staffing requirements, including a reported $5.1 million repayment to the Department of Corrections in 2023.[29] In 2026, the State Auditor announced a $7.4 million civil demand against MTC related to alleged failures to provide contractually required staffing.[30] The matter was referred to the Attorney General's office for potential civil action.[31]

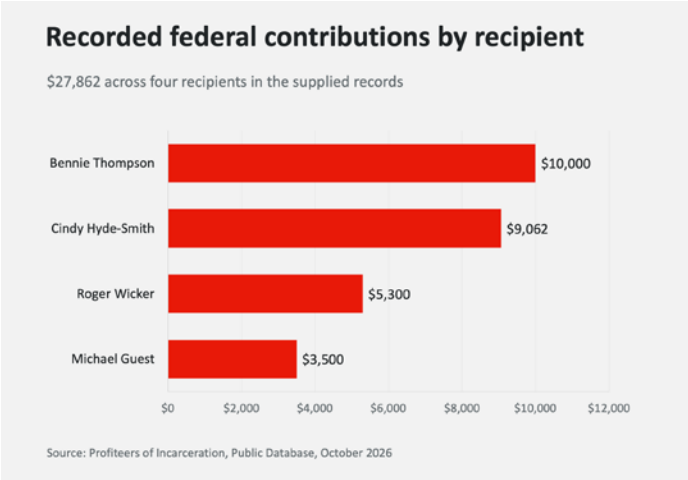
MTC has contributed to statewide officials, including the Attorney General, legislative leaders, House and Senate corrections committee members, and lawmakers whose districts include or border MTC-operated facilities.

CoreCivic and GEO Group

CoreCivic, one of the largest private corrections companies in the country, operates Mississippi facilities under multiple government contracts. Its campaign activity in source material is concentrated more heavily at the federal level than MTC's, and records show that CoreCivic, its PAC, and its CEO contributed to members of Mississippi's congressional delegation.[32]



GEO Group, another major private corrections company, also appears in the records reviewed for federal contributions. It plays a critical role in the Trump administration's mass detention policies targeting immigrants, and it contributes primarily to federal officials, including ranking member of the House Homeland Security Committee Bennie Thompson, who represents Mississippi's 2nd District.[33] Recently, GEO Group was reported to have donated more than a million dollars to Donald Trump's PAC after receiving federal contracts totaling $165 million to run ICE detention facilities.[34] Together, these companies demonstrate that the political economy of incarceration extends beyond state prison contracts to federal detention, immigration detention, administrative decisionmaking, and congressional policymaking.

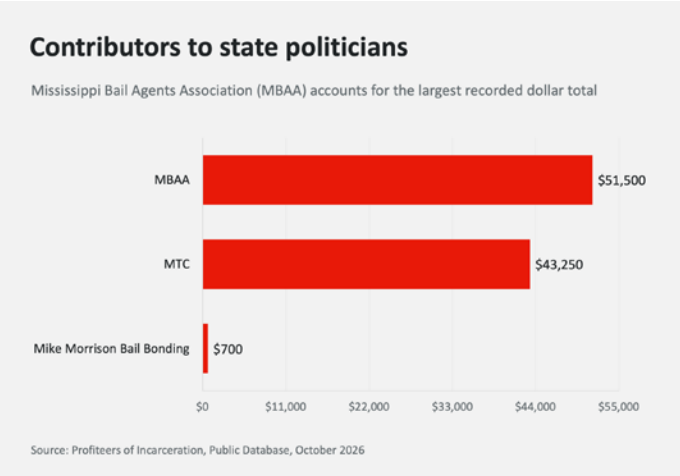


FINDINGS

1. Many Mississippi lawmakers receive significant financial contributions from companies that profit from incarceration.

Commercial bail companies and private prison companies – which make more money when the state incarcerates more people, even if just temporarily – have systematically and strategically donated to Mississippi lawmakers. LobbyWatch Mississippi's review of public campaign finance records and lobbying reports identified over a hundred twenty thousand dollars in reported contributions since 2023 from the Mississippi Bail Agents Association (MBAA), private prison corporations Management & Training Corporation (MTC), CoreCivic, GEO Group, and associated political action committees or executives.

The recipients include 75 Mississippi state and federal politicians.



Even small checks can be influential in an environment where candidates often report little fundraising; for many lawmakers, their only or primary annual contribution comes from the MBAA. For instance, in 2025 Charles Blackwell, a freshman Mississippi House Republican, had only one campaign contribution: $250 from the MBAA.[35] Mark Tullos, a House Republican, only received donations from the MBAA in 2024 and 2025.[36] Some lawmakers, like House Republican Elliot Burch, received more than one donation in a year, but total cash-on-hand remains relatively low, so a $500 donation from the MBAA makes up a significant percentage of his account. Burch's 2025 end of year balance was $3367.57, so one MBAA donation accounts for close to 15% of his account balance.[37] In these circumstances, the association's contribution may provide both financial support and a direct relationship with a lawmaker who otherwise has few donors seeking access.

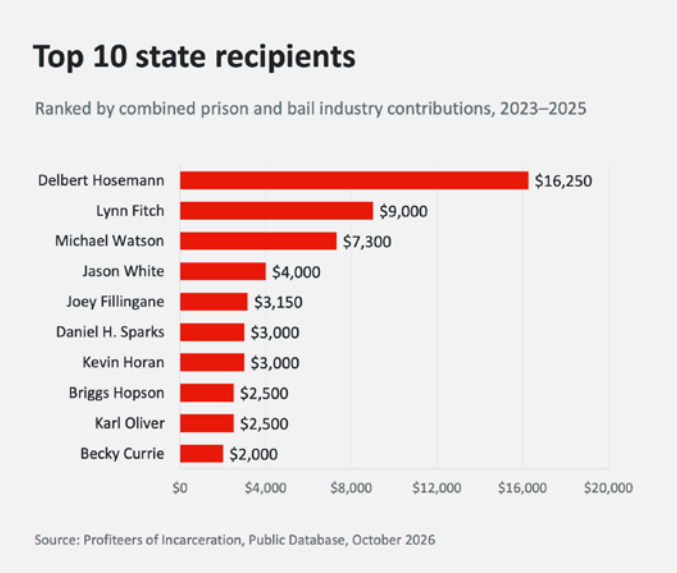
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2. These contributions create conflicts which threaten the public good and the civil rights of Mississippians.

The reviewed records suggest that Management & Training Corporation (MTC) focuses heavily on officials with authority over state corrections and government administration. Recipients of campaign donations include the Attorney General, Secretary of State, Lieutenant Governor, Speaker of the House, House and Senate corrections committee leaders and members, and lawmakers whose districts include or border MTC facilities. CoreCivic and GEO Group appear focused on Mississippi's congressional delegation, where federal prison, immigration detention, and appropriations policy are especially relevant.

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The contributions to Attorney General Lynn Fitch are particularly significant. The reviewed records show a $5,000 contribution from MTC's PAC in 2025 and a $1,000 contribution from MTC in 2024. In 2026, the State Auditor announced a $7.4 million civil demand against MTC for alleged contract violations including chronic understaffing and referred the matter to the Attorney General's office to pursue possible litigation to recover taxpayer money from MTC.[38]



The contributions do not guarantee that the Attorney General will handle the matter improperly, but they create, at a minimum, a conflict of interest that should be addressed through disclosure and recusal standards.

Among MTC's other reported recipients is Secretary of State Michael Watson, who is responsible for campaign finance reporting and disclosures. MTC's recipients also include House and Senate officials responsible for corrections policy and either chair or sit on legislative corrections committees. House corrections committee chair Becky Currie accepted $1000 MTC donations in 2024 and 2025, and recently retired Senate Corrections committee chair Juan Barnett accepted a MTC donation of $1000 in 2023.

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From 2023 to 2025, the MBAA contributed at least $52,200 to at least 66 politicians. Most checks were in increments of $250, $500, or $1,000. The contributions reached both parties, although Republicans received the largest share and most maximum-dollar contributions. Some legislators, such as Republican Senator Joey Fillingane and Secretary of State Michael Watson, also received contributions from the MBAA president's personal bail bonding company. The association publicly describes its mission as protecting, promoting, and preserving the bail industry.[39] Its public advocacy openly opposes many forms of bail reform and supports policies that maintain the role of commercial bondspeople. The research also reports nearly $31,000 in MBAA lobbying compensation and reimbursements during 2025. Campaign contributions and lobbying should therefore be understood as parts of a broader political strategy.

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Due to the low salary for state legislators (currently set at $23,500/ year),[40] many policymakers receiving donations also work in other professions, including some who even work as appointed attorneys or part-time "public defenders" representing indigent defendants.[41] Donations to these politicians, therefore, create the spectre of impropriety in their capacity both to support ethical legislation and to represent the individuals facing the consequences of that legislation. Public defenders and appointed attorneys are tasked with seeking reduced bail/bond amount and release on recognizance (ROR) and generally advocating for their client's release from pretrial detention. Therefore, the appearance of impropriety can exist if lawmakers who are also part-time public defenders receive funds from the commercial bail industry, which has an interest in bail amounts being set out-of-reach of criminal defendants.

3. Cash bail shifts burdens disproportionately onto low-income families and communities, by predicating release on ability to pay – in violation of state and federal constitutions.

Death Penalty lawyer Bryan Stevenson has famously said that the criminal legal system "treats you better if you are *rich and guilty, than if you are poor and innocent*."[42]

Mississippi's Rules of Criminal Procedure recognize that criminal defendants are presumed innocent and most should be eligible for release pretrial and courts should impose the least onerous conditions of release necessary.[43] However, in practice, money bail is frequently set without any meaningful consideration of a person's ability to pay. A person with money and resources can secure release. A similarly situated person without money may remain in jail.

Pretrial detention can result in the loss of employment, housing, transportation, healthcare, child custody arrangements, and family stability, and even a short stay can be fatal.[44] This also increases pressure on people to plead guilty. In Mississippi, families who turn to a commercial bond company must pay a nonrefundable 10% percent of the bond, transferring limited household resources to a private business simply to obtain release.

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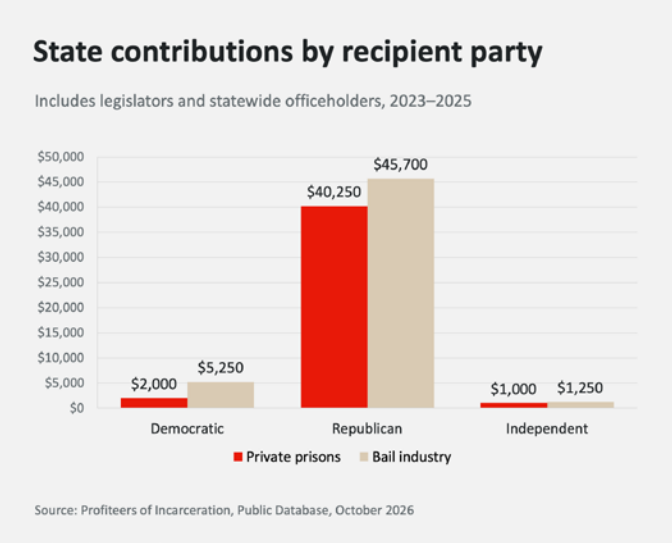
The unequal impact is most severe in poor and heavily policed communities. Due to the legacy of slavery and white supremacy within the Mississippi criminal legal system, this is most heavily felt by Black communities in the state.

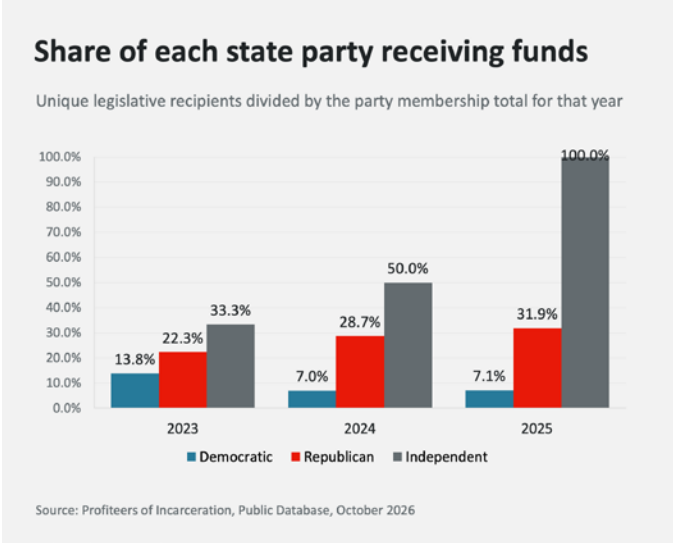
In 2024, the U.S. Department of Justice found that in Lexington, Mississippi, a mostly Black community in rural Holmes County, officials regularly violated residents' civil rights by illegally arresting, using excessive force, imposing money bail without justification, and by conditioning release on payment without any consideration of ability to pay – in violation of the Constitution.[45] The DOJ found that due to this "[i]n Lexington, many people hire a bondsperson, who posts the money in exchange for a fee[.]"[46] The potential for harm to Black residents is heightened when lawmakers representing Lexington and similarly impacted communities accept contributions from an industry that depends on the continued use of cash bail.

4. Weak laws around campaign finance disclosure and even weaker state oversight are exacerbating these problems.

Mississippi's campaign finance system makes political spending much harder to evaluate than it should be. Handwritten reports, inconsistent filing, missing itemization, limited search tools, and infrequent enforcement all reduce the public's ability to identify patterns quickly. The system also makes it difficult to determine whether the totals documented here represent the full extent of industry giving.

A similar lack of transparency affects private correctional contracting. MTC and CoreCivic have operated facilities that face allegations of understaffing, violence, neglect, inadequate healthcare, deaths, and contract noncompliance.[47] Yet Mississippi taxpayers continue to pay these companies substantial sums. It is no coincidence that the Secretary of State and the Attorney General, both of whom play a role in enforcing campaign finance laws and government transparency, also receive donations. The absence of strong disclosure requirements, consequences for nondisclosure, independent monitoring, or legally enforceable safeguards have allowed lawmakers to accept contributions from business entities that present conflicts of interest or the appearance of impropriety with near total impunity.

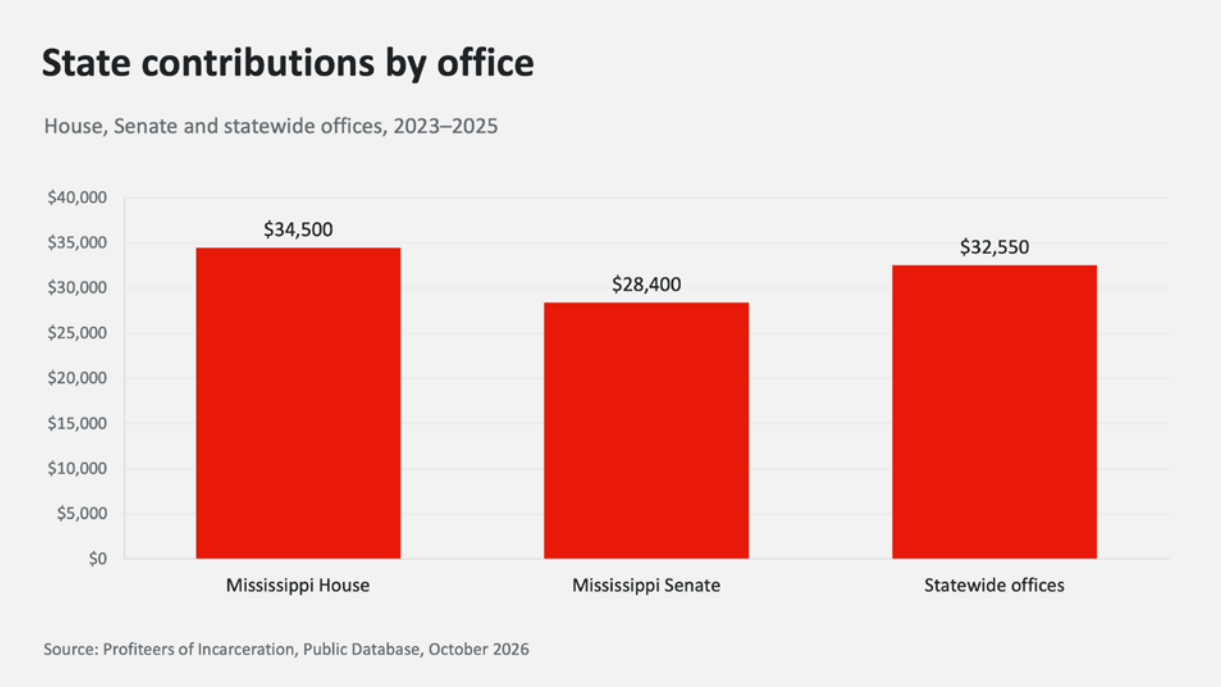




5. These systemic failures extend across party lines.

While Republican officials received most of the identified funds, the recipient list includes prominent Democrats and Independents as well. Forty-five percent of the Senate Democrats, eight out of eighteen, in the Mississippi legislature have taken money in the last three years from the private prison or commercial bail industry. This reveals a culture within the Mississippi Legislature where donations are accepted apparently without consideration of impact or donor motive. Cross-party giving helps the industries maintain access regardless of which party or faction controls a district, committee, chamber, statewide office, or congressional seat.

The issue is especially significant for lawmakers who represent poor, predominantly Black, or heavily policed communities and who publicly support criminal legal reforms. Accepting contributions from a private prison company or the bail industry should immediately raise concerns about the extent to which lawmakers are actually considering the wellbeing of their constituents – especially when many lawmakers routinely run unopposed campaigns, and do not have a need for campaign contributions.



Case Study, Senate Bill 2319 (2026)

Senate Bill 2319 (2026)[48] is a key example of how lobbying interests appear to trump public welfare concerns. Introduced during the 2026 legislative session by Republican Senator Joey Fillingane, the bill would have restricted judges' ability to release people accused of most felony offenses on their own recognizance or through pretrial diversion programs. For affected defendants, **release from jail would exclusively have required cash bail or a commercial surety bond.**[49]

The bill also would have prevented individuals and community-based bail funds from posting bail for **more than three people per year**, and imposed licensing and insurance requirements similar to those governing commercial bail businesses upon community-based bail funds. These proposed restrictions would have made it harder for families, churches, mutual-aid groups, and community bail funds to assist people who could not afford release, while preserving the commercial bond industry's role.

SB2319 died in committee,[50] but it remains an important case study in coordinated attempts to stifle community-based bail funds and further entrench the cash bail and surety bond system into the state's criminal legal system. Almost identical legislation passed in Georgia in 2024, and its constitutionality is currently being challenged in Georgia courts by civil rights groups.[51] Any such legislation, if passed in Mississippi, would also be challenged by civil rights groups given its blatant unconstitutionality.

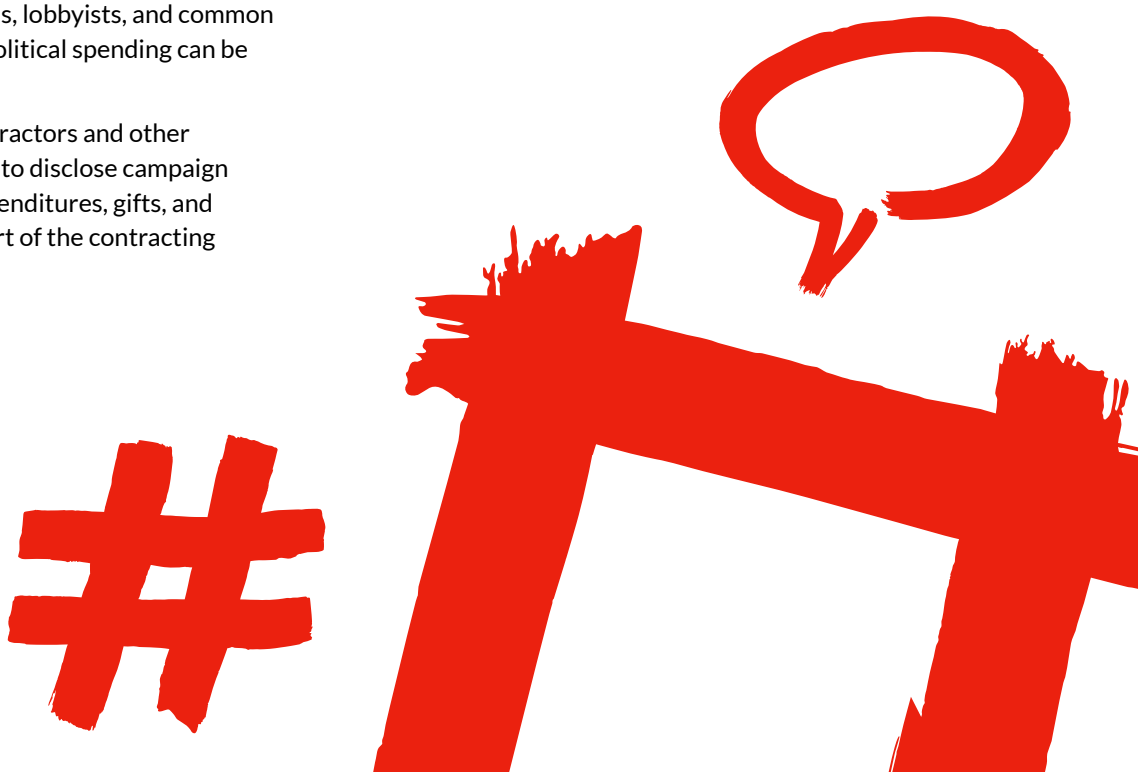
The bill served the MBAA's stated interest in preserving commercial bail and restricting alternatives. Senator Joey Fillingane, the bill's sponsor, is identified in the research as a recurring recipient of MBAA contributions. The MBAA's own social media showcases a close relationship between the association and Senator Fillingane.[52] MBAA social media posts indicate their previous involvement in past legislation, including Senate Bill 2315 (2025), an administrative bill regarding the bail and surety bond system that was likewise authored by Senator Fillingane and was passed into law.[53] These facts alone do not prove that contributions led to the 2026 bill's authorship, but the alignment between donor interest and the legislative proposal warrants public scrutiny.



RECOMMENDATIONS

The contribution patterns documented in this report call for both immediate voluntary action by public officials and structural changes to Mississippi law and practice, including the following:

- Elected officials should return contributions from private prison companies and the commercial bail industry and publicly commit not to accept such contributions in the future.
- Political parties, caucuses, and reform organizations should adopt internal contribution policies and ethical guidelines that prevent candidates who claim to support criminal legal reform from accepting money from industries that profit from incarceration or the threat of incarceration.
- Require all Mississippi state and local candidates and political committees to file campaign finance reports electronically in a searchable, downloadable format.
- Strengthen enforcement authority, establish meaningful penalties for late, incomplete, or inaccurate reports, and publish enforcement actions in a central public database.
- Require donors and recipients to disclose affiliated companies, PACs, executives, lobbyists, and common addresses so that related political spending can be identified more easily.
- Require private prison contractors and other major government vendors to disclose campaign contributions, lobbying expenditures, gifts, and political relationships as part of the contracting process.
- Adopt clear recusal and conflict-review procedures when an officeholder or agency is asked to investigate, sue, regulate, or award a contract to a campaign donor.
- Require corrections committees and contracting agencies to publish meetings, communications, contract amendments, staffing reports, penalties, and performance reviews involving private prison operators.
- Protect judicial discretion to release defendants on their own recognizance, unsecured bonds, and nonfinancial conditions, and reject legislation designed to make commercial bail the only practical route out of jail.
- Protect the ability of families, faith communities, and nonprofit bail funds to assist people who are legally presumed innocent.
- **At minimum, every campaign donation recipient identified should publicly explain whether the contribution will be returned, whether the donor has sought meetings or policy changes, and what safeguards the official will use when considering matters that affect the donor.**



CONCLUSION

The records reviewed for this report show a sustained flow of campaign money from businesses and associations that profit from incarceration or the threat of incarceration to the public officials who shape Mississippi's criminal legal system. The amounts vary, the recipients span parties and ideologies, and the giving strategies differ, but the underlying pattern is clear: industries with a direct financial stake in cash bail, detention, prison building and contracting, and incarceration are spending significant money investing in political relationships with those people who have power over those systems. This is the political economy of incarceration in Mississippi.

When a private prison corporation gives to officials who oversee corrections matters or may be asked to pursue claims against that contractor, or when the commercial bail industry's association funds lawmakers who write pretrial detention and bail policy, the public has a legitimate interest in knowing about those relationships and how elected officials manage them. The stakes are especially high because the policies at issue determine whether people remain in jail before trial, whether families must pay private companies for release, how incarcerated people are treated, and how public money is spent on private correctional contracts. In Mississippi, where even short stints in jails and prisons can be harmful and even fatal, the outcomes of these processes have grave implications for liberty, public safety, family stability, government accountability, and the use of taxpayer dollars.

Mississippi's weak disclosure and enforcement systems leave the public with too little information to evaluate the extent to which these donations have created undue influence, conflicts, and access. Mississippi can reduce these conflicts by making campaign finance reporting genuinely transparent, strengthening enforcement, requiring greater disclosure from government contractors, protecting judicial discretion in granting pretrial release, and creating clearer rules for recusals and conflicts involving major donors. Elected officials can act immediately as well by declining or returning contributions from industries whose profits depend directly on incarceration and by explaining publicly how they separate campaign relationships from official responsibilities.

The broader question we must ask is what kind of criminal legal system does Mississippi want to have? A system that relies heavily on cash bail and for-profit incarceration will continue to be vulnerable to the malign influence of private financial interests. Each person caught up in the system becomes a source of potential profit for private industry. If the state actually wants meaningful criminal legal reform, it must address not only the laws and institutions but also the political economy surrounding them. Transparency is essential but alone will not solve the problem. It is through a collective struggle to change policy, policymakers, and the underlying economic incentives that Mississippi might gain independence from the profiteers of incarceration.

A system that relies heavily on cash bail and for-profit incarceration will continue to be vulnerable to the malign influence of private financial interests.



APPENDICES

Appendix A: Reported Recipients

State Politicaian Totals									
Recipient	Party	Office	Private prisons	Bail industry	Combined total	Transac-tions	2023 total	2024 total	2025 total
Derrick T. Simmons	Democratic	Mississippi Senate	$0	$1,000	$1,000	2	$0	$500	$500
Hillman Frazier	Democratic	Mississippi Senate	$0	$1,000	$1,000	2	$500	$500	$0
Hob Bryan	Democratic	Mississippi Senate	$0	$1,000	$1,000	2	$500	$0	$500
Juan Barnett[54]	Democratic	Mississippi Senate	$1,000	$0	$1,000	1	$1,000	$0	$0
Rod Hickman	Democratic	Mississippi Senate	$1,000	$0	$1,000	1	$0	$0	$1,000
Bradford Blackmon	Democratic	Mississippi Senate	$0	$750	$750	2	$0	$500	$250
Albert Butler	Democratic	Mississippi Senate	$0	$250	$250	1	$250	$0	$0
Carl Mickens	Democratic	Mississippi House	$0	$250	$250	1	$250	$0	$0
David Blount	Democratic	Mississippi Senate	$0	$250	$250	1	$250	$0	$0
Gregory Holloway	Democratic	Mississippi House	$0	$250	$250	1	$250	$0	$0
Oscar Denton	Democratic	Mississippi House	$0	$250	$250	1	$250	$0	$0
Otis Anthony	Democratic	Mississippi House	$0	$250	$250	1	$0	$250	$0
Shanda Yates	Indepen-dent	Mississippi House	$0	$1,250	$1,250	3	$500	$250	$500
Angela Cockerham	Indepen-dent	Mississippi House	$1,000	$0	$1,000	1	$0	$0	$1,000
Delbert Hosemann	Republican	Mississippi Lieutenant Governor	$13,000	$3,250	$16,250	8	$11,250	$3,000	$2,000
Lynn Fitch	Republican	Mississippi Attorney General	$7,000	$2,000	$9,000	5	$1,000	$2,000	$6,000
Michael Watson	Republican	Mississippi Secretary of State	$7,000	$300	$7,300	4	$1,000	$1,000	$5,300
Jason White	Republican	Mississippi House	$1,000	$3,000	$4,000	4	$2,000	$1,000	$1,000
Joey Fillingane	Republican	Mississippi Senate	$0	$3,150	$3,150	4	$1,000	$1,000	$1,150

Recipient	Party	Office	Private prisons	Bail industry	Combined total	Transac-tions	2023 total	2024 total	2025 total
Daniel H. Sparks	Republican	Mississippi Senate	$2,000	$1,000	$3,000	4	$1,000	$500	$1,500
Kevin Horan	Republican	Mississippi House	$1,000	$2,000	$3,000	3	$1,000	$1,000	$1,000
Briggs Hopson	Republican	Mississippi Senate	$2,000	$500	$2,500	3	$0	$1,500	$1,000
Karl Oliver	Republican	Mississippi House	$2,000	$500	$2,500	4	$1,250	$1,250	$0
Becky Currie	Republican	Mississippi House	$2,000	$0	$2,000	2	$0	$1,000	$1,000
Brice Wiggins	Republican	Mississippi Senate	$1,000	$1,000	$2,000	4	$500	$1,000	$500
John Thomas "Trey" Lamar	Republican	Mississippi House	$500	$1,500	$2,000	3	$0	$1,000	$1,000
Tyler McCaughn	Republican	Mississippi Senate	$1,000	$1,000	$2,000	4	$0	$1,000	$1,000
Elliot Burch	Republican	Mississippi House	$0	$1,500	$1,500	2	$0	$1,000	$500
Jansen T. Owen	Republican	Mississippi House	$0	$1,500	$1,500	2	$0	$500	$1,000
Jeremy England	Republican	Mississippi Senate	$0	$1,500	$1,500	2	$1,000	$500	$0
Jeff Hale	Republican	Mississippi House	$0	$1,250	$1,250	3	$500	$250	$500
Angela Burks Hill	Republican	Mississippi Senate	$0	$1,000	$1,000	1	$0	$0	$1,000
Benjamin Suber	Republican	Mississippi Senate	$0	$1,000	$1,000	2	$0	$500	$500
J. Walter Michel	Republican	Mississippi Senate	$0	$1,000	$1,000	2	$0	$500	$500
Jay McKnight	Republican	Mississippi House	$0	$1,000	$1,000	3	$250	$500	$250
Jody Steverson	Republican	Mississippi House	$0	$1,000	$1,000	3	$500	$250	$250
Neil Whaley	Republican	Mississippi Senate	$0	$1,000	$1,000	2	$250	$0	$750
Noah Sanford	Republican	Mississippi House	$0	$1,000	$1,000	1	$1,000	$0	$0
Price Wallace[55]	Republican	Mississippi House	$0	$1,000	$1,000	1	$0	$0	$1,000
Chris Johnson	Republican	Mississippi Senate	$500	$250	$750	2	$0	$0	$750
Jason Barrett	Republican	Mississippi Senate	$0	$750	$750	2	$0	$500	$250
Mark Tullos	Republican	Mississippi House	$0	$750	$750	3	$250	$250	$250
Shane Barnett	Republican	Mississippi House	$0	$750	$750	2	$500	$250	$0
Stacey Hobgood-Wilkes	Republican	Mississippi House	$0	$750	$750	3	$250	$250	$250
C. Scott Bounds	Republican	Mississippi House	$0	$500	$500	1	$500	$0	$0

Recipient	Party	Office	Private prisons	Bail industry	Combined total	Transac-tions	2023 total	2024 total	2025 total
Casey Eure	Republican	Mississippi House	$0	$500	$500	2	$0	$250	$250
Dean Kirby	Republican	Mississippi Senate	$0	$500	$500	1	$0	$500	$0
Dennis DeBar Jr.	Republican	Mississippi Senate	$0	$500	$500	1	$0	$500	$0
Donnie Scoggin	Republican	Mississippi House	$0	$500	$500	2	$0	$250	$250
Jerry Turner	Republican	Mississippi House	$0	$500	$500	1	$0	$500	$0
Kevin Ford	Republican	Mississippi House	$0	$500	$500	2	$0	$250	$250
Lance Varner	Republican	Mississippi House	$0	$500	$500	2	$0	$250	$250
Lee Yancey	Republican	Mississippi House	$0	$500	$500	2	$0	$250	$250
Mike Thompson	Republican	Mississippi Senate	$0	$500	$500	1	$500	$0	$0
Rodney Hall	Republican	Mississippi House	$0	$500	$500	2	$250	$0	$250
William Tracy Arnold	Republican	Mississippi House	$0	$500	$500	2	$0	$250	$250
Andy Berry	Republican	Mississippi Senate	$0	$250	$250	1	$0	$0	$250
Bart Williams	Republican	Mississippi Senate	$0	$250	$250	1	$250	$0	$0
Carolyn Crawford	Republican	Mississippi House	$0	$250	$250	1	$250	$0	$0
Celeste Hurst	Republican	Mississippi Senate	$0	$250	$250	1	$250	$0	$0
Chad McMahan	Republican	Mississippi Senate	$0	$250	$250	1	$0	$0	$250
Charles Blackwell	Republican	Mississippi House	$0	$250	$250	1	$0	$0	$250
Dan Eubanks	Republican	Mississippi House	$0	$250	$250	1	$0	$0	$250
Fred Shanks	Republican	Mississippi House	$0	$250	$250	1	$0	$0	$250
Jeffrey S. Guice	Republican	Mississippi House	$0	$250	$250	1	$250	$0	$0
Jonathan McMillian	Republican	Mississippi House	$0	$250	$250	1	$250	$0	$0
Joseph M. Seymour	Republican	Mississippi House	$0	$250	$250	1	$250	$0	$0
Joseph Tubb	Republican	Mississippi House	$0	$250	$250	1	$250	$0	$0
Kevin Felsher	Republican	Mississippi House	$250	$0	$250	1	$0	$250	$0
Samuel Creekmore IV	Republican	Mississippi House	$0	$250	$250	1	$0	$0	$250
Zachary Grady	Republican	Mississippi House	$0	$250	$250	1	$0	$250	$0
Recorded total			**$43,250**	**$52,200**	**$95,450**		**$31,250**	**$27,000**	**$37,200**

Federal Politicaian Totals									
Recipient	Party	Office	Private prisons	Bail industry	Combined total	Transac-tions	2023 total	2024 total	2025 total
Bennie Thompson	Democratic	U.S. House	$10,000	$0	$10,000	1	$0	$0	$10,000[56]
Cindy Hyde-Smith	Republican	U.S. Senate	$9,062	$0	$9,062	3	$0	$1,562	$7,500
Roger Wicker	Republican	U.S. Senate	$5,300	$0	$5,300	2	$0	$5,300	$0
Michael Guest	Republican	U.S. House	$3,500	$0	$3,500	2	$0	$3,500	$0
Recorded total			**$27,862**	**$0**	**$27,862**	**8**	**$0**	**$10,362**	**$17,500**

Appendix B: Institutions and Terminology

Mississippi Bail Agents Association (MBAA): A membership and advocacy organization representing commercial bail agents. The association states that its mission is to protect, promote, and preserve the bail industry.

Management & Training Corporation (MTC): A private contractor that operates correctional and detention facilities, including facilities within the Mississippi Department of Corrections system.
CoreCivic: A private prison and detention company that operates facilities and contracts with federal, state, and local governments, including facilities and detention arrangements connected to Mississippi.

GEO Group: A private prison and detention company whose political spending has been connected to members of Mississippi's congressional delegation.

Commercial surety bond: A bond generally obtained through a bail agent after payment of a nonrefundable percentage of the court-set bail amount, plus any applicable fees or collateral requirements.

Release on recognizance (ROR): Pretrial release without requiring the defendant to pay money or purchase a commercial bond, based on a promise to return to court and any conditions ordered by the court.

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