A Message from the President & CEO

Dear Friends,

As we move through another season of advocacy, I am reminded that meaningful change is only possible because of the collective strength of our communities, partners, supporters, and advocates across Mississippi and beyond.

At the Mississippi Center for Justice (MCJ), we continue to witness both the challenges facing our communities and the extraordinary resilience of the people we serve. Whether we are protecting voting rights, expanding access to health care, advancing educational equity, preserving homeownership, or strengthening economic opportunity, our commitment to dismantling barriers and ensuring equitable access remains steadfast.

This year has already brought significant moments of both progress and challenge. Yet, through it all, one thing remains clear: when people come together in pursuit of justice, lasting change is possible.

As our nation reflects on 250 years of America's founding and the 62nd anniversary of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, we are reminded that each generation has a responsibility to shape what comes next. Progress is not only measured by the milestones we celebrate, but by the work we continue to do to ensure justice, opportunity, and dignity for all. I encourage you to read our latest blog, which reflects on this moment and what it means for the future of our communities.

As you read this newsletter, I hope you will take pride in the work we have accomplished together and find inspiration in the stories of advocacy, leadership, and community featured throughout these pages. Thank you for standing with us and for investing in a more just and equitable Mississippi.

Together, we will continue to raise our voices, take a stand, and build a brighter future for all.

In solidarity,

Kimberly Jones Merchant
President and CEO

MCJ Donor Spotlight

Ellen Weiss has dedicated her life to advancing justice and strengthening communities. Alongside her late husband, Dan Parr, she embraced progressive activism as a student at the University of Wisconsin and continued that commitment after settling in the Washington, D.C. area. As a longtime educator with Montgomery County Public Schools, Weiss combined a career in public service with a deep commitment to civic engagement and social justice.

Weiss has been a steadfast supporter of the Mississippi Center for Justice since its earliest days. Following Dan's passing in 2009, she expanded her philanthropic support, including helping fund legal representation for immigrant workers affected by the 2019 ICE workplace raids in Mississippi. Her generosity continues to strengthen MCJ's work to advance racial and economic justice throughout the state.

MCJ Advocacy and Policy

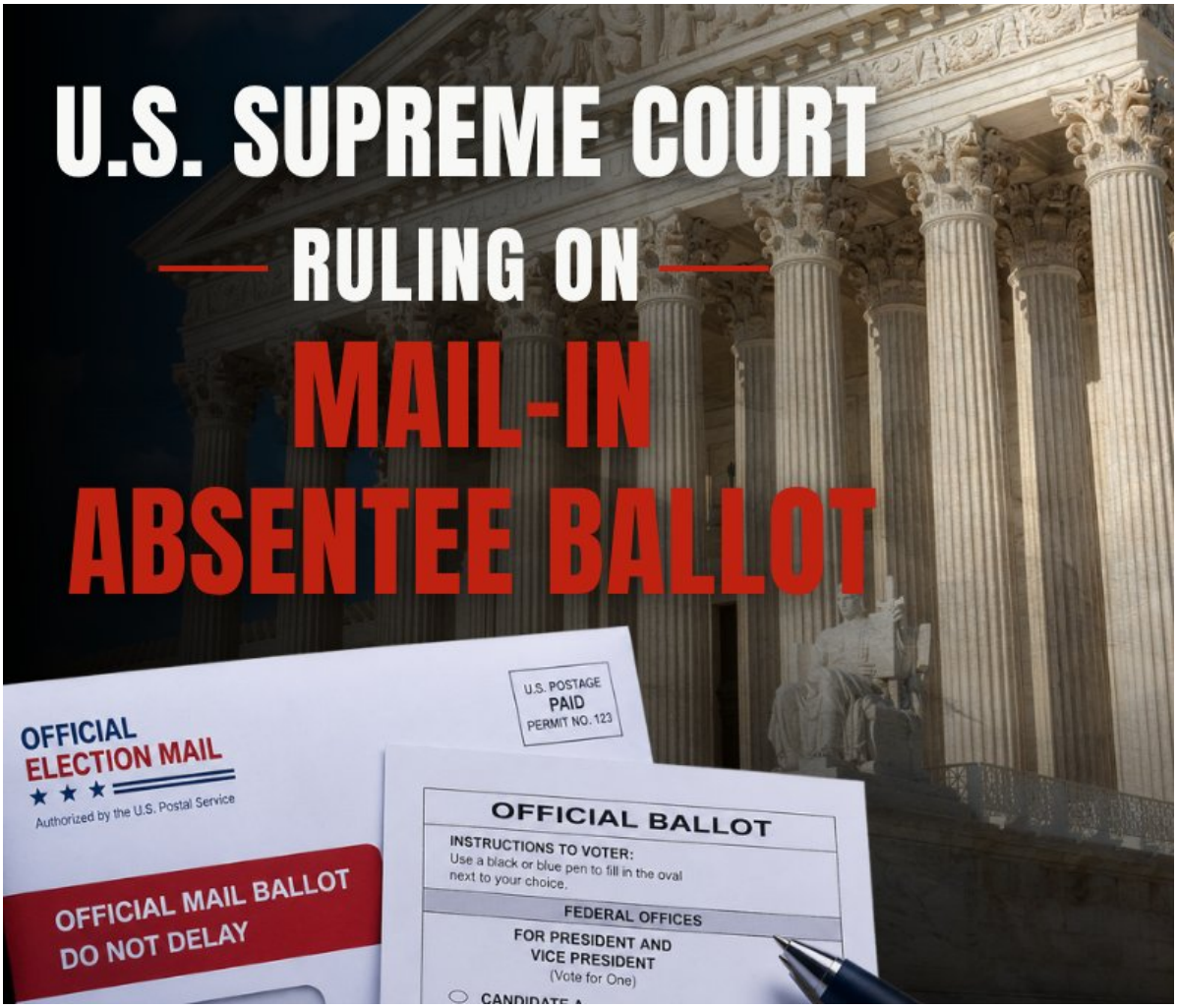
MCJ Helps Mobilize Mississippians to Protect the Vote

On May 20, more than 6,500 Mississippians and allies from neighboring states gathered in Jackson for a historic Day of Action in response to the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling in the *Callais* case, a decision that weakens protections under Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act and threatens fair representation for Black voters.

The Mississippi Center for Justice proudly joined coalition partners, advocates, faith leaders, students, community members, and out-of-state allies in a powerful demonstration affirming that the fight for voting rights is far from over. The gathering served as one of the most significant voting rights mobilizations in Mississippi in decades. MCJ staff documented the historic day, mobilized supporters, and deployed legal observers to help protect the rights of demonstrators exercising their constitutional freedoms.

As attacks on voting rights continue, MCJ remains committed to defending democracy and ensuring that every Mississippian has an equal voice at the ballot box.

Supreme Court Upholds Mississippi Absentee Mail-in Ballot Law – A Win for Mississippians

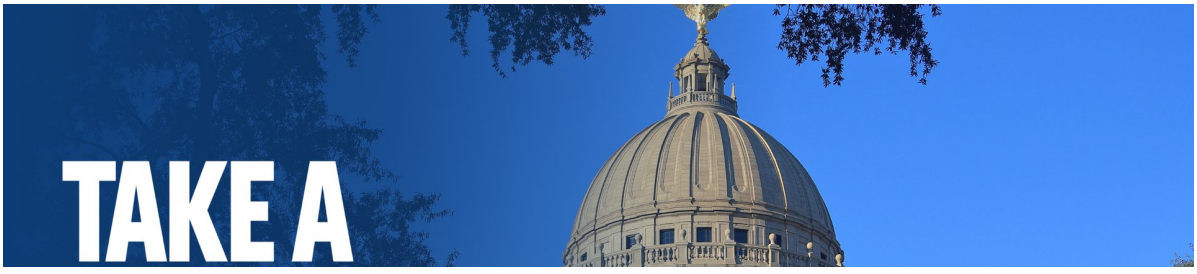


MISSISSIPPI – June 29, 2026 – Today, the United States Supreme Court issued a decision upholding Mississippi's law that accepts mail-in absentee ballots as long as they are postmarked by election day and received within five business days thereafter.

The Court rejected an argument from the Republican National Committee (RNC) claiming that Mississippi's five-day window, and similar laws in other states, conflict with federal laws setting the "day for the election" for President and members of Congress as the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November. The majority ruled that this language is satisfied as long as the ballots are postmarked by election day, and that the states may set later deadlines for receipt of ballots by mail.

Read More

MCJ Responds to Mississippi's New SHIELD Act

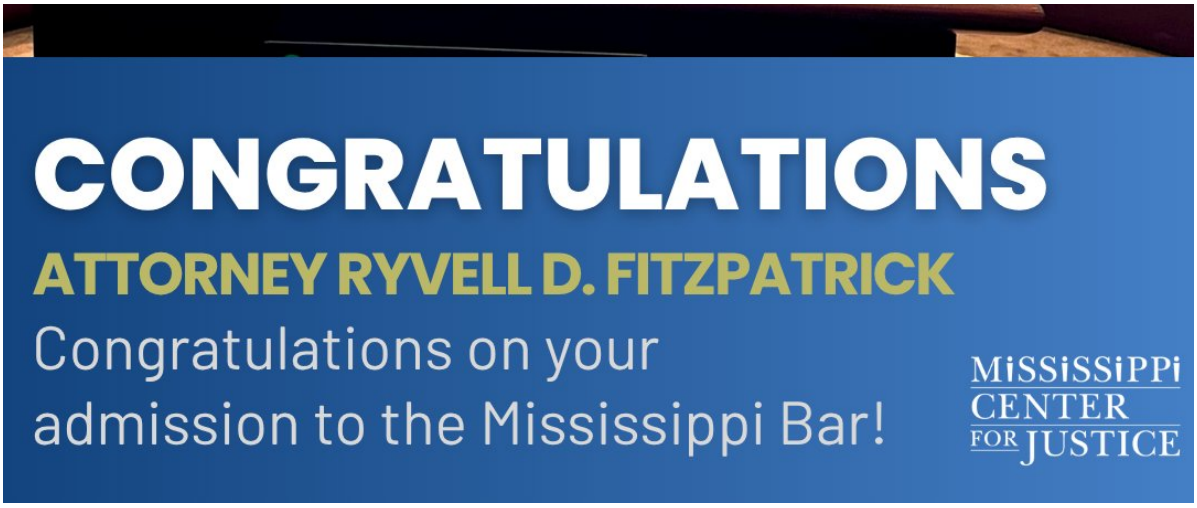


Mississippi's new **SHIELD Act** took effect on July 1, 2026, creating additional voter citizenship verification requirements for some registered voters and new voter registration applicants.

Proponents of the legislation have described the SHIELD Act as a measure to strengthen election administration and verify voter eligibility. However, voting rights advocates have raised concerns that eligible voters could face new barriers if citizenship records cannot be readily verified through government databases. In some cases, voters may be asked to provide additional documentation, such as a birth certificate, passport, or naturalization papers, to confirm their eligibility.

Learn More

Staff Highlights



The Mississippi Center for Justice proudly congratulates Attorney Ryvell D. Fitzpatrick on his admission to the Mississippi Bar.

A native of Ruleville, Mississippi, Attorney Fitzpatrick serves as a Staff Attorney with MCJ's Education Equity Campaign, where he ensures children with disabilities have the necessary modifications and accommodations they need to be successful students. Before joining MCJ, he began his career as a public school teacher in the Mississippi Delta and later worked in education and policy roles after earning his J.D. from Howard University School of Law.

This significant milestone is a testament to Attorney Fitzpatrick's hard work, perseverance, and commitment to expanding children's access to a quality education. We are proud to celebrate this achievement and look forward to the many ways he will continue to serve Mississippi communities.

Promoting Wellness Through Healthy Living

As part of its ongoing commitment to staff wellness, the Mississippi Center for Justice recently hosted *My Health, My Mississippi*, an interactive cooking demonstration led by Food for Life Instructor Charles Smith.

During the session, staff learned how to prepare simple, nutritious, and affordable meals while exploring practical strategies for incorporating healthy eating into their daily routines. Participants also received tips on meal preparation, healthy ingredient substitutions, and building sustainable wellness habits.

The event provided an opportunity for staff to connect, learn, and invest in their health—reinforcing MCJ's commitment to fostering a workplace culture that values wellness, balance, and overall well-being.

Event Highlights

The Mississippi Center for Justice was proud to host its annual signature event, *Mississippi on the Potomac*, on June 3, 2026, at The Observatory at America's Square in Washington, D.C.

The evening brought together advocates, supporters, partners, and friends from across the country for a celebration of justice, resilience, and community. Guests gathered to honor Attorney Vanita Gupta, whose lifelong commitment to civil rights has helped expand legal protections, strengthen democratic institutions, and advance equal opportunity for communities too often denied.

As we reflected on the progress made and the work still ahead, the evening served as a powerful reminder that lasting change is only possible through collective action. We invite you to take a look at some of the memorable moments from this inspiring evening.

Highlights

MCJ Addresses Food Deserts Across Mississippi

MCJ works alongside communities to address food insecurity and increase access to healthy, affordable foods in areas impacted by food deserts. On May 28, the Mississippi Center for Justice hosted its "Take a Seed, Plant a Seed" event at the Indianola Community Wellness Center, bringing community members together to promote healthy living, food access, and self-reliance.

Participants learned how to create and maintain bucket gardens, gaining hands-on experience in growing their own fresh fruits, vegetables, and herbs at home. In addition to planting gardens for themselves, attendees also helped create bucket gardens to donate to the Indianola Community Garden, expanding access to fresh produce throughout the community.

The event also featured a nutrition presentation led by the Wellness Center's registered dietitian, who shared practical tips and meal ideas using produce grown in home gardens.

To learn more about how the Mississippi Center for Justice supports

Mississippians in accessing public benefits, click here.

MCJ Upcoming Events

As the new school year approaches, the Mississippi Center for Justice (MCJ) is helping local families prepare by hosting a free Back-to-School Supply Giveaway in Indianola. Parents and caregivers from Indianola and surrounding communities are invited to attend and receive free school supplies for students while supplies last.

The event is designed to help ease the financial burden of back-to-school shopping while connecting families with valuable community resources and information. MCJ is committed to supporting students and ensuring they have the tools they need to begin the school year ready to learn.

Families are encouraged to arrive early, as school supplies will be distributed on a first-come, first-served basis while supplies last. MCJ looks forward to welcoming the community and helping students start the school year with confidence.

Join us from Friday, October 30 – Sunday, November 1, on a journey through time, music, and culture as we learn about notable civil rights changemakers and places of the past. Prepare for an unforgettable journey as we embark on The Great Mississippi Road Trip.

This tour guides you through some of the most fascinating corners of our state, where civil rights heroes made their mark and pivotal moments in history unfolded. Each day, you will visit significant sites to delve into the stories, events, and music that have defined Mississippi, and our nation.

Tickets are $1,500 per person, including transportation via motor coach, immersive activities, and meals. Hotel accommodations are not included, but room blocks have been reserved at a select hotel. The Great Mississippi Road Trip is part of MCJ's Social Justice Empowerment Experience.

For more information on sponsorship packages contact Tosha Taylor at ttaylor@mscenterforjustice.org or (601) 709-0859.

Learn More

The Men of MCJ: Mind, Body, and Well-Being

June was Men's Health Month, a time to raise awareness about the importance of physical, mental, and emotional well-being among men and boys. Too often, men delay preventive care, ignore symptoms, or avoid seeking help when they need it most. These decisions can have lasting consequences for individuals, families, and communities.

At the Mississippi Center for Justice, we believe that health equity includes ensuring that everyone has access to the care, resources, and support they need to thrive. We encourage men to prioritize routine checkups, engage in healthy habits, seek support for mental and emotional health, and have open conversations about wellness.

Taking care of your health is not only an investment in yourself—it is an investment in your family, your future, and your community.

Read Our Latest Blog Post on Men's Health Month: Black Men in Mississippi Deserve a Policy Agenda Built Around Their Needs.

Visit our website mscenterforjustice.org to learn more about our mission to advance racial and economic justice.

Join the Fight Today

Stay informed. Stay engaged. Stay empowered.
Follow us on social media.