

February 28, 2024

The Honorable Tate Reeves  
Governor, State of Mississippi  
550 High Street  
Sillers Building, 19th Floor  
Jackson, MS 39201

Dear Governor Reeves:

We write to you today to share this letter from 60 Mississippi business leaders who have joined our voices in support of school choice. We support HB 1449 authored by House Chairman of Education Rob Roberson, the Mississippi Student Freedom Act. This act establishes “Magnolia Scholarship Accounts” which would allow parents to utilize state education dollars to match their children with the best private school to meet their needs. We appreciate that this bill phases in over five years a program similar to what Arkansas passed in 2023 and nine other states have passed in recent years.

These business leaders come from every sector and every corner of the state, and include a former governor, former ambassador, former state senator, former mayor and head of Mississippi Development Authority, and are some of the most influential leaders in the state.

We urge you to support this important bill and would welcome the opportunity to visit with you more about this important measure. Our cell numbers are below.

Sincerely,



Abb Payne  
Chief Executive Officer  
Payne Companies  
Cell: 601-270-7001



Joey Havens  
Leading with Significance  
Retired Partner HORNE LLP  
Cell: 601-720-8777

## 60 Business Leaders for Private School Choice

February 28, 2024

*Hand Delivered*

The Honorable Tate Reeves, Governor of the State of Mississippi  
The Honorable Delbert Hosemann, Lieutenant Governor of the State of Mississippi  
The Honorable Jason White, Speaker of the Mississippi House of Representatives  
Honorable Members of the Mississippi House and Senate

**Dear Governor Reeves, Lt. Governor Hosemann, Speaker White, and Honorable Members of the Mississippi Legislature:**

Under conservative leadership the last decade, Mississippi has made incredible progress in K-12 education. From historic literacy gains and record-high graduation rates to the largest teacher pay raise in state history and historic investments in public education, Mississippi leaders have accomplished much and should be proud of these achievements. Yet, our work is not yet finished. We must build on these accomplishments to remain competitive and, more importantly, prepare our students for the future.

As Mississippi business owners and employers, we recognize the importance of preparing the next generation of skilled workers. Too often, we find that Mississippi students are not prepared for the workforce when they graduate high school. This is a disservice to both our students, who are then unable to obtain or retain gainful employment, and our Mississippi business community, who struggle to find competent and reliable employees.

Mississippi has many great public schools, but even the best public schools may not be the best educational “fit” for every student. We encourage lawmakers to embrace an education system that puts the needs of students first, provides them with the best opportunities for success, and prepares them for life after graduation. ***Private school choice policies***, such as those sweeping the nation in states like Arizona, Arkansas, Iowa, Florida, Utah, and West Virginia, ***do just that.***

Supporting such policies does not mean we “oppose” public schools—quite the contrary. We believe strong public schools are essential to the overall success of our education system. In fact, that’s one of the reasons we so passionately support private school choice policies. Research consistently shows that these policies strengthen the entire public education system. More than 25 studies show that the academic performance of students who remain in public schools improves when those students have more education options.

In business, we understand that healthy competition fosters innovation, lowers costs, and improves quality. The same is true in education, and Mississippi’s education system should promote competition to achieve these outcomes. Our current education system does not; students are often locked into a specific school based solely on where they live, regardless of whether that school best meets their needs. Simply put, Mississippi’s current K-12 education system could be described as a monopoly, where students and families often have only one

option. Such an environment would be unacceptable in business and should be unacceptable in education. Private school choice policies give parents the ability to choose the best school for their child and create true competition in education.

Further, recent data indicates that Mississippi's labor force participation rate is one of the worst in the nation. Fewer Mississippians are working, or looking for work, than at any time in recent history. This is not merely a statistical concern, but a reflection of the larger issue of employability and workforce readiness among our citizens.

State Economist Cory Miller has [written](#) that educational attainment is the foremost reason Mississippi's labor force participation rate is the lowest among states. We believe private school choice policies can help. In fact, [studies](#) show that such policies positively impact program participant educational attainment, which is a key indicator of future employability.

Lieutenant Governor Delbert Hosemann recently [wrote](#) that addressing Mississippi's labor force participation rate should be the legislature's highest priority this session. One of the best ways to address this issue immediately is the adoption of private school choice policies in the Magnolia State.

We are confident that implementing private school choice in Mississippi would lead to a more dynamic and well-prepared workforce. By providing students with education options that better fit their individual needs and learning styles, we not only enhance their immediate educational outcomes but also set them up for long-term success in the workforce.

In conclusion, as Mississippi business owners deeply invested in the future of our state's economy and workforce, we encourage lawmakers to adopt K-12 private school choice policies. Such policies will not only benefit our children and their futures but also the economic and social fabric of Mississippi as a whole.

Sincerely,

**Allen Anderson**  
Anderson Design Center  
Hattiesburg

**Drew Adams**  
Addicus  
Oxford

**Kirby Boteler**  
Align IT Group  
Jackson

**Phillip W. Bowman**  
Specialty Metals Supply, Inc.  
Jackson

**Jason Branning**  
Branning Wealth Management  
Jackson

**Phil Bryant**  
BSS Global  
Ridgeland

**Lee Bush**  
National Collection System  
Jackson

**Brian Cain**  
Cain, Inc. and Cain Recyclers  
Kosciusko

**Chris Caughman**  
Peoples Bank  
Mendenhall

**Fred Carl, Jr.**  
Carl Investments, LLC  
Greenwood

**NJ Correnti**  
Nicholas Air  
Oxford

**Perry N. Cox**  
PNC Investments  
Madison

**Chip Crane**  
FL Crane & Sons, Inc.  
Fulton

**Dr. John D. Davis, IV**  
NewSouth NeuroSpine  
Flowood

**Sunny Desai**  
Desai Companies  
Ridgeland

**Jonathan Duhon**  
YAK Access  
Hattiesburg

**Joe Estess**  
Investments  
Tupelo

**Michael Freeman**  
MG Freeman Enterprises  
Hattiesburg

**Arty Finkelberg**  
Raymond James  
Jackson

**Gerard Gibert**  
Executive  
Ridgeland

**Dr. Daryl P. Guest**  
Starkville Surgical Associates  
Starkville

**Bryan Hawkins**  
Hawkeye Manufacturing  
Tupelo

**Joey Havens**  
Leading with Significance, LLC  
Ridgeland

**Dr. James R. House, III**  
Jackson Ear Clinic  
Jackson

**Phillip Holmes**  
Highest Good Media  
Jackson

**Brien B. Hubbard**  
Cavalier Healthcare, Inc.  
Hattiesburg

**Robbie Hughes**  
Investment  
Madison

**Julie Koestler**  
Koestler Prime  
Ridgeland

**David Landrum**  
Business Executive  
Madison

**Alan Lange**  
Kinetic Staffing  
Ridgeland

**Edward J. Langton**  
Langton Holdings  
Hattiesburg

**Francis C. Lee**  
Lee Investment Partners  
Flowood

**Jeanne Luckey**  
Investments  
Ocean Springs

**John Marchetti**  
Gallagher Insurance  
Ridgeland

**Glenn McCullough, Jr.**  
GLM Associates, LLC  
Tupelo

**Douglas M. McDaniel**  
McDaniel & Register  
Jackson

**Ashley Meena**  
Investments  
Jackson

**Hu Meena**  
C Spire  
Jackson

**Oscar Miskelly**  
Miskelly Furniture  
Pearl

**Jason C. McNeel**  
Canton Concrete  
Madison

**Luke Montgomery**  
Montgomery Enterprises, Inc.  
Fulton

**William M. Mounger, II**  
Tristar Technologies, LLC  
Jackson

**Nash Neyland**  
Tristar Technologies, LLC  
Jackson

**Don Noblitt**  
Investments  
Jackson

**Scott Noblitt**  
Investments  
Jackson

**Lee Parish**  
Parish Tractor Company  
Hattiesburg

**Abb Payne**  
Payne Companies  
Hattiesburg

**Bo Pennebaker**  
Ashley Furniture  
Hattiesburg

**Fmr Ambassador Mike Retzer**  
Retzer Resource  
Greenville

**Brian Sanderson**  
Three Oak Group  
Ocean Springs

**Marie Sanderson**  
GP3 Partners  
Ocean Springs

**Rob Tatum**  
CR Properties  
Ridgeland

**Josh Thrash**  
Thrash Contractors  
Brandon

**Hugh D. Trussell, II**  
Blue Sky RE, LLC  
Richland

**Sparkman Walker**  
Stokes Distributing Co. Inc.  
Hattiesburg

**George Williams**  
Heron Operating  
Jackson

**J. Kelley Williams, Jr.**  
Greenover Managers, LLC  
Jackson

**Howard Alan Wilson**  
Investments  
Flowood

**T. Calvin Wells**  
Attorney  
Jackson

**Wirt Yerger, III**  
Investment  
Ridgeland