

# LEAP

## LEGISLATIVE ENGAGEMENT + ADVOCACY PARTNERSHIP

### Key Legislative Priorities and What They Could Mean for The W

As the next session of the Mississippi Legislature draws near, there's one truth to keep front-of-mind: almost every legislative action touches higher education in some way. Even bills that appear unrelated to The W's mission — whether they affect K-12 funding, state pensions, workforce grants, regulatory changes, tax policy, or infrastructure — can ripple through our operational environment, recruitment pipelines, budget outlook, and capacity to serve students.

For that reason, **your awareness matters now more than ever**. When you stay informed, you spot emerging issues early, you lend your voice at critical moments, and you help The W act not just reactively but proactively.

The following are areas in which the legislature is expected to consider as priorities:

#### Education and School Choice

The Legislature is expected to push a major “education-freedom” or school-choice package, revisiting issues such as charter schools, vouchers, and other public school alternatives.

**For The W:** Be attentive to how any shift in K-12 policy might affect the pipeline of incoming students, dual-enrollment relationships, or partnerships with public schools. Also, budget or funding shifts in K-12 could influence state higher-education budgets.

#### Workforce Development and Energy Initiatives

The Governor and legislators are signaling a strong focus on workforce development — particularly in high-demand fields like energy, health care, business, and technology — along with a renewed push to keep Mississippi talent in-state.

**For The W:** This emphasis aligns directly with our current strengths. The W's professional degrees in nursing, public health, business, teacher preparation, and STEM-related fields already serve as workforce engines for Mississippi. Our nationally recognized programs — including top-

ranked nursing and high-value degrees in education, business, and the arts — position the university as a practical, proven contributor to the state’s economic goals.

When legislators talk about expanding Mississippi’s workforce, The W can point to real outcomes: high licensure pass rates, strong graduate employment, and alumni who stay in Mississippi at rates that outpace many peer institutions. Emphasizing those results in conversations with lawmakers helps reinforce that The W isn’t just aligned with workforce priorities — it’s already delivering on them.

## **Retirement & Public-Employee Pension System (PERS)**

Financial challenges within the state’s public-employee pension system are expected to receive significant legislative attention.

**For The W:** Any discussion around PERS could influence faculty and staff retirement planning, the level of state contributions, and the overall benefits structure. These conversations may shape how future compensation and benefits are structured across Mississippi’s public institutions, including The W.

## **Regional Infrastructure / Economic Support (Including Gulf Coast / Restoration Funds)**

Legislators—especially those representing the Gulf Coast — are expected to prioritize infrastructure, restoration funds, and regional economic growth. While much of that attention will naturally center on the Coast, the broader conversation about rebuilding, modernizing, and responsibly maintaining public assets has statewide implications.

**For The W:** This is an important opening. Even though The W isn’t located on the Coast, we’re part of Mississippi’s statewide economic and educational infrastructure. Our graduates serve in every region, our programs meet workforce needs from the Delta to the Gulf, and our partnerships stretch far beyond Columbus.

Just as important, The W has something rare in Mississippi higher education: **the lowest deferred maintenance of any public institution in the state**. That record reflects disciplined stewardship, smart planning, and careful prioritization. It’s something legislators respect — and it’s a point worth emphasizing.

But responsible stewardship doesn’t eliminate need. Many of The W’s historic academic buildings, residence halls, and student-service facilities require modernization to remain competitive and safe. Additional state funding for infrastructure — particularly renovation and modernization dollars — is critical. Without it, even campuses that have managed costs well risk falling behind in the very areas that support enrollment growth, retention, and accreditation

standards.

In conversations with lawmakers, advocates should highlight three things:

- **The W is a good investment** — its low deferred-maintenance burden proves it.
- **The W still needs targeted modernization funding** to protect historic facilities, update learning environments, and strengthen campus safety.
- **Infrastructure funding is workforce funding** — because modern labs, clinical spaces, and teaching environments directly shape the quality of Mississippi's future nurses, teachers, entrepreneurs, and public leaders.

Framing The W this way ensures legislators see the university as both efficient and worthy of continued investment — a statewide asset, not a regional afterthought.

## **Budgeting, Resourcing, and Higher Education Funding**

Though explicit proposals are fewer in public headlines, budget management and higher-education funding will naturally be part of the session's conversation, given other pressures (workforce, pensions, education reform).

**For The W:** This means staying vigilant about funding streams, potential shifts in appropriations, and changes in state policy that could alter how The W is funded or held accountable.

Every legislative session carries its own uncertainties. But this year's priorities make one thing clear: The W's future will be shaped by how effectively we track these issues and explain what's at stake for our students, faculty, and the communities we serve. Early understanding leads to early action, and that's where our advantage lies.

The W has earned trust by staying prepared and by responding with clarity and steadiness when policy shifts come our way. This moment is no different. By staying informed, anticipating change, and speaking with one voice, we can help ensure that decisions in Jackson strengthen — not weaken — the work happening on our campus.

For that reason, the weeks ahead aren't just about watching legislation. They're about showing lawmakers that The W delivers real value, real outcomes, and real impact for Mississippi. And that's a story worth standing behind.

## **Be a Voice for The W!**

The W moves forward because its people do. And that includes you. Your voice carries weight — with legislators, community leaders, alumni, and agencies that depend on accurate information.

When you speak up, share updates, or correct misunderstandings, you strengthen The W's position.

Here's how you can take action right now:

- Share this newsletter with another alum or friend of The W.
- Reach out when an alert is issued.
- Tell your local legislators why The W matters to you and to Mississippi.
- Stay connected with the Development & Alumni team.

If you're ready to get involved, even in a small way, contact us at [developmentandalumni@muw.edu](mailto:developmentandalumni@muw.edu).