

Executive Summary

This community needs assessment provides a comprehensive overview of the challenges and priorities facing Washington County, Mississippi, with the goal of guiding targeted programs and initiatives for community development. Home to approximately 47,688 residents, the county faces a dynamic demographic landscape characterized by diversity in age, race, and income levels across urban, suburban, and rural areas. The assessment employed a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods, including surveys, interviews, community forums, and data analysis, to explore key areas such as education, healthcare, economic development, social services, infrastructure, and environmental sustainability.

Socioeconomic factors reveal a complex landscape marked by economic disparities, higher poverty rates, and limited employment opportunities, emphasizing the need for tailored interventions. In health and well-being, the county grapples with challenges such as limited healthcare access, high rates of chronic diseases, and mental health concerns, necessitating targeted strategies for improvement.

Education emerges as a focal point, with lower educational attainment levels than the national average, calling for increased access to higher education and resources. Social services, encompassing healthcare, housing, food assistance, and transportation, reflect both existing programs and gaps in service delivery. Housing affordability, food security, and transportation accessibility are identified as critical concerns.

Infrastructure and environmental considerations highlight the county's slightly below-average broadband access and infrastructure conditions, emphasizing the need for improvements. The report concludes with a set of recommendations addressing these multifaceted challenges, focusing on economic development, educational enhancement, healthcare infrastructure, mental health support, housing accessibility, food security, transportation services, community and recreation, broadband access, progress monitoring, and collaborative partnerships.

These recommendations are designed to guide stakeholders, including local government, nonprofits, businesses, and community organizations, in the development and implementation of targeted interventions. By prioritizing these recommendations, Washington County can work toward building a resilient, inclusive, and thriving community that addresses the diverse needs of its residents. The executive summary serves as a roadmap for informed decision-making, resource allocation, and collaborative efforts to foster positive and sustainable change in Washington County.

Introduction:

The purpose of this community needs assessment is to identify the key needs and priorities of Washington County, Mississippi, to guide the development of targeted programs and initiatives that address the community's most pressing issues. This assessment aims to gather data and input from various stakeholders to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the community's needs.

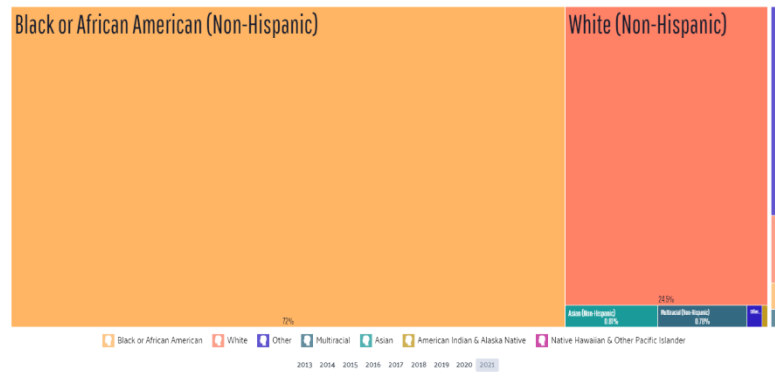
Washington County, Mississippi, is home to approximately 47,688 residents and is expected to decrease by 5% by 2025. The demographic profile includes a diverse population in terms of age, race, and income levels. The community comprises urban, suburban, and rural areas, each with its unique needs and challenges.

Methodology:

The community needs assessment was conducted through a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods. Data was collected from surveys, interviews, community forums, and existing electronic reports. The assessment focused on key areas including education, healthcare, economic development, social services, infrastructure, and environmental sustainability.

1. Socioeconomic Factors:

Washington County, Mississippi, exhibits a complex socioeconomic landscape with various indicators reflecting both strengths and challenges. The county faces persistent economic disparities, as evidenced by higher poverty rates compared to the state average. According to recent data, the poverty rate in



Washington County stands at 8.2%, significantly above the Mississippi average of 5.6%.

Unemployment rates also remain a concern, with limited job opportunities affecting certain segments of the population. Income levels in the county tend to be lower, with median household incomes falling below the statewide median. Additionally, educational attainment rates in Washington County are lower than the state average, posing barriers to economic mobility and workforce development. These socioeconomic factors highlight the need for targeted interventions and comprehensive strategies to address poverty, unemployment, income disparities, and educational opportunities within Washington County.

2. Health & Well-being:

The health and wellbeing of residents in Washington County, Mississippi, presents a multifaceted landscape with a range of opportunities and challenges. The county faces various health issues that require attention and resources. 44.6 % of households have at least one member on Disability and 38.3% of households are without health insurance. Access to healthcare services can be limited, particularly for vulnerable populations, leading to disparities in healthcare outcomes. Chronic diseases, such as obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular conditions, are prevalent within the

community, requiring targeted prevention and management strategies. Mental health concerns, including depression and substance abuse, also contribute to the overall wellbeing of residents. It is crucial to prioritize efforts to improve healthcare infrastructure, expand access to affordable healthcare services, increase mental health resources, and enhance health education and prevention programs. By addressing these health and wellbeing challenges, Washington County can foster a healthier and more resilient community for its residents.

3. Education

Educational Attainment: Washington County, like many areas in the Mississippi Delta region, faced educational challenges, with lower levels of educational attainment compared to the national average. Many residents held high school diplomas or equivalent credentials, but a smaller percentage had completed higher education degrees.

High School Graduation: 81% of the population of Washington county has completed high school or earned GED certificates, although this is significantly lower than the national average of 88.9%.

College Education: 20.6% of individuals residing in Washington County, Mississippi with bachelor's or advanced degrees, such as master's or doctoral degrees. However, this is significantly lower than the national average of 33.7%. Access to higher education and resources for post-secondary education could have been limited, contributing to these lower educational attainment levels.

Educational Challenges: Washington County, along with other parts of the Mississippi Delta, faced socioeconomic challenges that influenced educational outcomes. Factors such as poverty, inadequate access to quality educational resources, and limited economic opportunities might have impacted the educational levels of its residents.

4. Social Services

Social services available to residents of Washington County, Mississippi, may include a range of programs and resources aimed at supporting the well-being and quality of life of the community. These services are typically provided by various government agencies, non-profit organizations, and community groups. Here are some common social services and programs that may be available in the county:

- **Healthcare Services:**

Access to Care:

In Mississippi, 91,483 consumers selected or were automatically re-enrolled in quality, affordable health insurance coverage through the Marketplace as of December 2020. Nationwide, nearly 12 million consumers selected a plan or were automatically enrolled in Marketplace coverage. In our State 98% of Mississippi consumers who were signed up qualified for an average tax credit of \$545 per month through the Marketplace. Consumers had a choice from four issuers in the Marketplace depending on what county a person resides in. Open enrollment typically runs from November 1 – December 15, 2022. Consumers can visit [HealthCare.gov](https://www.healthcare.gov) or [OneMississippi.com](https://www.onemississippi.com) to assess the qualifications of a Special Enrollment Period because of a life change such as: marriage, birth of a child or loss of other coverage. Enrollment in Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program is open year-round. The most recent data for 2020 indicates that

14.4% of those living in Washington County are uninsured, which is higher than the State average of 14.5% and considerably higher than the National average of 9.7%. (Data Source: Centers for Disease Control)

Disease Incidence and Prevalence – (Incident rates are per 100,000 individuals.)

Diabetes:

In 2021, Mississippi ranked the third highest in the U.S. for overall diabetes prevalence, 14.6%, with over 325,000 adult Mississippians having type 2 diabetes (over 14.4% of the adult population). African Americans are 77% more likely than whites to be diagnosed with diabetes, and one in four African American women older than 55 has diabetes.

(stateofchildhoodobesity.org) (cdc.gov/diabetes) Screening is an essential measure in order to allow for early detection and treatment of diabetes. Every year an estimated 20,433 people in Mississippi are diagnosed with diabetes. (diabetes.org)

Obesity:

Since 1980, obesity rates have increased drastically in the United States, doubling for adults, and tripling for children, a statistic that doctors have coined, “The Obesity Epidemic.” Despite growing recognition of the problem, the obesity epidemic continues in the U.S., and obesity rates are increasing around the world. Because of the complexity of obesity, it is likely to be one of the most difficult public health issues our society has faced. There are numerous health issues linked to obesity, including increased risk for heart disease, stroke, and type2 diabetes all are fuel to our nation’s skyrocketing healthcare costs. Additionally, recent studies on overweight children have revealed correlations to depression, increased likeliness to miss school, and lowered academic performance in school. Unfortunately, 22.3 % of children from the ages of 10 to 17 suffer from obesity putting Mississippi in the number two spot with Kentucky number one. In 2021, Mississippi has the highest adult obesity rate in the nation. Mississippi's adult obesity rate is currently 39.7%, up from 39.5% in 2018. Rates of obesity now exceed 35 percent in nine states (Mississippi, West Virginia, Alabama, Louisiana, Indiana, Kentucky, Delaware, Iowa, Arkansas, and Oklahoma.), 21 states have rates above 30%, and every state is above 20%. Mississippi has the highest adult obesity rates at 39.7%, while Colorado has the lowest at 24.2%. Unfortunately, in Washington County, 48% of adults aged 20 and older self-report that they have a Body Mass Index (BMI) greater than 30.0 (obese) in the report area.

(countyhealthrankings.org/app/Mississippi/2022 and stateofchildhoodobesity.org.) In Washington County, 29.1% of the population does not have access to healthy food outlets compared to 26.4% in Mississippi and 21.7% nationally. The percentage for low healthy food access is 18% in Washington County compared to 11% in the state of Mississippi and 2% nationally. (countyhealthrankings.org/app/Mississippi/2022

Heart Disease & Stroke:

Heart disease is the leading of cause of death in Mississippi, accounting for 29.7% of all deaths in 2018. Mississippi’s Cardiovascular Disease (CVD) mortality rate remains one of the highest in the nation. (www.cdc.org) Approximately every 40 seconds, an American will have a myocardial

infarction. The average age of a person's first myocardial infarction is 65.6 years old for men and 72.0 years old for women. About 697,000 people in the United States died from heart disease in 2020—that's 1 in every 5 deaths. Every 40 seconds, on average, an American will have a stroke. In 2019, cerebrovascular disease (stroke) accounted for more than 1,700 deaths in Mississippi. About 795,000 Americans have a new or recurrent stroke annually. About 90% of stroke risk is due to modifiable risk factors; 74% is due to behavioral risk factors (acc.org).

With 82 counties in Mississippi, Washington County is 13th in county rankings for CVD mortality in Mississippi. In Washington County, 17.9% of individuals diagnosed with hypertension admit to not taking their blood pressure medicine. In addition, 46.8% of those 18 years of age or older have been told by a physician or other allied healthcare professional that they have high cholesterol. A more recent indicator reports the percentage of the Medicare fee-for-service population with ischemic heart disease in Washington County is only slightly above the State average at 28.63%. Patients within this same sample report high cholesterol to be 4% lower than the State's average at 36.35% (cdc.gov/brfss).

High Blood Pressure/Hypertension:

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, hypertension (or high blood pressure) is a leading cause of stroke, heart attack and kidney failure. Nearly half of adults in the United States (47%, or 116 million) have high blood pressure. Mississippi ranks second in the nation with the highest incidence of hypertension with 43.6%. In 2020, more than 670,000 deaths in the United States had hypertension as a primary or contributing cause. Only 24% of the people with high blood pressure have their condition under control. Nearly 30% of

Youth obesity had the highest prevalence of hypertension. High blood pressure in youth is linked to health problems later in life. The good news is that high blood pressure is preventable and treatable. An estimated 1.3 million youth ages 12 to 19 would have high blood pressure according to the new guidelines, or about 1 in 25 children. In a classroom of 30 youth, 1 person would have hypertension, and about 3 more would have elevated blood pressure. The updated guideline reclassifies 2.6% of youth in the United States, or nearly 800,000 young people, as having high blood pressure. (cdc.gov) In 2018, African Americans were 30 percent more likely to die from heart disease than non-Hispanic whites. Although African American adults are 40 percent more likely to have high blood pressure, they are less likely than non-Hispanic whites to have their blood pressure under control. African American women are nearly 60 percent more likely to have high blood pressure, as compared to non-Hispanic white women. (minorityhealth.hhs.gov)

High blood pressure is more common in non-Hispanic black adults (56%) than in non-Hispanic white adults (48%), non-Hispanic Asian adults (46%), or Hispanic adults (39%).³ Among those recommended to take blood pressure medication, blood pressure control is higher among non-Hispanic white adults (32%) than in non-Hispanic black adults (25%), non-Hispanic Asian adults (19%), or Hispanic adults (25%). (cdc.gov). More than 700,000 Mississippi adults have high blood pressure (hypertension), and thousands more may be at risk. In Washington County, over 13,900 adults have high blood pressure which is approximately 51.8% of the population. This is higher than the national level. 66.2% of the Medicare population reports having high blood pressure. (careshealth).

Mental Health:

Mental illnesses are common in the United States. Nearly one in five U.S. adults' lives with a mental illness (52.9 million in 2020). Two broad categories can be used to describe these conditions: Any Mental Illness (AMI) and Serious Mental Illness (SMI). AMI encompasses all recognized mental illnesses. SMI is a smaller and more severe subset of AMI. Mental illnesses include many different conditions that vary in degree of severity, ranging from mild to moderate to severe. In 2020, there were an estimated 52.9 million adults aged 18 or older in the United States with AMI. This number represented 21.0% of all U.S. adults. The prevalence of AMI was higher among females (25.8%) than males (15.8%).

Young adults aged 18-25 years had the highest prevalence of AMI (30.6%) compared to adults aged 26-49 years (25.3%) and aged 50 and older (14.5%). The prevalence of AMI was highest among the adults reporting two or more races (35.8%), followed by White adults (22.6%). The prevalence of AMI was lowest among Asian adults (13.9%).

(nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/mental-health)

Mississippi has a population of approximately three million people. Close to 4.7% of adults in Mississippi live with serious mental health conditions such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and major depression. Only 38.3% of adults with mental illness in Mississippi receive any form of treatment from either the public system or private providers (according to SAMHSA). The remaining 61.7% receive no mental health treatment. Mississippi is ranked 48 out of the 50 states and Washington D.C. for providing access to mental health services.

(<https://mhanational.org/issues/ranking-states#four>)

The number of Psychiatrists, Psychologists, Clinical Social Workers, and Licensed Professional Counselors in Washington County is 77 per 100,000 individuals. Access to Mental Health Professionals in our county is way below the State average of 121 and the National average of 201. (careshq.org)

- **Education:** Public schools and educational support programs help ensure access to quality education. Washington county has 4 public school systems and 4 private school options for residents.

(1) Public School Districts

- (a) **Greenville Public School District** - Greenville Public Schools is a public school district located in GREENVILLE, MS. It has 3,668 students in grades PK, K-12 with a student-teacher ratio of 16 to 1. According to state test scores, 4% of students are at least proficient in math and 11% in reading.
- (b) **Leland School District** - Leland School District is a public school district located in LELAND, MS. It has 673 students in grades PK, K-12 with a student-teacher ratio of 11 to 1. According to state test scores, 5% of students are at least proficient in math and 15% in reading.
- (c) **Hollandale School District** - Hollandale School District is a public school district located in HOLLANDALE, MS. It has 524 students in grades PK, K-12 with a student-teacher ratio of 15 to 1. According to state test scores, 5% of students are at least proficient in math and 16% in reading.

(d) **Western Line School District** - Western Line School District is a public school district located in AVON, MS. It has 1,664 students in grades PK, K-12 with a student-teacher ratio of 14 to 1. According to state test scores, 19% of students are at least proficient in math and 28% in reading. The school has an overall rating of B.

(2) Private Schools

- (a) **Deer Creek School (Arcola)** - A private school located in ARCOLA, MS. It has 177 students in grades PK, K-12 with a student-teacher ratio of 11 to 1. Tuition is \$5,450 for the highest grade offered. After graduation, 56% of students from this school go on to attend a 4-year college.
- (b) **Greenville Christian School** - A private, Christian school located in GREENVILLE, MS. It has 173 students in grades PK, K-12 with a student-teacher ratio of 10 to 1. Tuition is \$4,250 for the highest grade offered. After graduation, 23% of students from this school go on to attend a 4-year college.
- (c) **Saint Joseph Catholic High School (Greenville)** - This is also a private school that offers classes from PK to 12th grade. It has a total of 266 students and a student-teacher ratio of 7:1. The school has an overall rating of A-.
- (d) **Washington School (Greenville)** - This is a private school as well that offers classes from PK to 12th grade. It has a total of 466 students and a student-teacher ratio of 8:1. The school has an overall rating of A.

The quality of public education is lacking though, especially at the public level. The average school in Washington County, Mississippi has a rating of 2/10 which is in the bottom 50% for the state. Minority enrollment is 90% of the student body (majority Black), which is more than the Mississippi public school average of 57% (majority Black).

- **Housing Assistance:**

Housing Units: Washington County had a total number of 20,863 housing units, including single-family homes, apartments, and other types of dwellings. The homeownership rate in the county is 56.3% with a median value of \$80,500.00 per unit. The median selected monthly owner costs for units with a mortgage is \$1,183, and \$352 without a mortgage. The median age of housing units is 52 years old compared to the national average of 47 years old. The overall vacancy rate for Washington County is 8.13% vs 4% nationally. The median gross rent is \$723 with 76.8% of renters in Washington County are cost burdened vs 47.9 % nationally. According to Affordable Housing Online, there are 531 low-income apartments in Washington County that offer reduced rents to eligible households. Rental assistance programs support 845 low-income homes in Washington County where households pay rent based on how much they earn. For 2023, eligible households participating in federally assisted housing pay an average of \$291 towards rent each month. Availability of housing assistance is as follows:

<u>Program</u>	<u>Properties</u>	<u>Units</u>
Section 202 Supportive Housing for the Elderly	4	158
Section 811 Supportive Housing for Persons with Disabilities	1	12

Section 8 Project-Based Rental Assistance (PBRA)	7	484
Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC)	12	290
Section 515 Rural Rental Housing	12	528
HOME Investment Partnerships Program	7	90
Section 521 USDA Rental Assistance	6	145
Section 514/516 Farm Labor Housing	1	1
Section 221 (d) (3)	6	435

- Food Assistance:** According to the US News Healthiest Communities website, Washington County, Mississippi has an overall food and nutrition score of 19 out of 100. This score is based on the availability and use of healthy foods in the community, as well as the prevalence of chronic diseases that have been linked to poor nutrition. 29.1% of the population is without access to a large grocery store (<https://www.usnews.com>). Programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and food banks provide food assistance to eligible residents who may be experiencing food insecurity.
- Transportation:** Public transportation services, including buses and taxis, are non-existent with 13.5% of households without a vehicle (usnews.com). The average commute time is 18.8 minutes (datausa.io) with 2.8% of workers commuting 60 minutes or more. There are several grant-funded organizations that provide transportation assistance for low-income individuals. Washington County, Mississippi has five state highways and 1 regional airport as listed below:

 - (1) Major highways
 - (a) U.S. Highway 82
 - (b) U.S. Highway 61
 - (c) U.S. Highway 278
 - (d) Mississippi Highway 1
 - (e) Mississippi Highway 12
 - (2) Airport
 - (a) Mid Delta Regional Airport, owned by the City of Greenville, is in an unincorporated area in the county.
- Community and Recreation Services:** According to usnews.com, 38% of residents reside within a ½ mile of a park. The following county parks and community resources are listed below:

 1. **Leland Health Department/Community Building**
The Leland Community Building is located at 801 N. Broad Street in Leland, which is 11 miles east of Greenville on Highway 82. The building has a seating capacity of 80 with a full kitchen. The Community Building was the site of the Highway 61 Blues Festival in 2012.
 2. **Avon Community Building**
Avon is about 12 miles south of Greenville. The Avon Community Building has a seating capacity of 60, with a full kitchen.

3. **Glen Allan Community Building**

Glen Allan is about 30 miles south of Greenville. The Glen Allan Community Building has a seating capacity of 50 with a refrigerator and a microwave.

4. **Paul Love Park**

Paul Love Jr. Park is located at 42 Lake Washington Road in Glen Allan, about 26 miles south of Greenville. The park provides campsites with water and electric hook-up, a ball field, fishing site, playground equipment, and picnic tables. The park was the site of the 5th Annual Delta Tractor Show in November 2012.

5. **Warfield Point Park**

Located in Greenville, in the heart of the Mississippi Delta on eighty beautiful acres between the levee and the Mississippi River, Warfield Point Park offers one of the State's few locations directly on the river with facilities for overnight camping, RV's, picnicking and ATV trails. A Washington County Park, the well-maintained natural area is a habitat for many kinds of birds and other wildlife, and from its 38-foot observation tower, Park visitors are treated to breathtaking panoramic views of the legendary Mississippi River.

Note: Residents of Washington County can access these social services by contacting local government agencies, non-profit organizations, and community centers. It's important to note that the availability and scope of these services can change over time, so residents should contact relevant agencies or organizations for the most up-to-date information and eligibility criteria.

5. **Infrastructure & Environment** 93.9% of residents have access to broadband internet slightly lower than the national average of 96.7% (usnews.com). Washington County roads have a score of 73.9 which is slightly below average according to Mississippi Department of Transportation. The same cannot be said for the county's bridges inventory which has 70% of bridges in fair or poor condition compared to 35% statewide.

6. **Prioritization & Recommendations** In response to the comprehensive community needs assessment conducted in Washington County, Mississippi, several key recommendations emerge to address the identified challenges and foster positive community development:

1. Prioritize Economic Development:

- Develop targeted economic development initiatives to address persistent unemployment and income disparities.
- Foster partnerships with businesses and educational institutions to create job training programs and increase employment opportunities.

2. Enhance Educational Opportunities:

- Invest in resources and programs to improve educational attainment levels, particularly at the post-secondary level.
- Establish mentorship and tutoring programs to support students and address challenges faced by the community.

3. Strengthen Healthcare Infrastructure:

- Increase access to healthcare services, especially for vulnerable populations, through community clinics or mobile health units.
- Implement preventive measures and health education programs to address prevalent chronic diseases.

4. Address Mental Health Challenges:

- Expand mental health resources and services to meet the needs of residents, considering the lower-than-average ratio of mental health professionals.
- Collaborate with local organizations and agencies to raise awareness and reduce stigma around mental health issues.

5. Improve Housing Accessibility:

- Implement initiatives to address housing affordability and reduce the overall vacancy rate.
- Explore partnerships with nonprofit organizations to increase the availability of affordable housing options.

6. Enhance Food Security:

- Support and expand programs like SNAP and local food banks to address food insecurity.
- Encourage community gardens and initiatives that promote access to healthy, affordable food options.

7. Strengthen Transportation Services:

- Explore innovative transportation solutions for residents without vehicles, such as community shuttle services.
- Advocate for funding and resources to improve the condition of roads and bridges in the county.

8. Invest in Community and Recreation:

- Support the development and maintenance of parks and community buildings to enhance recreational opportunities.
- Promote community engagement and events that foster social connections and well-being.

9. Enhance Broadband Access:

- Collaborate with telecommunications providers to improve broadband infrastructure.

- Seek funding opportunities and grants to support the expansion of broadband services in underserved areas.

10. Monitor and Evaluate Progress:

- Establish a framework for monitoring and evaluating the impact of interventions over time.
- Regularly update the community needs assessment to reflect changes in demographics, challenges, and progress.

11. Foster Collaborative Partnerships:

- Facilitate collaboration among local government, nonprofits, businesses, and community organizations to leverage resources and expertise.
- Engage community members in decision-making processes to ensure the relevance and effectiveness of interventions.

These recommendations aim to address the multifaceted challenges identified in the community needs assessment and provide a foundation for targeted and sustainable improvements in Washington County, Mississippi.

https://datausa.io/profile/geo/washington-county-ms#health_indicators

<https://datausa.io/map?measure=Z1rxPGY&groups%5B0%5D=1TTqnI%7C0&time=2021>

<http://www.usa.com/washington-county-ms-natural-disasters-extremes.htm>

<http://www.washingtoncounty.ms/Warfield-Point-Park/vs/home>

<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/geo/chart/washingtoncountymississippi/PST045219>

<https://www.usnews.com/news/healthiest-communities/mississippi/washington-county>

<https://path.mdod.ms.gov/bridges>

[file:///C:/Users/Nathan/Downloads/23UFA_Report_Mississippi_4.11.23_Final%20\(7\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/Nathan/Downloads/23UFA_Report_Mississippi_4.11.23_Final%20(7).pdf)

<http://www.unitedforalice.org/ALICE-EVD>

<https://www.census.gov/data.html>

<https://www.census.gov/data/datasets.html>

<https://endhomelessness.org/homelessness-in-america/homelessness-statistics/state-of-homelessness-report/mississippi/>

<https://datausa.io/profile/geo/washington-county-ms/?propertyTaxesValue=propertyValue#education>