

Mississippi driver's license process: Long lines, long wait

Associated Press

Getting a new driver's license in Mississippi can be a multiday ordeal with long lines at Department of Public Safety stations that are short-staffed.

"It's just a mess, having to wait in line like this," said 18-year-old Stuart Alcorn of Raymond, who was back at a station outside Pearl last week for his fifth time.

He said that after waiting one day, examiners would not administer his road test because it was raining. After waiting several hours three other days, he said he didn't get to take either his written test or his road test because too many people were in front of him and the office closed before everyone was served.

"There's only 30 people ahead of me now," Alcorn said as he studied for the written exam Wednesday. "Hopefully, I'll get in."

Alcorn wasn't the only one frustrated. Debbie Smith of Jackson and her 18-year-old son, Zachary Smith, went to the Pearl station Tuesday afternoon but left without getting served. They arrived back at the station at 7:20 a.m. Wednesday, 40 minutes before it opened, then waited nearly two hours before he was called to take his test.

"They absolutely need more help here," said Debbie Smith, a home health worker who sometimes

drives past the station and sees people waiting outside.

Lines are a problem in other parts of the state, as well. On the Gulf Coast, people have waited hours to get licensed.

The Mississippi Department of Public Safety is requesting more money to fill vacant jobs for driver's license examiners, but it's unclear whether legislators will fulfill that request. Negotiators are in the final days of setting the overall state budget for the year that begins July 1.

"It's hard to say right now," said Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Buck Clarke, a Republican from Hollandale. "We're going to look at it."

The Department of Public Safety says it has 134 jobs for regular driver's license examiners, but 48 are vacant. It has 44 jobs for commercial driver's license examiners, but 14 are vacant.

The department is seeking money to fill the vacant jobs and to add 70 new regular examiners and 25 new commercial examiners, in addition to other new employees to be supervisors or to be greeters who make sure people have all the documents they need as they enter license stations.

Public Safety Commissioner Marshall Fisher said he knows getting a driver's license is a necessity, and

he knows about problems with long lines.

"I've been aware of it since the day I walked in the door," said Fisher, who has led the Department of Public Safety since early 2017. "I've gone to a couple of these driver services offices myself, sat down, watched, talked to some of the people."

Maj. Ken Brown, the department's director of driver services, said filling the license examiner jobs is difficult because of low pay. The regular examiner's job starts at about \$23,500 a year, and the top salary after decades on the job is about \$41,600. Commercial examiners, who have more training, are paid about \$3,000 a year more.

Brown said short staffing is only part of the problem creating long lines. He said the licensing process has become more time-consuming because of a federal requirement for increased security standards in issuing driver's licenses and identification cards.

In the state's biggest population hub, the metro Jackson area, the Pearl station is the only one that administers written or road tests for people to get a new, regular license. New commercial licenses for people such as truckers and renewal of existing regular licenses are handled other places, also with long wait times. And people who already hold

drive the minimum they can in terms of a car until they complete my first three steps.

Baby Step 1 is a beginner emergency fund of \$1,000. Baby Step 2 is paying off all debt except for your home. Baby Step 3 is fully funding your emergency fund with three to six months of expenses.

After you've accomplished these first three steps, then you can move up to a nicer car. Notice that I didn't say move up to a new car.

I want you to save up cash, and get a really nice used car. That's what the typical millionaire does, and I want you to model your financial behavior after people who are in the position you want to be in some day!

—Dave

**Dave Ramsey is CEO of Ramsey Solutions. He has authored seven best-selling books, including The Total Money Makeover. The Dave Ramsey Show is heard by more than 13 million listeners each week on 585 radio stations and multiple digital platforms. Follow Dave on the web at daveramsey.com and on Twitter at @DaveRamsey.*

County native named in Mississippi's Top 50 Most Influential Hall of Fame

Press Release

On February 18, during the 3rd Annual Mississippi Top 50 Award Event, Holmes County resident Robert G. Clark, Jr., former Speaker Pro Tempore of the Mississippi House of Representatives and Governor Phil Bryant were inducted into Mississippi's Top 50 Most Influential Hall of Fame.

Mississippi Top 50 is an annual list of the people who are judged to be the most influential leaders in the state of Mississippi.

This bipartisan selection of leaders come from the ranks of elected and appointed officials, economic development professionals, business, media and governmental affairs.

Additionally, there was a special recognition for "Hall of Fame" status. These are Mississippians who have made lasting contributions to the political, business and public policy landscape.

During the awards event, Mississippi Top 50 recognized, Clark as the most pioneering black elected official of the modern era in Mississippi.

regular licenses can renew them at the Department of Public Safety's main office by Interstate 55 in Jackson.

Because of the prohibitively long waiting times in Pearl, it's common for people to drive an hour or more to seek shorter lines in smaller towns. Even then, there's no guarantee the station in the smaller town will be open.

On March 12, about a dozen people stood in line outside a driver's license



ROBERT CLARK AND GOVERNOR PHIL BRYANT

Clark was elected to the Mississippi House of Representatives in 1967 and was the first black elected to the state legislature since the Reconstruction era.

In January 1992, he was elected as House Speaker Pro Tempore and held that position until his retirement in 2003. While in the House of Representatives, he represented District 47 which at various periods encompassed parts of Holmes, At-

tala, Yazoo and Humphreys Counties.

Bryant was sworn in for his second term as Mississippi's 64th governor in January 12, 2016.

Before becoming the state's chief executive, he was lieutenant governor from 2008–2011. He also served as state auditor and represented his legislative district in the Mississippi House of Representatives for five years.

station in the small town of Walnut Grove, waiting for it to open at 8 a.m. A sign taped to the door said the office was closed that day because of a "temporary personnel shortage." It said people could go to the nearest stations, about 40 miles (64 kilometers) to the east in Newton, or 60 miles (97 kilometers) to the west in Pearl.

Charleen Sproles and her 16-year-old daughter, Macy, live near Jackson.

With Macy on spring break, they left home before dawn and traveled more than an hour to the Walnut Grove station.

"We were first in line at 7:45," Charleen Sproles said. She said the sign was up, but it wasn't entirely clear until 8 a.m. that the office was closed that day. The mother and daughter then went on to Newton, farther from home, for Macy to take her road test and get her license.



Time to fix the real problem

Dear Dave,
I've heard you tell people to avoid debt consolidation companies. Why do you think debt consolidation is such a bad thing?

Tom

Dear Tom,
The main reason is that debt consolidation makes you feel like you did something to really change your financial world when you didn't. That's part of the catch.

Believe it or not, I hear people all the time say things like, "I took out a loan, and paid off all my debt!" No, you didn't. All you did was move your debt around. It's still there!

In cases like this, the biggest issue remains because you didn't do anything to address the real problems—you and your behavior. When you have debt, the number of payments you have left isn't the problem. The problem isn't interest rates, either.

The problem is the person you look at in the mirror ev-

ery day.

Until you get mad enough about your financial situation and the real reasons for it—until you fix you and your behavior—you'll never make any progress toward winning with money!

When can we buy a new car?

Dear Dave,
My husband and I are following your plan, and we're in the middle of saving up our emergency fund. When do you recommend buying a new car in the process? Do we have to wait until we've finished all the Baby Steps?

Alanna

Dear Alanna,
I never advise buying a brand new car, unless you have a net worth of at least \$1 million. At that point, you've got enough assets that you won't get rocked by the ridiculous depreciation that comes with buying a new vehicle.

Now, you don't have to drive a beater until you pay off your house or anything like that. I advise people to

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