

**IN AND AROUND
LEXINGTON**
BY LEONA (LENA) FIELDS



The Archer sisters have our fun person on the bus with their niece visiting them for ride to and from the site. the summer. She has been Mr. Cornelius "Jim" coming for quite a few years. Kitchens funeral was held Mrs. Annie Sago is sick. Saturday, at Mt. Calvary We miss her at the Senior MB Church in Tchula. Citizen's feeding site. She is Mrs. Coraine Torry passed

away on Wednesday morning, July 17. Funeral arrangements are incomplete as of press time. Her daughter Janell Brown was at home from Atlanta visiting her when she passed away. Her granddaughter Trice lives here in Lexington. Keep Janell and Trice uplifted in prayer.

Durene Benson's husband passed recently. I don't know her married name but please uplift the Benson

family, the Hester family and Durene in prayer.

Due to a funeral at the Multi-Purpose Complex, Friday, July 19, it was not open to the Senior Citizen's feeding program and the farmer's market. The farmer's market was open on Thursday.

Congratulations to Morris Morgan and his family. They are back in their own home after losing a trailer and a house to a fire.

***Auditor Report**

(Continued from page 1.)

- Did not certify whether multiple childcare centers met health and safety standards;
- Did not monitor recipients of several grants to determine whether grant money was spent in accordance with the law;
- Did not compile basic, required documents, like a comprehensive list of grant recipients;
- Did not follow federal reporting guidelines, submitting some federal paperwork nearly two years late;
- Did not follow all legal requirements for ensuring beneficiaries of large programs like Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) were actually eligible for the programs;
- And did not or could not ensure childcare centers receiving CCDF funds accurately counted children in the centers.

Several of these DHS findings have been repeatedly identified by the Auditor's office since 2014 with no corrective action completed. Findings listed in the Single Audit Report can affect the amount of federal funding Mississippi receives. Mississippi Prison Industries Corporation, a non-profit created by the state to provide work programs for inmates, also drew serious findings. After a cash shortage and subsequent management change, the accounting office at Prison Industries has experienced a staff shortage. Without necessary staffing levels, job duties have not been properly separated. When too few employees have too much control over the finances of an office, the risk for fraud and theft increases.

Several state agencies have also created fraud risk by the way they utilize the software designed to manage payroll and purchasing. The State-wide Payroll and Human Resources System (SPAHRS) is the program used by the state to keep track of agency employees and their pay. If employees have too much individual control over an agency's files on SPAHRS, the agency could be at risk for fraud. For instance, an employee with a great deal

of control could create "ghost employees" to secretly funnel money to themselves. Auditor White recommended some agencies limit unnecessary access to SPAHRS and separate responsibility for recording entries in the system among multiple employees to prevent this situation.

Auditor White made similar recommendations regarding Mississippi's Accountability System for Government Information and Collaboration (MAGIC), the accounting and procurement software for the state.

Finally, auditors noted the overall level of expertise among accounting staff in multiple state agencies was insufficient. The State Auditor's office recommends the Department of Finance and Administration continue training programs for accounting personnel in all state agencies.

The full 300-page report can be viewed online at www.osa.ms.gov under the "Reports" tab.

"My hope is that the agencies with the findings listed in the audit report will take swift action to remedy the problems we highlighted," White said. "The taxpayers deserve to know that money is being spent appropriately, in accordance with the law, and that the proper safeguards to prevent fraud are in place."

Teacher pay raise will cost \$18.5M more than first estimated

Associated Press

The Mississippi Department of Education announced Monday, July 22, that a \$1,500 raise for teachers will cost \$18.5 million more than it originally informed lawmakers, months after local superintendents discovered a shortfall caused by the department's ignorance of how teachers were classified in its own computer system.

Lawmakers allotted \$58 million for the raise that began July 1, based on a total of 31,000 teachers and assistant teachers. But the department didn't count almost 10,000 other teaching positions that officials thought were federally funded, meaning federal funds would cover the cost of the raises. Instead, it turns out those positions are state-funded, and Mississippi must absorb another \$18.5 million in costs, bringing the overall price of the increase in pay and associated benefits for 40,991 educators to \$77 million.

In March, the department sent a letter to lawmakers counting 31,157 teachers. Officials said that was a count of teachers in its computer system classified as being paid only with funds from the Mississippi Adequate Education Program, the formula that divides state aid among school districts. But state Superintendent Carey Wright later said the department didn't know that its computer system places some teachers paid all or in part with state money into classifications that the department thought included only teachers paid completely with federal money. The department now says it worked with districts to identify all state-funded positions.

The Legislature mandated a pay increase in law, so local districts must pay it regardless of state funding.

The Department of Education said it is working with lawmakers to make up the deficit when the Legislature reconvenes in January after state elections. Some people pushed for a special session to solve the problem immediately. But outgoing Gov. Phil Bryant and others rejected that move as a waste of money. Because it's an election year, there's no guarantee of who will hold top posts in January, but many current and prospective leaders have pledged to cover the shortfall.

House Education Committee Chairman Richard Bennett, a Long Beach Republican, released a letter Monday pledging the support of House Republicans.

"The House leadership is supportive of funding this deficit and ensuring that the school districts will not be required to absorb any costs associated with the pay raise," Bennett wrote.

The department usually sends state aid to local school districts in two checks a year. Wright has said the department won't split the \$58 million in pay raise funds equally, but will send a larger share this summer, providing enough money to pay for the raise until lawmakers return.

Not only teachers and assistants, but counselors, librarians and other specialized workers are getting the raise.

"This is the most comprehensive pay raise the Legislature has approved and is intended to provide Mississippi educators with a well-deserved raise," Wright said in a statement.

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