



FACT SHEET

# JACKSON WATER CRISIS

As the people of Jackson, Mississippi, know well, the city’s drinking water system has suffered from serious safety and reliability problems for decades. Residents have endured discolored water, low pressure, oily water, and water with floating particles. Jackson’s water has previously had elevated lead levels, and its treatment plants have struggled to properly and consistently filter and disinfect the water. Hundreds of times, the risks from harmful microbes have forced officials to tell consumers to boil their water before drinking it. Two complete water shutoffs, in 2021 and 2022, left residents without drinkable water for weeks.

Water woes in Jackson, a majority-Black city, are part of a national infrastructure crisis rooted in and made worse by structural racism. Local governments, including the government of Jackson, must rely on state politicians for funding to fix urgent problems with aging water pipes and treatment plants. But Mississippi has engaged in a pattern of disinvestment and withholding of funds from the city.

## COMMUNITY GROUPS ARE FIGHTING FOR SAFE WATER IN THE CITY

For years, Jackson-based organizations including the Mississippi Poor People’s Campaign, People’s Advocacy Institute, and other member organizations of the Mississippi Rapid Response Coalition have helped their neighbors access safe water during “boil water” notices and water shutoffs. Since 2021 they have held marches; organized community meetings; met with government officials; and set up sites to give out water, filters, and testing kits. The Rapid Response Coalition also set up a call center to respond to residents’ immediate needs and questions. You can reach the call center at 844-435-7601 daily from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. CST.

## AS OF DECEMBER 2023, JACKSON’S WATER DOES NOT MEET ALL FEDERAL REQUIREMENTS

The system’s 2022 Annual Drinking Water Quality Report shows violations of federal rules relating to proper treatment to remove particles and control lead contamination. The state department of health’s Drinking Water Watch website, as well as the water treatment plants’ monthly operating reports, show ongoing violations through 2023.



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**Mississippi Poor People’s Campaign** and **People’s Advocacy Institute**, both community-led groups, have been working to secure safe drinking water in Jackson. The former, the state chapter of the national Poor People’s Campaign, is dedicated to uniting people across Mississippi to challenge the evils of systemic racism, poverty, the war economy, ecological devastation, and religious nationalism. People’s Advocacy Institute is a resource and training incubator for transformative justice in the South. Both groups are among the more than 30 state-based organizations in the Mississippi Rapid Response Coalition. The coalition formed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and has since responded to crises caused by climate change and failing infrastructure across Mississippi, including by raising resources to provide clean water to residents. Legal nonprofits **American Civil Liberties Union of Mississippi**, **Center for Constitutional Rights**, **Forward Justice**, and **Natural Resources Defense Council** are supporting their efforts.

For more information, please visit:

[www.nrdc.org](http://www.nrdc.org)

[www.ccrjustice.org](http://www.ccrjustice.org)

[www.forwardjustice.org](http://www.forwardjustice.org)

[www.aclu-ms.org](http://www.aclu-ms.org)

[www.peoplesadvocacyinstitute.com](http://www.peoplesadvocacyinstitute.com)

[www.facebook.com/MSPPC](https://www.facebook.com/MSPPC)

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## EDWARD “TED” HENIFIN AND JXN WATER CURRENTLY CONTROL JACKSON’S WATER SYSTEM

Facing a lawsuit from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the City of Jackson (together with the EPA) requested that a federal court put the city water system under an interim third-party manager while they negotiate long-term solutions. In November 2022, the court appointed Interim Manager Ted Henifin to stabilize and temporarily run the water system and gave him broad control over the system’s hiring, operations, finances, and billing. Henifin created JXN Water, a Mississippi corporation, to conduct the business of the water system. In October 2023, the court granted Henifin control over the city’s sewer system as well.

## THE FIGHT FOR SAFE WATER AND COMMUNITY-DRIVEN SOLUTIONS GOES ON

Jackson community groups continue to fight for every Jacksonian’s access to safe drinking water. They are also pushing officials to center community priorities and perspectives in decisions about the future of the city’s tap water.

- **In July 2023**, community groups and residents stood up in court in EPA’s lawsuit to speak directly to the federal judge about ongoing problems with water quality and access. Mississippi Poor People’s Campaign and People’s Advocacy Institute also submitted a community statement to EPA with the following demands:
  - Full transparency into Ted Henifin’s and JXN Water’s actions to manage the water system. This includes subjecting them to public records laws and state procurement laws, from which they are currently exempt.
  - Making residents partners in creating long-term, sustainable solutions to the water crisis. This includes hiring a community member to serve as a connection point between residents, Henifin, and the government.
  - Rejecting attempts to privatize the city’s water system, which would result in higher costs for residents and increased risk of corruption and health and safety violations.
  - Increasing educational resources to help residents understand their water quality, how they can test their water, and improvements to the water system.

- **In August 2023**, the groups filed an emergency petition with the EPA, asking the agency to immediately address serious health threats from Jackson’s tap water. The petition asked for bottled water, filters, home testing kits, and improved public access to water safety data. As of January 2024, EPA has not granted any of these requests.
- **In September 2023**, the Mississippi Poor People’s Campaign and People’s Advocacy Institute requested that the judge in the EPA’s drinking water lawsuit allow them to become formal parties to the case, which would give the groups greater ability to influence the lawsuit. As of January 3, 2024, the court had not ruled on this request.

## HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF AND YOUR FAMILY

JXN Water must provide data showing that tap water is now consistently safe to drink throughout the city. As of December 2023, it has not done so. Until reliable information is provided showing that Jackson’s tap water is reliably safe, taking these steps can ensure your family is consuming safe water:

- Drink and cook with treated bottled water (for example, reverse osmosis-derived water such as Dasani or Aquafina) when possible. Aquifer or spring water may meet less stringent criteria than the criteria applied to your tap water.
- Use reverse osmosis under-the-sink filters certified to meet National Sanitation Foundation (NSF) Standard 58, or
- Use other filters that meet NSF Standard 53 for both lead and cyst reduction. These are often faucet-mount or refrigerator-installed filters.
- Use “ready-to-feed” baby formula or make formula using water from the sources listed above.

It’s especially important that young children and people who are pregnant or breastfeeding drink water from the sources above. If you use an NSF 53-certified filter (typically carbon based), you should regularly change the cartridges as recommended by the manufacturer to avoid bacterial contamination. For guidance from the Mississippi State Department of Health, visit <https://msdh.ms.gov/page/23,0,148,720.html>.

## GET INVOLVED

**VOLUNTEER.** The Mississippi Rapid Response Coalition needs volunteers to help load, inventory, and distribute water; spread the word about resources and support services; and support one another in these challenging times. To volunteer, email [rapidresponse@peoplesadvocacyinstitute.com](mailto:rapidresponse@peoplesadvocacyinstitute.com), call (844) 435-7601, or go to [Bit.ly/mrrcvolunteers](https://bit.ly/mrrcvolunteers).

**SPREAD THE TRUTH.** State officials are trying to frame this crisis as “evidence” of Jacksonians’ “inability” to govern themselves. Conservative actors are using the crisis to whip up fear and bigotry. Keep others informed and combat harmful and false narratives about the water crisis.

**DONATE:** For monetary donations go to [Bit.ly/msresponsedonations](https://bit.ly/msresponsedonations). For water/supply donations, email [candace@peoplesadvocacyinstitute.com](mailto:candace@peoplesadvocacyinstitute.com).