A Snapshot of Mississippi Regulation in 2018

117,558 Restrictions, 9.3 Million Words, and 13 Weeks to Read

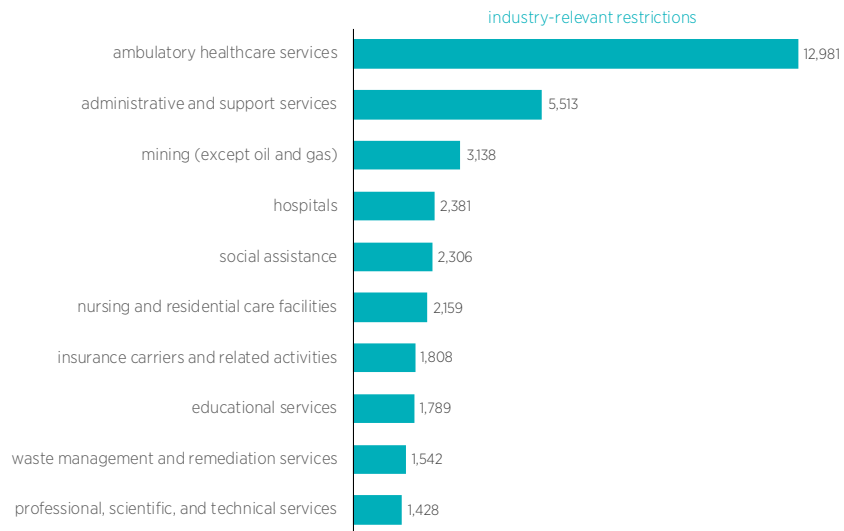*James Broughel and Jonathan Nelson*

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It would take an ordinary person more than two and a half years to read the entire US *Code of Federal Regulations* (CFR), which contained nearly 104 million words in 2017.[1] The sheer size of the CFR poses a problem not just for the individuals and businesses that want to stay in compliance with the law but also for anyone interested in understanding the consequences of this massive system of rules. States also have sizable regulatory codes, which add an additional layer to the large body of federal regulation. A prime example is the online version of the 2018 *Mississippi Administrative Code* (MAC).[2]

Researchers at the Mercatus Center at George Mason University developed State RegData, a platform for analyzing and quantifying state regulatory text.[3] State RegData captures information in minutes that would take hours, weeks, or even years to obtain by reading and counting. For example, the tool allows researchers to identify the industries that state regulation targets most by connecting text relevant to those industries with restrictive word counts. Referred to as regulatory restrictions, the words and phrases *shall*, *must*, *may not*, *prohibited*, and *required* can signify legal constraints and obligations.[4] As shown in figure 1, the three industries with the highest estimates of industry-relevant restrictions in the 2018 MAC are ambulatory healthcare services, administrative and support services, and mining (except oil and gas).

State RegData also reveals that the 2018 MAC contains 117,558 restrictions and 9.3 million words. It would take an individual about 518 hours—or almost 13 weeks—to read the entire MAC. That's assuming the reader spends 40 hours per week reading and reads at a rate of 300 words per minute. By comparison, there are 1.09 million additional restrictions in the federal code.[5] Individuals and businesses in Mississippi must navigate these different layers of restrictions to remain in compliance.
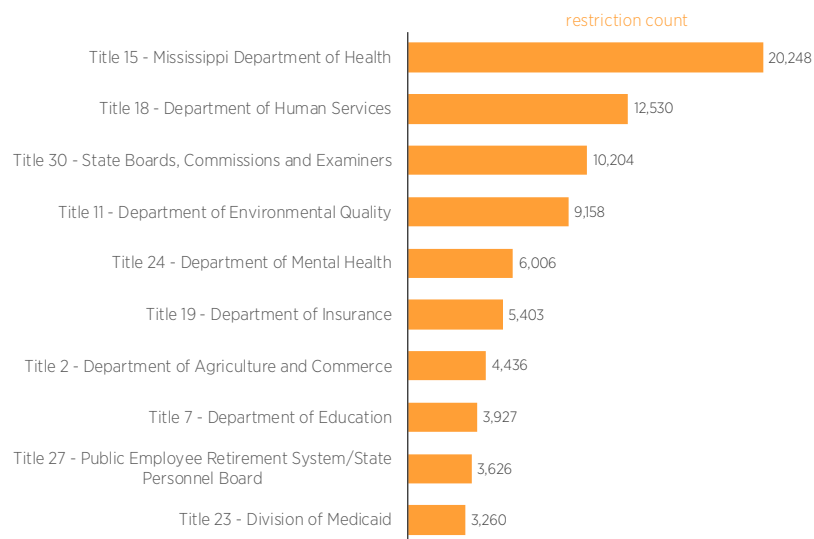
Figure 1. Top 10 Industries Targeted by Mississippi State Regulation in 2018

industry-relevant restrictions

Industry	Restrictions
ambulatory healthcare services	12,981
administrative and support services	5,513
mining (except oil and gas)	3,138
hospitals	2,381
social assistance	2,306
nursing and residential care facilities	2,159
insurance carriers and related activities	1,808
educational services	1,789
waste management and remediation services	1,542
professional, scientific, and technical services	1,428

Source: State RegData (Mississippi data), https://quantgov.org/state-regdata/.

The titles of the MAC are organized by state agency. Figure 2 shows that the title of the MAC associated with the Mississippi State Department of Health contains 20,248 restrictions. By this measure, this is the biggest regulator in Mississippi. Coming in second is the Department of Human Services, with 12,530 restrictions.

Figure 2. Top 10 Regulators in Mississippi in 2018

restriction count

Title	Restriction count
Title 15 - Mississippi Department of Health	20,248
Title 18 - Department of Human Services	12,530
Title 30 - State Boards, Commissions and Examiners	10,204
Title 11 - Department of Environmental Quality	9,158
Title 24 - Department of Mental Health	6,006
Title 19 - Department of Insurance	5,403
Title 2 - Department of Agriculture and Commerce	4,436
Title 7 - Department of Education	3,927
Title 27 - Public Employee Retirement System/State Personnel Board	3,626
Title 23 - Division of Medicaid	3,260

Note: Title names are based on the largest department in the title. In some cases, other small agencies, in addition to the departments presented here, have rules in the relevant title. Restriction counts are for the entire title.
Source: State RegData (Mississippi data), https://quantgov.org/state-regdata/.

Federal regulation tends to attract the most headlines, but it is important to remember that the nearly 104 million words and 1.09 million restrictions in the federal code significantly understate the true scope of regulation in the United States. States like Mississippi write millions of additional words of regulation and hundreds of thousands of additional restrictions. State-level requirements carry the force of law to restrict individuals and businesses just as federal ones do.

Researchers are only beginning to understand the consequences of the massive and growing federal regulatory system on economic growth and well-being in the United States.[6] Meanwhile, the effects of state regulation remain largely unknown. If this snapshot of Mississippi regulation in 2018 is a good indicator, then the states are also active regulators, suggesting that the full impact of regulation on society is far greater than that of federal regulation alone.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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NOTES

1. This assumes the person reads 300 words per minute for 40 hours per week with two weeks of vacation per year. Patrick A. McLaughlin and Oliver Sherouse, RegData US 3.1 Annual (dataset), QuantGov, Mercatus Center at George Mason University, Arlington, VA, 2018; Patrick A. McLaughlin, Oliver Sherouse, Daniel Francis, Michael Gasvoda, Jonathan Nelson, Stephen Strosko, and Tyler Richards, "RegData 3.0 User's Guide," accessed February 15, 2018, https://quantgov.org/regdata/users-guide/.

2. Mississippi Secretary of State, Mississippi Administrative Code, accessed May 21, 2018, http://www.sos.ms.gov/admin-search/default.aspx.

3. State RegData is part of a broader project called QuantGov, which seeks to quantify legal text. See Patrick A. McLaughlin and Oliver Sherouse, "QuantGov—A Policy Analytics Platform," QuantGov, December 20, 2017. Data for Mississippi are available at State RegData (Mississippi data), https://quantgov.org/state-regdata/.

4. Restrictions can also occur in legal text for other purposes, such as for definitional purposes. At times, restrictions may relate to government employees rather than the private sector.

5. McLaughlin and Sherouse, RegData US 3.1 Annual (dataset); McLaughlin et al., "RegData 3.0 User's Guide."

6. See, for example, Bentley Coffey, Patrick A. McLaughlin, and Pietro Peretto, "The Cumulative Cost of Regulations" (Mercatus Working Paper, Mercatus Center at George Mason University, Arlington, VA, 2016).