

EXPRESS GRAIN TERMINALS

## Help available for unpaid farmers

By KEVIN EDWARDS  
Staff Writer

Limited financial relief is available for farmers who have gone unpaid due to the bankruptcy of Express Grain Terminals LLC.

The Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce issued a notice March 10 that farmers may submit claims on Express Grain's two corporate surety bonds "on account of Express Grain's failure to faithfully comply" with state law. Claims must be made within 60 days of the notice.

Express Grain, as required by Mis-

issippi law, posted a surety bond of \$1 million for its grain warehouse licenses and a bond of \$100,000 for its grain dealer license. The company's grain warehouse licenses were revoked last month after Commissioner Andy Gipson determined the company submitted fraudulent financial documents to the agency over multiple years.

For those seeking relief, a "Claim

Against Corporate Surety Bonds" must be submitted and is available on the department's website at [www.mdac.ms.gov/expressgrain](http://www.mdac.ms.gov/expressgrain). Farmers must write the factual bases of their claims and submit any supporting documents.

In an email, Gipson said there is no cap on the amount a person can claim on the bonds, but "once the bond proceeds are divided up among all the claimants, persons claiming losses will receive a pro-rated portion of their loss."

Money has been an ongoing issue during the company's bankruptcy. As first reported by The Taxpayers

Channel, multiple parties were scheduled to meet in Jackson on Thursday in a mediation session ahead of court hearings on April 1 to determine ownership of Express Grain's grain and grain proceeds.

The company's attorney, Craig Geno, has estimated farmers are owed as much as \$46 million, a number he called a "moving target."

Geno asked the bankruptcy court Thursday for more time for Express Grain to operate. He said the "vast majority" of pre-petition grain has been sold or processed and is now in the form of cash, accounts receivable or finished product.

Express Grain's Greenwood manufacturing plant and its grain warehouses in Greenwood, Sidon and Minter City were purchased last month by UMB Bank of Kansas City, Missouri, the company's largest creditor, which held liens on nearly all of Express Grain's property.

John Coleman, Express Grain's president, has been ordered to appear before a meeting of creditors scheduled for Wednesday. He filed for bankruptcy along with Express Grain in late September.

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Gipson

## Senate approves teacher raises



Lt. Gov. Delbert Hosemann, center, listens as lawmakers speak during a meeting of the education conferees from both the House and Senate Wednesday, seeking a compromise on their separate teacher pay bills at the Mississippi Capitol in Jackson. A number of public school teachers also watched the proceedings from the gallery.

## House still must vote on final version of bill

JACKSON (AP) — Mississippi teachers would receive their largest pay raise in years, under a bill that the state Senate passed Thursday.

The House still needs to pass the final version of House Bill 530 before it can go to Republican Gov. Tate Reeves for his expected signature, the Northeast Mississippi Daily Journal reported.

Mississippi has long had some of the lowest teachers salaries in the nation.

"This is the plan that teachers have told us they wanted," Senate Education Chairman Dennis DeBar said. "This is the input they provided to each and every one of us since last year."

The bill would provide an average increase of about \$5,100 — a jump of more than 10% over teachers' current

pay. The average teacher salary in Mississippi during the 2019-20 academic year was \$46,843, according to the Southern Regional Education Board. That lagged behind the average of \$55,205 for teachers in the 16 states of the regional organization. The national average was \$64,133.

Under the bill, teachers' base pay would increase by a few hundred dollars most years, with larger increases with every fifth year of experience and a more substantial bump at 25 years.

A beginning Mississippi teacher with a bachelor's degree currently receives a \$37,000 salary from the state, and the local school district can provide a supplement.

Under the bill, the base pay from the state would be \$41,500. Teachers with

higher degrees and more experience are paid more.

Teachers' assistants would receive a \$2,000 increase over two years, taking their pay from \$15,000 to \$17,000.

The Mississippi Association of Educators said it was grateful for the Senate's decision.

"This legislative action provides an avenue for recruitment and retention of Mississippi's public school teachers. We know firsthand how difficult the past two years of instruction have been for our educators and their assistants. We believe that by providing them the respect of paying them according to their value, we can expect more talented Mississippians to enter the field," the nonprofit advocacy group said in a statement.

## Nonprofit group lobbies for safer dormitories

### Some concerned visitation policies aren't being enforced

By GERARD EDIC  
Staff Writer

A Lexington-based nonprofit is seeking to have Mississippi's public universities enforce their opposite-gender visitation policies for dormitories.

The specific mission of Safe Dormitories Association is to ensure male students do not enter women's rooms after visitation hours, said Nancy Barrett, one of the association's founders. The group officially registered as a nonprofit with the Mississippi Secretary of State's Office in 2020.

"We started working in 2019 when we realized what a terrible situation there was in our dormitories in Mississippi," Barrett said. "I heard many stories, just horrifying, of things that were going on, where the boys could stay in the girls' rooms, doors locked until midnight."

The organization has no issue with male students visiting common areas, such as hospitality rooms, she said. However, male students sleeping over at women's dorm rooms or visiting after hours has caused distress for female students, Barrett said.

Barrett is a 1968 graduate of the University of Mississippi, which her husband, Don Barrett, a well-known Lexington trial attorney, and other relatives family and friends also attended.

Barrett recalled that when she was a student, the dean of

her alma mater would have students expelled if men were caught in women's rooms after visitation hours.

Based on stories Barrett has heard from friends whose children have attended the state's public universities, as well as stories from students and parents the nonprofit has received, these visitation policies are no longer enforced, meaning men have spent nights in women's rooms.

"This is my analogy: I don't have to know how many people are killed by land mines to know that land mines are extremely dangerous," she said. "That is my thinking about this policy."

On its website, [saferdorms.com](http://saferdorms.com), and in full-page print ads in the Clarion Ledger newspaper, Safe Dormitories has published anonymous letters by female college students or concerned parents detailing incidents in which female students have felt uncomfortable with male students sleeping over in their rooms while visiting the female students' roommates.

Before her organization was formed, Barrett and others reached out to various leaders, including elected representatives, University of Mississippi administrators and even a member of the board for the state's Institutions of Higher Learning, to express their concerns.

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## FBI eyeing 6 suspects in bomb threats at Black colleges

Associated Press

As the nation's historically Black colleges remain on edge after receiving dozens of bomb threats in recent weeks, federal law enforcement officials said they have identified six suspects who they believe are responsible for most of the racially motivated crimes.

More than a third of America's 101 historically Black col-

leges and universities have been targeted by calls or emails threatening to set off bombs on their campuses since early January, with the vast majority arriving during the celebration of Black History Month in February. The threats are being investigated as hate crimes.

Mississippi Valley State University in Itta Bena was one of the universities receiving threats.

At a congressional hearing Thursday, federal law enforcement agencies said they are working aggressively to make arrests in the 59 cases, calling

the case their "highest priority." All six suspects are juveniles, according to the FBI.

Ryan Young, executive assistant director of the FBI intelligence branch, said investigators have identified "one person and a small group," although some of the threats may have been copycat crimes.

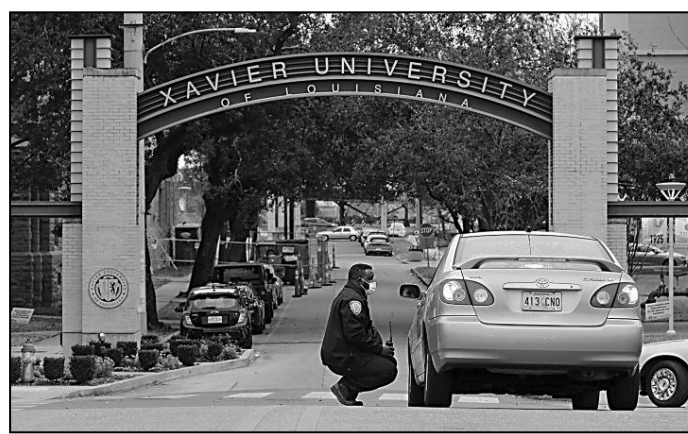
"Our intention is to bring these individuals to justice," Young told the House Oversight Committee.

The Biden administration this week announced a series of actions in response to the threats. The Education

Department on Wednesday issued guidance to help colleges navigate threats and get help from federal agencies. Vice President Kamala Harris, the nation's first Black vice president and an alumna of Howard University, a historically Black institution in Washington, also notified colleges they are eligible for grants meant to help schools recover from violence.

No explosives have been found in connection with the threats, but students say the prospect of violence has

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A Xavier University police officer redirects a motorist around campus after a bomb threat put the campus on lockdown in New Orleans on Feb. 1.



WEATHER

Friday: High near 73 with 80% chance of rain.  
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NATIONAL NEWS

Return of St. Patrick's Day parades livens up cities.  
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