



STATE OF MICHIGAN
JOCELYN BENSON, SECRETARY OF STATE

Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson
Testimony in support of Senate Bills 613-616
Senate Oversight Committee
October 25, 2023

Good morning, Chair Singh and members of the Senate Oversight Committee. Thank you for allowing me to speak with you today.

I am here because for far too long our state has been among the worst states in the nation when it comes to government transparency and ethics laws. Michigan's ethics and transparency laws are virtually nonexistent compared to other states. The Center for Public Integrity has listed Michigan last among the 50 states on transparency and accountability, grading Michigan an "F."

Voters want this to change. They made this clear by overwhelmingly passing Proposal 1 last year, requiring more transparency at the intersection of money and politics.

Senate Bills 613-616 before the committee today are just the beginning, one step forward in a journey that needs to take us above and beyond the minimum that voters required. This is what we must, constitutionally, get done before the end of the year, but it cannot be the last thing we do.

I support the bills that are before the committee today. I am grateful to the work of this chamber in bringing these bills to where they are now, and I also encourage the Senate to adopt a spousal disclosure provision that includes not only occupation but also employer and financial disclosure. This current exception creates too many loopholes and should be improved in the final version of the bill.

As we continue on this journey in the future, Michigan should align our disclosure requirements with those of Congress, and create real penalties for noncompliance, including fines, candidate disqualification and prosecution. This includes greater restrictions on travel and gifts.

And finally, in addition to enacting the anti-corruption requirements I've just summarized, we must enable enforcement.

Currently the Bureau of Elections does not have discovery or subpoena power to investigate any breaches of our campaign finance or lobby laws. They must be given those abilities to ensure that elected leaders and candidates obey our laws or face penalty when they don't.

While that may sound like a long list of regulations, the truth is that many of the laws are already in place in other states and at the federal level. They are tried, tested, proven effective and can be easily modified to fit within our existing legal framework in Michigan.

And the good news is once this is done, we will no longer be among the worst in government transparency and ethics. Rather, we can greatly improve by simply implementing the national best practices that are in place elsewhere, thereby making Michigan a place where the practices of governing, legislating and leading is done with integrity by all involved and in accordance with the will of voters.

Thank you again for taking this important first step to implement the will of Michigan voters. My office will be happy to assist and provide information at any time as you work to refine this legislation.