



Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson

Restoring the Public Trust

Michigan residents have a right to know who is funding the campaigns of politicians and ballot initiatives, what conflicts of interest their public leaders may have, and who is lobbying their public officials.

Our state has been on the wrong track on government transparency. According to the Center for Public Integrity, we have the weakest transparency and ethics laws in the nation. Working together, we can make Michigan a leader in transparent government and go from worst to first. To that end, Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson is sharing ideas to restore the public's trust in state government.

Legislative Collaboration

Secretary Benson has several ideas to achieve these goals that will require legislative collaboration. She looks forward to meeting with legislators on these and other issues to ensure that the people of Michigan have the transparent and accountable government they deserve.

Show us the money: Full disclosure of all money in politics

- Ensure that all 527 committees are reporting. While they are created primarily to influence elections, some of these tax-exempt organizations are not regulated under state campaign finance laws because they do not “expressly advocate” for the election or defeat of a candidate or party.
- Close the administrative account loophole by applying reporting requirements for all receipts and disbursements. This loophole was originally allowed so political parties could purchase paper clips and pens without the hassle of reporting. Now, it is used for large, undisclosed contributions from corporations and unions and spent on so-called “issue advocacy” or contributions to issue-advocacy entities.
- End the “Express Advocacy” reporting exception by creating a threshold definition for electioneering in the Michigan Campaign Finance Act.
 - Clarify the definition for electioneering communication in the Michigan Campaign Finance Act to match the language used for federal elections and in 30 states. Specifically, this would mean that any paid communication that refers to a candidate and is publicly distributed close to an election in which that candidate appears on the ballot is subject to disclosure laws.
 - Under the electioneering definition, it doesn't matter what the ad says, or how it says it. If it features or refers to a candidate at all during a statutory time period, then it is an “electioneering communication.”

- Tighten LLC reporting requirements to ensure secret and foreign money do not corrupt our elections. If an LLC gives money, that amount should be assessed equally to each officer's individual campaign limit, and full names should be disclosed.

Pull back the curtain: A government for the people, not hidden from the people

- Expand the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) so it applies to the Governor and the Legislature.
- Eliminate the potential for quid pro quo corruption and "Pay to Play" by banning companies (and associated individuals with a controlling interest) that receive state grants or contracts from making political contributions.

Let the light in: Ethics and transparency bring influence out of the shadows

- Require personal financial disclosures from elected officials.
- Promote ethics in leadership by enforcement of the Conflict of Interest Act (Act 318 of 1968). This Act provides a process to identify members with a legislative conflict of interest.
- Slow the fast-track recruitment between the Legislature and the lobbying corps by instituting a mandatory 2-year "cooling off" period between leaving office as a legislator and working as a lobbyist.
- Require former legislators who are defining their work as "legislative consulting" to register and report as lobbyists.

Secretary of State Actions

In addition to these goals for legislative collaboration, during Sunshine Week (March 10-16), Secretary Benson will announce a series of actions that she and the Department of State will take to implement improvements in the areas of disclosure, ethics and transparency. She intends to lead by example and to encourage others to follow that lead.

Public Engagement

As part of her next steps to accomplish her transparency agenda, Secretary Benson plans to have conversations with residents at town hall meetings across the state, where she will welcome their feedback. Efforts to improve disclosure and other changes are meaningful only if they help members of the public become more informed and enable them to hold elected officials accountable.