

Transparency is the backbone of American democracy — it allows voters to make an informed choice about who they give the privilege of representing them.

But historically, Michiganders have been kept in the dark regarding the financial interests of our state officials. For years, Michigan was one of just two states without any financial disclosure laws. That all changed in 2022, when [Michiganders overwhelmingly voted](#) to pass a ballot initiative — [Proposal 1](#) — requiring elected state legislative and executive officials to file annual financial disclosure reports. These reports will include their income, assets, liabilities, gifts from lobbyists, positions held in certain organizations and agreements on future employment.

To say the proposal was a massive win for Michigan democracy would be an understatement. Voters chose transparency over secrecy. Now, it's time for the Michigan House and Senate to pass a bill supporting that choice.

Michigan has seen two bills in the past that attempted to introduce financial disclosure; [SB194](#) (Bieda) in 2015 and [HB4323](#) (LaGrand) in 2021. While neither bill made it to the governor's desk, they are the best examples we have of what financial transparency should look like in Michigan.

The bills enacting financial disclosure in 2023 must include at least two provisions that were not in the language of the ballot proposal.

First, they must require financial disclosure from other statewide offices. As it currently stands, the language in the ballot proposal applies only to sitting legislators and state executive officials. This ignores folks who are members of the Board of Education, governance boards of public universities, and other holders of public office. Additionally, candidates for the offices that fall under this law must also be required to disclose. The much broader list of down-ballot offices would shine a light across the state and allow voters to feel confident they're picking candidates without conflicts of interest for these important roles.

Second, immediate family members — from spouses to dependents — must be required to disclose their income and assets. It would be all too easy for an elected official to transfer assets in their spouse's name or create a conflict of interest if we choose not to ask for that information. Reporting the financial interests of a spouse or dependent is a requirement throughout several states; there is no reason it should be any different here in Michigan.

These provisions will raise the bar for transparency and accountability in Michigan and honor the spirit of what Proposal 22-1 is supposed to be. They will shine a light on potential conflicts of interest and allow voters to make sure their elected officials are beholden to the people. What is decided now will likely be the system our state uses for many years to come. Let's get it right this time.