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Levin Center at Wayne Law Presents Report on the Michigan Legislature's Oversight Capacity and Performance

January 28, 2020

Today, the Levin Center at Wayne State University Law School is testifying before the Michigan Senate Oversight Committee on the Michigan Legislature's capacity and performance with respect to fulfilling its constitutional duty to perform oversight. The Levin Center commissioned from Wayne State University's Center for Urban Studies a 1000-page study of the oversight capabilities of all fifty states. Representatives of Center for Urban Studies will give testimony about their findings overall and specifically with respect to the Michigan Legislature. The Hearing will take place at **2:00 pm in Room 1300, Binsfeld Office Building, 201 Townsend Street, Lansing, MI.**

"The Michigan Legislature ranks twenty-third among the states with respect to its capacity to perform effective oversight," said Jim Townsend, director of the Levin Center and a former minority vice chair of the House Committee on Oversight. "Michigan is not at the bottom but the report shows that there is significant room for improvement that would not only raise Michigan's ranking but, more importantly, improve the state legislature's ability to hold state government accountable for delivering results for the people of Michigan."

"Michigan is fortunate to have an Auditor General's Office that produces about thirty performance audits each year," said Marjorie Sarbaugh-Thompson, professor of political science at Wayne State University and one of the report's co-authors, "but the state legislature could do more to ensure that these audits get the attention and follow-up that they deserve. For example, our study found that legislative committees only occasionally hold public hearings on performance audits and Michigan has no systematic report on legislative action in response to performance audits."

"The Michigan Legislature can do better to hold the Executive Branch accountable for faithfully carrying out the laws it has enacted and to inform the people about whether the Legislature is taking action in response to the findings of these audits," said Lyke Thompson, study co-author and director of the Center for Urban Studies and professor of political science at Wayne State University. "Now more than ever, it is important that the state legislature uphold its responsibilities under our system of checks and balances. Bipartisan, solution-driven state legislative oversight of the Executive Branch is essential to that system."

The Center for Urban Studies report lists a series of actions that the Michigan Legislature can take to strengthen its capacity to perform effective oversight, including:

- House and Senate Committees charged with oversight could meet jointly when the Office of the Auditor General (OAG) presents performance audits. This would remove the inefficiency of presenting the same information twice.
- All audit reports could receive a hearing in some committee or subcommittee, and those could also be joint chamber meetings.
- House and Senate Committees charged with oversight could make annual requests for performance audits by the OAG, so that the oversight effort becomes more proactive and responsive to legislative priorities.
- The legislature could produce an annual report itemizing the actions it took in response to performance audit findings.
- Legislative committees overseeing the legislative fiscal agencies, which play a crucial role in analyzing the fiscal and economic impact of policies, could be governed by a bipartisan membership. The House committee overseeing the House Fiscal Agency is bipartisan. The Senate committee overseeing the Senate Fiscal Agency is not.
- House and Senate Oversight Committees could make a public commitment to bipartisan oversight and consider balancing their party membership.
- Committee, caucus and personal staffs could commission and undergo training in fact-based, bipartisan oversight techniques.

“Bipartisan efforts to get to the truth about the performance of government and the issues that matter most to Michiganders should be the Michigan Legislature’s top priority,” said Townsend. “Working together across the aisle to investigate issues can build relationships between Republican and Democratic members and staff and reduce the polarization that too often prevents state government from delivering good policies that the people want and deserve.”

“The Levin Center’s leaders and staff have decades of experience conducting legislative oversight investigations,” Townsend continued. “We have found that bipartisan investigations, while they take longer and require more work, almost always result in more thoughtful investigations and findings that are more accurate and credible and more likely to lead to important policy change, because they are informed by the diverse viewpoints of lawmakers from both sides of the aisle.”

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The [Levin Center at Wayne Law](#) is a bipartisan organization at Wayne State University Law School in Detroit founded in honor of former U.S. Senator Carl Levin who led numerous bipartisan Senate investigations during his 36 years in office and remains active in the center’s administration. The center’s mission is to foster bipartisan, fact-based, high-quality legislative oversight as well as civil discourse on important policy issues. In pursuit of its mission, the Levin Center provides oversight training, sponsors conferences, supports research, and offers other oversight resources.