

ANNUAL REPORT 2023



LEVIN CENTER



FOR OVERSIGHT
AND DEMOCRACY



Report issued February 19, 2024

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*Good government
requires good
oversight.*

-- Senator Carl Levin

Reflecting on 2023

Bridging Divides and Strengthening Democracy



Jim Townsend

“People have not rejected the goals of our programs, but they have begun to question whether our programs have anything to do with our goals.”

Carl Levin said this in 1979, remembering how as city council president in Detroit he saw federal affordable housing programs trigger, rather than mitigate, the epidemic of housing foreclosures and mass abandonment that rocked the city’s neighborhoods. Outraged by Congress’ feckless response, Senator Levin dedicated himself to legislative oversight and government accountability and founded this center to expand on that work to redeem the public’s trust in government and democracy.

Recent trends suggest that these efforts are more important now than ever, as an increasingly frustrated public – especially the youngest voters – is beginning to question whether democracy is still a viable means of solving public problems. A recent Penn State University poll found that nearly one-half of voters aged 18-25 were either indifferent about democracy versus dictatorship (28 percent) or thought that “dictatorship could be good in certain circumstances” (19 percent).

Senator Levin believed that a root cause of our faltering democratic consensus is the disconnect between policy and governing, where nearly all the emphasis is placed on passing legislation – or dismantling the last administration’s agenda – rather than ensuring that our programs accomplish what they are supposed to do. With so little oversight and accountability for government’s often disappointing performance, cynicism takes hold of our politics. Our campaigns become a widening gyre of personal attacks, conspiracy mongering, and tribalism that turns off most people.

The Levin Center’s activities this past (and every) year have been focused on breaking this cycle by elevating fact-based oversight and discourse between people about how our government is doing its job. We are working to bridge the divides that separate us from each other and build relationships that enable our government to solve problems that matter.

In the report that follows you'll read about many of the Levin Center's efforts to build closer connections between:

Citizens and their government

→ through the Center's panel on the House Select Committee that investigated the January 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol and our conversation with its Chairman, Congressman Bennie Thompson.

Scholars and practitioners

→ through our State Oversight Academy's (SOA) symposium that brought academics and legislative investigators together to talk about oversight.

Students and civics

→ through the Center's launch of its Learning by Hearings civic education classroom materials.

Legislative and executive branches

→ through the Center's testimony before the U.S. Senate subcommittee examining how to restore the accommodations process between the branches, and the SOA's programs with state auditors and other oversight agencies.

States and federal government

→ through SOA's programming to build a national community of oversight leaders and the Center's workshops in Congress and state capitals.

Good governance and democracy are the byproduct of countless conversations and relationships forged with truthfulness, mutual respect, reciprocity, and the other “civic virtues” that our nation's Founders championed. These can seem like quaint notions, but in fact they are the values our history and our republic charge us with keeping. Thank you for taking time to learn about the Levin Center's work and for the support that makes it possible.



Jim Townsend -- Director -- February 2024

Our Year in Numbers

1

Oversight Fellow Funded

2

New Portraits in Oversight on the
Titanic and Mafia

3

New Full-Time Members of Staff

48

Congressional Staffers Trained

830

Podcast Downloads

1,250

Newsletter Reads

67,800

Website Views

338,900

Views of the State Legislative Wiki

2023 Highlights



January

Panel discussion on the January 6 House Select Committee



February

Interview with U.S. Representative Bennie Thompson



March

Launch of the State Oversight Academy



April

SOA panel discussion on audit reports for a legislative audience



May

Presentation by our 2022 Research Award Winner - Professor David Rapallo



June

New Portrait in Oversight: Congress investigates the Mafia

2023 Highlights



July

Our civic education Teacher Collaboration Team met in Detroit, MI.



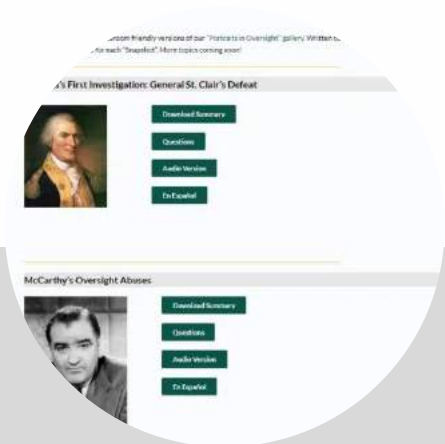
August

17th congressional Oversight Boot Camp held in D.C.



September

Levin Center testifies before U.S. Senate Judiciary Subcommittee



October

Civic education program launches high school classroom materials



November

SOA holds first symposium of academics and practitioners



December

Four U.S. Senators recognized with 2023 Carl Levin Award for Effective Oversight



State Oversight Academy

State Oversight Academy

As the U.S. Supreme Court wrote seventy years ago, when lawmakers engage in oversight, they serve as the “eyes and voice” of their constituents. Never has it been more important for legislators in every state to use their unique fact-finding power to get to the heart of important issues and solve problems. The State Oversight Academy’s goal is to offer knowledge, tools, and networks to help lawmakers ensure that government keeps its promises to the people.



Ben Eikey
*State Training and
Development Manager*



Ian McKnight
*State Training and
Development Manager*

What is the State Oversight Academy?

The State Oversight Academy is the first and only national institution dedicated to promoting effective bipartisan fact-finding and oversight by state legislatures as essential to good governance and democracy.

SOA Objectives:

1. **Improving the practice of oversight** in state legislatures across the country via trainings and events with lawmakers and staff.
2. **Fostering academic research** and scholarship on state legislative oversight.
3. **Translating scholarship** into actionable best practices to be shared among states.
4. **Increasing the visibility of legislative oversight** as an essential legislative function.

Launch Week - March 2023

The State Oversight Academy launched in March 2023 with a week of panel discussions and the release of new state oversight resources for practitioners and scholars.



Click the circle to watch the panel recording!

SOA Launch Panel: **The Essential Role of an Effective Lawmaker** *March 28, 2023*



State Senator Kyra Hoffner (D-DW)



State Senator Ed McBroom (R-MI)

SOA Launch Panel: **The Eyes of the People: How Statehouse Journalism Affects Legislative Behavior** *March 30, 2023*



Jonathan Oosting
Bridge, MI



Amelia Knisely
Freelance, WV



Camryn Sanchez
Arizona Capitol Times



Click the circle to watch the panel recording!

State Oversight Resources



State Oversight Newsletter

Our new monthly state oversight newsletter includes updates from state legislatures across the country, an overview of the State Oversight Academy's activities, and announcements for the upcoming month.



Oversight Matters Blog

The State Oversight Academy's blog, State Oversight Matters, offers expert advice on conducting oversight investigations in your state legislature, oversight news from statehouses across the country, and other important topics in the field.



Oversight Overview Videos

Oversight Overview is a video series that explores how state legislatures across the nation are performing oversight on a particular issue, such as Medicaid, corrections, or child welfare.



Workshops and Events

SOA holds regular panels, classes, and presentations about important topics in state legislative oversight, as well as custom-designed oversight workshops for members of state legislatures and their staff.



Legislative Oversight Wiki

State legislatures conduct oversight in countless ways often through committees and with help from partner agencies. The Wiki is the first interactive resource of its kind to gather state oversight data for the 50 states and the U.S. territories.



Find your state on the Wiki and browse through all our information on the legislature, legislative committees, fiscal committees, oversight partners, and much more.

The Wiki is **interactive** - check your state and submit your ideas and input through the website.

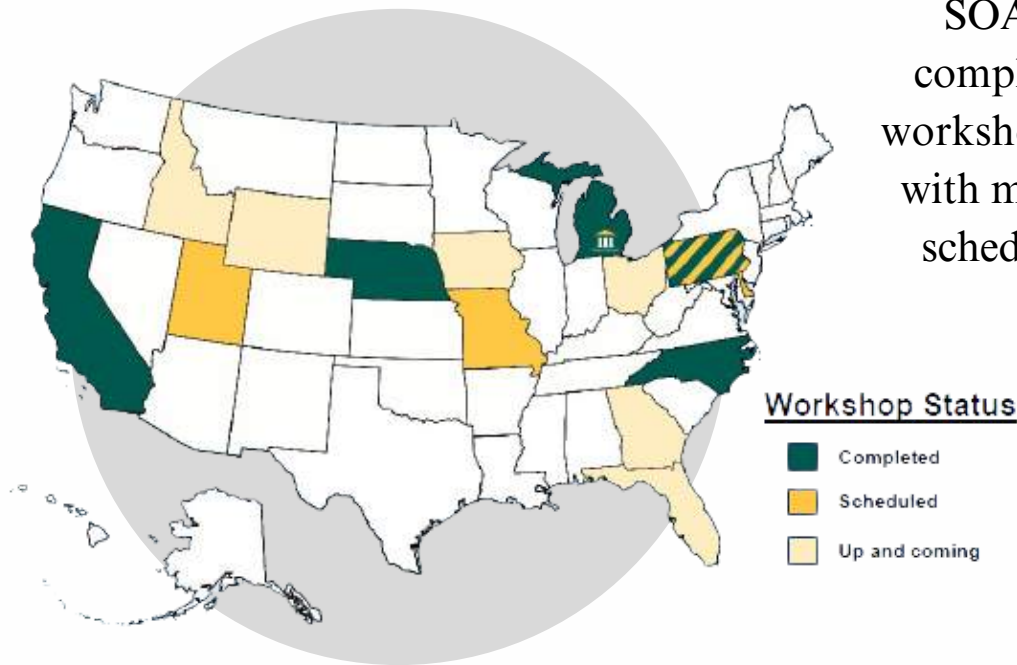
The Wiki had close to **340,000** views in 2023!

[Visit Now](#)

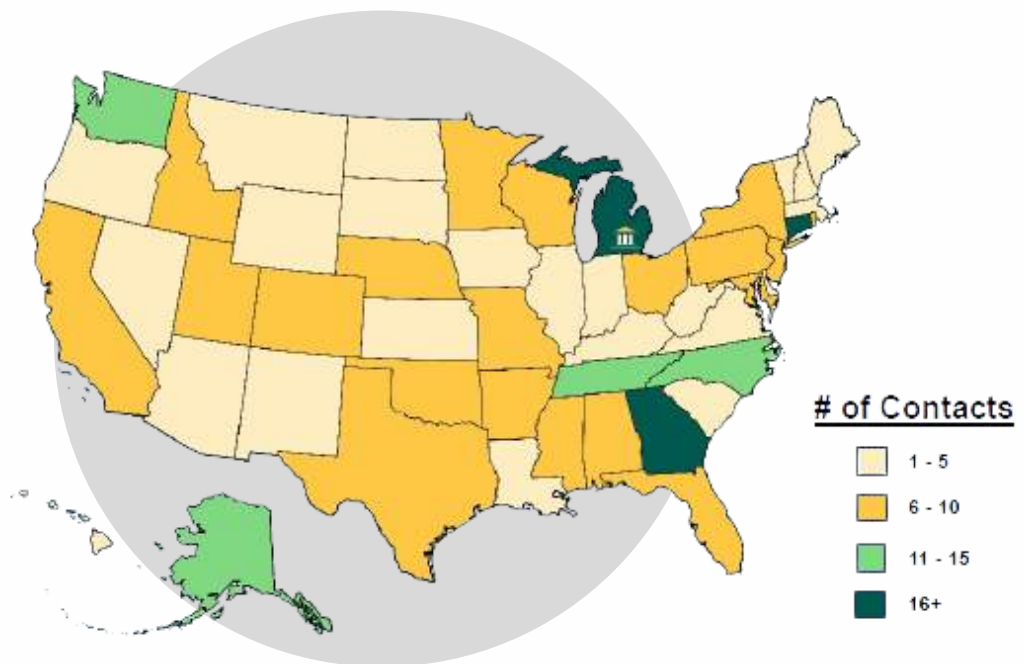


State Oversight Outreach

SOA has already completed oversight workshops in five states with more workshops scheduled for 2024!



In less than one year, SOA has established contacts in all 50 states!





Learning by Hearings

Civic Education Program

What is *Learning by Hearings*?

Learning by Hearings is our rapidly growing civic education program. Through the *Learning by Hearings* high school content modules and after-school programs, we provide high school students an opportunity to experience for themselves what it's like to conduct fact-based, bipartisan oversight hearings.

Inside the Classroom

Our in-class modules include plans and materials for inquiry lessons and in-class simulations, using noteworthy congressional investigations to bring to life principles of accountable governance and historic figures central to the development of our democracy.

Outside the Classroom

The extracurricular mock legislative oversight hearing experience allows students to role-play a legislator engaged in a vital investigation. Students are given the resources to prepare for and conduct a hearing using research, critical thinking, and public speaking skills.

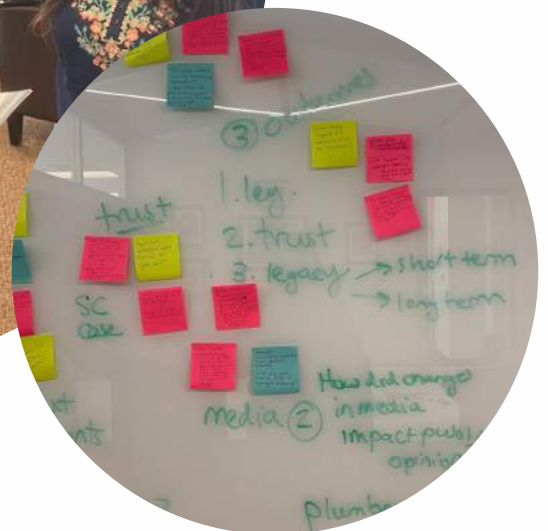


Discover our New Materials:



Teacher Collaboration Days

We were thrilled to be joined by a group of Michigan teachers for three workshops during the summer 2023 to develop our civic education lesson modules.



Classroom Materials



We want to inspire students to value fact-finding, good governance, and bipartisan cooperation as well as to sharpen their investigative skills and their ability to engage in public policy debates with civility.

Lauren Jasinski
Civic Education Specialist

Our *Learning by Hearings* classroom materials were launched on October 27, 2023. They include one introductory lesson plan on legislative oversight and four lesson plans on historic oversight investigations.

Congress's First Investigation: General St. Clair's Defeat

[Download Snapshot](#)[Questions](#)[Audio Version \(3:52\)](#)[En Español](#)

Ferdinand Pecora and the 1929 Stock Market Crash

[Download Snapshot](#)[Questions](#)[Audio Version \(6:23\)](#)[En Español](#)

McCarthy's Oversight Abuses

[Download Snapshot](#)[Questions](#)[Audio Version \(12:21\)](#)[En Español](#)

The Watergate Investigation

[Download Snapshot](#)[Questions](#)[Audio Version \(12:56\)](#)[En Español](#)



Awards



The image features a dark teal background with the word "Awards" centered in a large, white, sans-serif font. The top and bottom of the image are framed by a white brick wall texture, with a thin orange horizontal line separating the teal area from the brick sections.

Effective Oversight Award

The Carl Levin Award for Effective Oversight was established in honor of the work of Senator Carl Levin to promote bipartisan, fact-based oversight and to recognize those legislators who conduct it. The 2023 Effective Oversight Award was presented to Senators Chuck Grassley (R-IA), Ron Wyden (D-OR), Todd Young (R-IN), and Ben Cardin (D-MD) in recognition of their bipartisan, fact-based efforts over several years to investigate and improve the national organ donation program.



The subject of their investigation was the failure of a federal contractor, UNOS, to competently manage the Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network (OPTN) which is made up of 57 Organ Procurement Organizations (OPOs) responsible for obtaining and distributing organs to patients on the organ donation waiting list.

UNOS has been the lone contractor managing OPTN for 40 years and the results in too many cases have been tragic. The senators found that organs were being discarded before they could be used, and people were dying because they couldn't get the organs they needed. The investigation conducted by these four senators resulted in several hearings and reports as well as legislation enacted in September of last year that will open the management of OPTN to competition and improve services.

According to the senators' August 2020 report, "Experts estimate that, by reforming government regulations and holding OPOs accountable, 28,000 more organs could be transplanted each year. Experts also project that improvements to the OPTN could save the federal government and taxpayers up to \$40 billion over the next decade, particularly through reductions in dialysis and treatment of End Stage Renal Disease which accounts for \$36 billion in Medicare spending each year."

[Click here for more](#)



Oversight Research Award



Jason MacDonald

We granted our 2023 Levin Center Award for Excellence in Oversight Research to The Rise and Fall of Congressional Oversight of the Bureaucracy: The U.S. House Committee on Energy and Commerce, 1969-2018, by Jason MacDonald, Associate Professor of Political Science at West Virginia University.

MacDonald's paper appears in the Journal of Political Institutions and Political Economy.

Chosen by a selection committee composed of law and political science oversight scholars and veteran practitioners, the award-winning paper emerged from a competitive field of excellent candidates.

The selection committee found that Professor MacDonald's paper offered a compelling, well-sourced review of a congressional committee's oversight work over five decades. The selection committee also recognized the paper's use of several innovative review techniques and analytics, including reviewing hearing opening statements to identify oversight hearings; using the number of agency witnesses as an identifier of agency oversight hearings; and concluding that the committee's agency-related oversight decreased over time despite an overall increase in committee hearings exploring issues other than legislation.



Oversight Fellowship

In 2021, the Center launched its Oversight Fellowship Program, which provides funding and support to scholars conducting research on legislative oversight that deepens our understanding of its role in democratic governance. In 2023, after considering several excellent candidates, we selected Professor Sean Theriault of the University of Texas at Austin as our 2023/24 Levin Center Oversight Fellow.



Sean Theriault

Professor Theriault's research focuses on the effect of interpersonal relationships within Congress. He has published five books and numerous articles in a variety of journals on subjects ranging from presidential rhetoric to congressional careers and the Louisiana Purchase to the Pendleton Act of 1883. He has received numerous teaching awards, including the Friar Society Teaching Fellowship, UT Professor of the Year, and the Regents' Outstanding Teaching Award.

Professor Theriault's fellowship research will analyze congressional oversight report data provided in the Levin Center's new Congressional Oversight Records Database (CORD) focusing on three main research questions: How have the reports' frequency and policy contents changed overtime? How has the development of the reports changed? And how does the reports' development affect their impact on policy and politics?





Advancing Wayne Law Students

Legal Summer Internships

We have now sponsored eight cohorts of summer legal interns working on oversight committees in the U.S. Congress. With our four interns in 2023, the Levin Center has now given 32 Wayne State University law students the opportunity to work in Washington, D.C.

The legal interns work with congressional staff under the supervision of an experienced attorney engaged in conducting oversight on behalf of a congressional committee. While we use the term “interns,” these budding attorneys take on significant responsibilities, similar to that of a young committee counsel. They also develop connections and relationships in Washington, which can support them throughout their careers and, a hands-on understanding of our federal system.

“The internship was one of the most rewarding experiences of my professional career. Investigating bad actors and ensuring laws were being enforced properly was an incredible opportunity, particularly seeing successful bipartisan work during highly polarized times. I am still using the lessons I learned through my internship and look forward to proving myself to be a good alumnus of the program.”

Alexander Coryell

“My experience as a Levin Center intern was personally enriching. I am grateful for the opportunity to see the Constitution in action, make connections, and enjoy a vibrant D.C. summer.”

Micah Stadnika



Student Placements



Micah Stadnika

U.S. Senate Homeland
Security and
Governmental Affairs
Committee



Madeline Cole

HSGAC -
Subcommittee on
Emerging Threats and
Spending Oversight

Alexander Coryell

U.S. Senate Select
Committee on Aging



Jah'juan Bess

U.S. Senate
Finance Committee



Lawyering in the Nation's Capital - Externship Program

In 2023, we sent two Wayne law students to Washington, D.C., as externs. Micah Wright and Joseph Brennan worked for 15 weeks in a congressional oversight committee while attending a colloquium course and earning academic credit toward their law degrees.



Micah Wright



Joseph Brennan

Other Student Opportunities

Research Assistantships

In 2023, we offered **seven Research Assistantships** to law students working on our varied research tasks and programs. Law students supported the creation of our new civic education mock oversight scenario, provided research to our new *Portraits in Oversight*, and gathered oversight reports and metadata for our CORD database.

Civic Education Volunteers

Through our *Learning by Hearings* civic education program, we engage law students to join the YMCA's Youth and Government conferences. Law students roleplay witnesses or legal counsels during our mock oversight investigation. It's a day of teaching, learning, volunteering, and most importantly fun!

Career Panels

We have a library of career panels focusing on legal career paths in public service. We continuously add to the library highlighting the broad range of career opportunities open to Wayne law students.





Team News

New Additions



Lauren Jasinski

Lauren Jasinski joined our team in March 2023 as **Civic Education Specialist** for our *Learning by Hearings* program. A Michigan high school social studies teacher for over ten years, Lauren brings a wealth of knowledge to the program. Since her start, Lauren has launched our first lesson plans, has organized Teacher Collaboration Days, and has greatly expanded our civic education network.



Ian McKnight

Ian McKnight joined our team in July 2023 as **State Training and Development Manager** for our *State Oversight Academy*. A former staffer of the MI State Legislature, Ian also worked in constituency office software implementation and training before coming to the Center. Since his start, Ian has traveled the country for oversight workshops and has forged new partnerships with state government associations.



Grace Moore

Grace Moore joined our team full-time in September 2023 as **Research and Data Specialist** for the *Congressional Oversight Records Database*. A Library Science graduate and a certified archivist, Grace was a part-time Research Assistant with CORD from the very beginning. Since her start, Grace has gathered countless oversight reports and metadata points, and has coordinated a cohort of 23 student assistants.

Levin Center Social





Outlook 2024



Work In Progress



Civic Education Growth

With the support of a \$4 million multi-year grant from the State of Michigan, the Levin Center is working to bring our *Learning by Hearings* civic education program to classrooms across the state. We are excited to build our library of classroom materials and expand our outreach to school districts in Michigan. Stay tuned to meet our new civic education team members soon!



Oversight Records Database - Academic Seminar

We will host an academic seminar in July 2024 to present and discuss the first-ever working papers using data gathered in our *Congressional Oversight Records Database* (CORD). We are excited to hear scholars' feedback on our existing data and to expand the database with new committees and collections.



People-Centered Oversight Study

Through the generous support of the Democracy Fund, we are launching a new *People-Centered Oversight* study to explore how states across the country engage citizens in legislative oversight. Through in-depth case studies, the research will identify best practices and derive recommendations for states to increase direct citizen involvement with oversight.

Work In Progress



\$10 Million by Year 10

The Levin Center turns 10 in 2025. We will launch our new outreach and fundraising campaign in 2024 to reach our endowment goal of \$10 million by year 10. This endowment goal is vital to our continued growth in advancing oversight and strengthening democracy. To become a part of this work, you can use the donation sheet on the next page!



State Oversight Symposium

The *State Oversight Academy* will host its second symposium in June 2024 bridging the gap between oversight scholars and practitioners to discuss current state oversight research, vital future research questions, and the real-life input legislators and legislative staff can provide to scholarship.



Congressional Outreach

We have exciting new developments in our Washington, D.C., office. In 2024, you can look forward to a new addition to the team, new congressional outreach activities, and continued work on our oversight case law pages. Stay tuned for news from our *Congressional Office* in 2024.

Invest in Our Work

Your contribution will help the Levin Center reach its goal of building a \$10 million Endowment, enabling us to continue advancing oversight and strengthening democracy.

Scan this code for a digital donation form:



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Stock gifts may be made to:

Corey Sanborn
Raymond James and
Associates 15 Kercheval
Avenue,
Grosse Pointe Farms, MI
48236 313-885-9470
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DTC 0725

Or complete and mail the form below in the enclosed envelope to:

Carl Levin Center for Oversight and Democracy, Attention: Lynne Geller
Wayne State University Law School, 471 W. Palmer St., Detroit, MI 48202

We are deeply grateful for your philanthropic support.

Donation Amount:

Donor Contact Information

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

Phone (preferred – home, cell, office): _____

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Checks may be made payable to: Levin Center at Wayne Law

Credit card: ☐ Visa ☐ American Express ☐ Master Card

Card No. _____

Exp. Date _____

Signature _____



Our Supporters

Wayne Law School

Our Funders

We thank our funders who make the Levin Center's work possible:

Democracy Fund

William and Flora Hewlett Foundation

Ralph Wilson Jr. Foundation

MI Department of Education

U.S. Department of Education

C.S. Mott Foundation

S.R. Mott Foundation

and many generous individuals.

Wayne Law Leadership

The Law School's leadership including **Dean Richard Bierschbach**, **Associate Dean Rachel Settlage**, and **Associate Dean Michael Oswalt** enthusiastically support our mission and programs.



Dean Bierschbach

Faculty Advisory Committee

Our Faculty Advisory Committee Chair and all committee members provide advice and counsel that are vital to our success.

Professor Linda Beale, Professor Hillel Nadler,
Professor Rachael Kohl, Professor Brad Roth



Professor Jack Mogk
Chair

Advisory Board



Paul Hillegonds, Chair

Paul became the Center's second Advisory Board Chair in June 2022, following Eugene Driker who served as Chair since the Center's establishment in 2015. A native of Holland, MI, Paul's distinguished career includes serving as Speaker of the Michigan House of Representatives, Member of the Wayne State University Board of Governors, Executive Vice President of DTE Energy, and President of the Michigan Health Endowment Fund.

Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson

Vice-Chair



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