

INTRODUCTION

A primary mission of the League of Women Voters is to promote the active and informed participation of citizens in government. Over the years, we have pursued that mission in a variety of ways, including conducting candidate and issue forums, issuing voter guides, and offering guides to government.

Delegates to the 1997 Convention of the League of Women Voters of Michigan (LWVMI) discussed a number of recent actions, including some ballot initiatives, that were redefining state government. Among them were term limits at the state level, downsizing and streamlining government, privatizing services and shifting services between governmental agencies and bodies. The delegates unanimously supported a LWVMI effort to assess the impact of those changes on citizens' access to government.

In May 1999, the LWVMI published its first *Report Card: Citizen Access to Government in Michigan*. The intent was to publish such a report card biennially.

Here, then, is the fifth such *Report Card* that seeks to assess the state of *Citizen Access to Government in Michigan*. As with our last edition, the report focuses on nine benchmarks against which to measure citizen access. Those benchmarks are listed below, along with the number of the page on which each benchmark discussion begins:

- A. Remove barriers to and actively promote citizen participation in the electoral process. (page 1)
- B. Make the government's workings and decisions visible and accessible to all who wish to participate in democratic self-government. (page 7)
- C. Welcome citizen input and empower all officials, elected and otherwise, to interact directly with the citizens and residents they are to serve. (page 10)
- D. Provide timely, accurate, and complete information about the current and proposed actions of governments, elected officials, and government employees. (page 12)

- E. Act at a pace and in a deliberative manner that provides ordinary citizens with as much opportunity to influence and respond to government proposals as registered lobbyists. (page 13)
- F. Ensure that all government contracts worth more than a nominal amount are awarded only through a genuinely open and unbiased competitive bidding process. (page 15)
- G. Preserve accountability to the public whenever government functions are contracted out to private business. (page 16)
- H. Ensure that all persons have access to justice. (page 16)
- I. Encourage citizen respect for, trust in, and ownership of government, leading to greater oversight and participation. (page 18)

For each of the benchmarks, the task force compiled a list of events that have impacted citizen access to government, either positively or negatively. In the report card, we briefly describe each event and its impact or potential impact. We then indicate the degree of impact with:

- one thumb up favorable impact on citizen access to government
- one thumb down unfavorable impact on citizen access to government
- two thumbs up significant favorable impact on citizen access to government
- two thumbs down significant unfavorable impact on citizen access to government
- three thumbs up serious favorable impact on citizen access to government
- three thumbs down serious unfavorable impact on citizen access to government

Commonly Used Abbreviations

CEO	Chief Executive Officer
DEQ	Department of Environmental Quality
DNR	Department of Natural Resources
DOC	Department of Corrections
FOIA	Freedom of Information Act
HB	House Bill
MCL	Michigan Compiled Law
PAC	Political Action Committee
SB	Senate Bill
SBT	Single Business Tax
SR	Senate Resolution

