

STATE SENATOR • DEBORAH CHERRY • 26TH DISTRICT

Cherry Press Release

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Sen. Cherry, Reform Groups Call for Action on Public Financing for State Supreme Court

Senate Bill 128 Would Bring Transparency, Legitimacy to High Court

LANSING—Senator Deb Cherry (D-Burton) was joined today by Senators John Gleason (D-Flushing) and Gretchen Whitmer (D-East Lansing) and advocates from the Michigan Campaign Finance Network, the League of Women Voters and the Michigan Independent Supreme Court Campaign to call for action on her legislation, Senate Bill 128, to establish public financing for Michigan Supreme Court campaigns.

“Action on this legislation is long overdue, considering that this is the second term that I’ve introduced it and that it’s been in committee for more than a year,” said Sen. Cherry. “This bill would dilute the impact of campaign contributions by providing for public financing of state Supreme Court elections and bringing justice back to the people and not special interests.”

Under SB 128, Michigan Supreme Court candidates would be required to raise \$50,000 to show that they are serious and have a real base of support, but the money could only come in amounts less than \$500. Once they qualify, candidates would receive in public funds the average amount raised by candidates in the two previous election cycles.

Since 2000, spending for the state’s Supreme Court campaigns has exceeded \$23 million. The candidates’ campaign committees raised \$10.5 million, while political action committees and the political parties, which can accept unlimited contributions, spent another \$2.3 million for independent expenditures. Ten million dollars more was spent for candidate-focused “Issue” advertising that praised or disparaged candidates by name, and because those advertisements did not explicitly reference voting or an election, there is no requirement to report financing of those ads.

“The financial record we can see is troubling enough,” said Rich Robinson of the Michigan Campaign Finance Network. “Through the decade of the 1990s, 86 percent of the Supreme Court’s cases featured at least one contributor to at least one justice hearing the case. When you consider that more than 40 percent of all spending since 2000 is off the books, it’s obvious that this is an area in desperate need of reform.”

Senator Cherry introduced legislation to reform campaign financing for the Supreme Court during her first Senate term in 2006, and again last January as her second term was underway. The bill was assigned to the Senate Committee on Campaign and Election Oversight on January

31, 2007, where it has yet to receive a hearing. The committee is chaired by Senator Michelle McManus (R-Lake Leelanau).

The Michigan Independent Supreme Court Campaign traveled by bus from Traverse City today to urge their state senators, Senators McManus and Jason Allen (R-Traverse City), to support public financing for Supreme Court campaigns and full financial disclosure of all electioneering advertisements. They also encouraged Sen. McManus to hold public hearings on the reforms. Senator McManus attended the tail end of today's press conference, and the group presented her with over 1,000 signatures from Northern Michigan residents supporting public financing for Michigan Supreme Court election campaigns and full disclosure of financial sponsors of candidate-focused "issue" advertising.

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Elected to the Senate in 2002 and 2006, Senator Cherry is a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, serving as Minority Vice Chair on the Subcommittees for Community Health and Retirement. She is also a member of the Subcommittee on Capital Outlay.