

# MACKINAC CENTER

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Friday, June 20, 2008

Mr. Nathaniel Lake, Jr.  
Cabinet Secretary  
Office of the Governor  
George W. Romney Building  
111 South Capitol Avenue  
Lansing, MI 48909

Dear Mr. Lake:

Thank you for your letter of June 17, and your willingness to take the time to consider the Mackinac Center's offer regarding the "Show Michigan the Money" transparency web project. I am sorry to hear that the Office of the Governor does not wish to participate and I'd like to take this opportunity to clear up what may be some misconceptions about what we are trying to accomplish.

Spending transparency is an issue that has in some places become a political football field where partisan points are scored and where taxpayers' access to information becomes a secondary concern to the ambitions of political actors who seek to advance (or defend) their own reputations in relation to one another. But in other cases, citizens and organizations with specific and reasonable requests for greater spending transparency have worked very well with the government officials who control access to the information at issue. The end result of the latter collaborations is measurably greater transparency for taxpayers and well-earned praise for the government officials who went the extra mile to accommodate them.

I am writing to assure you – 100 percent – that the purpose of the Mackinac Center for Public Policy is to bring about the latter outcome and not the former. A comprehensive and objective view of our approach toward the decisions made by Gov. Granholm should reveal our singular focus on sound public policy, regardless of the political actor or party attempting to advance it.

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One example of this is the favorable statements made last summer by a Center policy analyst regarding Gov. Granholm's proposal to reduce the sentences for non-violent criminals. The analyst in question wrote a commentary and a press release praising the new sentencing plan as a more prudent use of tax dollars ([www.mackinac.org/8845](http://www.mackinac.org/8845)) and also discussed it in an interview with a major Michigan radio station ([www.mackinac.org/8860](http://www.mackinac.org/8860)).

Both large Detroit newspapers referenced the Center's favorable view of the plan in supportive editorials of their own the following weekend. As a result, the analyst who wrote the commentary received feedback from some in the Senate who were displeased because the administration was allegedly using his work to justify why the Senate should reverse its opposition to the governor's proposal. We were exceptionally pleased with all of this because it all conforms perfectly to our mission – as noted above – to effectively promote positive policy choices without concern for which political actors agree with us (or not.)

While we have also criticized the governor's budget priorities – and also those of her predecessor and lawmakers of both parties – the sentencing issue is hardly the only instance of us praising her fiscal decisions. As another example, I commented favorably on much of her first year in office in a retrospective of same ([www.mackinac.org/6052](http://www.mackinac.org/6052)). I specifically remind you of the corrections matter because the analyst who decided to author it is Ken Braun, the director of our transparency project and the person who would be working with the administration, should the Office the Governor and the Mackinac Center be able to agree that there is more that can be done for the taxpayers to better uncover the details of state spending.

To that point, I would like to reference the statement in your letter regarding the technological limitations of the state's financial record keeping system. Much has been said about what this system can and cannot or should and should not be able to do. The Mackinac Center has avoided participation in this debate, seeking instead to focus on what objectively and definitively can be accomplished within the present environment.

This approach is what produced the decision by the Michigan Department of State to issue quarterly reports on most of their spending details. As the MDOS operates under the same technological constraints as other state departments, it is reasonable to assume that those branches of state government under the direction of the governor can match the standard of quarterly expenditure reporting announced by the MDOS on April 23, 2008.

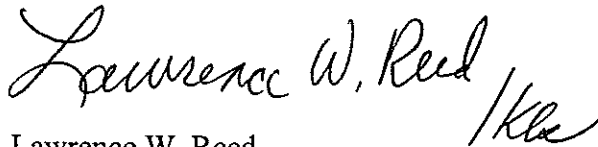
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Bringing about this reasonable result is the primary purpose of our request at issue right now.

While we continue to believe that more can and should be done than this – by the MDOS and all others – an agreement whereby every executive department matched the MDOS expenditure reporting standard would be considered by us to be a noteworthy and praiseworthy accomplishment. I believe that this is something worth talking about and hope that you agree.

Once again, we look forward to hearing from you soon about this exciting project, and to working with the Office of the Governor to expand citizen access to the details of how their tax dollars are being accounted for.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lawrence W. Reed". To the right of the signature, there is a small, stylized mark that appears to be "LWR".

Lawrence W. Reed  
President  
Mackinac Center for Public Policy