



CaesarRodney.org

Making Transparent Government a Reality

Recently, State Representative Greg Lavelle re-introduced the transparency in government legislative package that he sponsored during the 144th General Assembly. The Caesar Rodney Institute (CRI) commends Representative Lavelle and all of the co-sponsors of the legislation for their commitment to open government in Delaware.

This package of bills will:

- Require all state agencies, school districts and charter school to post checking account activity (other than payroll checks) online. It also requires pay and benefits to be posted by job title at the beginning of each fiscal year;
- Require the creation and maintenance of a searchable website for contracts entered into by school districts and charter schools;
- Require information concerning the distributions from the Delaware Strategic Fund to be posted on the Delaware Economic Development Office website; and
- Require the Office of Management and Budget to create and maintain a searchable budget database website detailing where, for what purpose and what results are achieved for all taxpayer investments in state government.

Last year, when this same package was introduced, the fiscal notes attached to these bills totaled over \$1 million for the first year of implementation alone.

Dedicated to expanding accountability and transparency in state and local government, the Caesar Rodney Institute is in the process of doing exactly what these bills propose. CRI will accomplish this without a single taxpayer dollar as we are funded entirely by private sources.

By June of this year, the public will be able to view payments made by all state agencies in a very simple and straightforward process at DelawareSpends.com. We believe in Justice Louis Brandies' oft-quoted opinion that, "sunlight is the best disinfectant."

In addition to the vendor payments, CRI plans to list all payroll expenditures and contracts in the same searchable format by the end of the year. Further, CRI will post all Delaware school district and charter school expenditures in a searchable format at SunlightonSchools.com. This site will allow anyone to compare school districts on both expenditure information and performance metrics.

While our efforts to open the doors on government begin with state expenditures, the Caesar Rodney Institute will expand the data available online to the counties and municipalities within Delaware.

Why put this information online? Our hope is that making the data available for all to see and analyze will help to “right-size” Delaware government(s), to eliminate waste and to make clear to everyone spending our taxpayer dollars that we are watching. The “we” is the Caesar Rodney Institute, the media, academia and most importantly the public.

Currently, Delawareans face a bureaucratic maze when searching for simple information about state government spending. In many cases, the data is there, but it is not easily digestible. A single, unified website will serve as a valuable resource for not only citizens, but for policy makers as well. And, most importantly, this database will benefit everyone.

It is our view that the status quo of a self-serving bureaucracy remains prevalent. In large part it is not the people in government who are the problem. The problem lies in the systemic resistance to change.

In posting this public data online, CRI hopes to refocus public and media attention on government accountability, misplaced priorities, ineffective performance and inefficient spending. As stated by Dr. Byron Schlomach of the Goldwater Institute, “Transparency is not about the ‘gotcha.’ It is about helping officials keep perspective, expanding the potential talent base for evaluating government efficacy, and focusing dollars where they are most productively spent.”

The policy alternatives presented at CaesarRodney.org, along with the raw data at DelawareSpends.com and SunlightonSchools.com will be a significant step forward for changing the status quo in Delaware.

In 2008, SunshineReview.org ranked Delaware 43rd in combined measures of transparency. In our current fiscal crises, Delaware has a unique opportunity for change – an opportunity to rethink how government operates. The unresponsive, entrenched bureaucracy has not shown an ability to change. Delawareans cannot afford to see the can continued to be “kicked down the road.” Delawareans deserve to know where and how money is being spent in order to help identify waste and abuse. We are pleased to report that every state agency, local government and school district we have contacted thus far has been forthcoming with information and a pleasure to work with.

Garrett Wozniak is the Public Policy Director of the Caesar Rodney Institute.

The Caesar Rodney Institute is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization founded in 2008. CRI is an affiliate of the State Policy Network and is committed to being a catalyst for improved performance, accountability, and efficiency in Delaware government. For more information, please visit www.caesarrodney.org