

# money in politics

a project of Ohio Citizen Action

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**May 25, 2010**  
**Testimony on House Bill 504**

By Catherine Turcer,  
Before the Ohio House Elections and Ethics Committee

My name is Catherine Turcer and I am the director of Ohio Citizen Action's Money in Politics Project. Founded in 1975, Ohio Citizen Action has 80,000 members and has long supported open government. Access to information and transparency allows voters to participate more knowledgeably and more fully in government. Justice Louis Brandeis coined the phrase "Sunlight is the best disinfectant" in praise of transparency and honesty in public policy. What we need now is more sunlight. Access to information on the Internet is the very definition of transparency in 2010. Although legislators' financial disclosure statements are available on-line, this information is not available on-line for other candidates, including the statewide candidates.

While I commend the sponsors for attempting to strengthen access to more detailed information, House Bill 504 could make a giant leap forward by requiring that public officials' and candidates' financial disclosure statements be available on-line. Voters should be able to consider possible conflicts of interest from their own homes. Currently, voters have to travel to Columbus or request specific filings to be sent to their home via the mail. Imagine having to travel from Darke County, Lucas County or Hamilton County just to look at financial disclosure statements. Or waiting at the mail box. On-line disclosure is both immediate and convenient.

Making the statewide candidate disclosure filing available on-line would be a fairly simple process. Yesterday I called the Ohio Ethics Commission and picked up Governor Ted Strickland's and John Kasich's most recent filings. I scanned them and then my co-worker posted them on-line this morning with my testimony ([www.ohiocitizen.org/money.html](http://www.ohiocitizen.org/money.html)). It would be fairly simple to do this for all statewide candidates with off-the-shelf software, a scanner and a server.

The Ohio Ethics Commission collects the financial disclosure statements of more than 11,000 people and clearly getting all local candidates' and public officials' information on-line would take a lot more work. However, on-line filing of ethics statements would create a user-friendly, searchable way for voters to consider possible conflicts of interest or other ethical dilemmas. Access to information on-line doesn't limit voters to requesting just a few filings; they would have access to peruse as many as they want. Requesting hard copies can be intimidating and those requesting information may worry that they are requesting too many. Voluminous requests are simply not an issue if the financial disclosure statements are available on-line.

Ohioans should not be left in the dark. Although there are no simple answers, improved access to information would be a giant leap forward for Ohioans.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important issue.