

Transparency Hero Susan Bisio and Senator McBroom Honored With Jane Briggs-Bunting Transparency in Government Award

The award is presented by Michigan Coalition for Open Government

LANSING, Mich. – The Michigan Coalition for Open Government is proud to present the Jane Briggs-Bunting Transparency in Government Award to Susan Bisio and Senator Ed McBroom. Both have worked tirelessly to advance transparency efforts in the state.

“Susan’s work is an inspiration to Michigan’s citizens, who are too often unable to obtain access to the records they need to fully participate in the democratic process,” said Steve Delie, executive director of MICOG. “Senator McBroom truly embodies the mentality that transparency should be the default for every level of government. The Jane Briggs-Bunting award recognizes individual contributions to transparency and open government. I can think of no better way to celebrate transparency than by recognizing both Susan and Senator McBroom’s work to advance these causes.”

Bisio’s efforts created precedent that will enable Michiganders everywhere to more easily obtain documents in the future. In 2015, after a FOIA request to the City of the Village of Clarkston was repeatedly refused, Bisio sued. Five years later, after a review by the Michigan Supreme Court, Bisio successfully obtained the records she sought.

She continues to draw attention to transparency issues in Clarkston through her two websites, clarkstonsunshine.com and clarkstonsecrets.com. She has also called for meaningful FOIA reform, to ensure that public bodies are unable to use FOIA to conceal records from public attention. In response to receiving the Jane Briggs-Bunting Award, Bisio stated:

“I never dreamed that it would take me five long years to obtain public records that Clarkston tried to keep secret by hiding them. The city sought to delay the progress of my lawsuit in every way, driving my legal fees to astronomical levels on matters that had nothing to do with the core issue in the case. No tactic was out of bounds for the city and its lawyers - they even attacked my gender and marital status.

The Michigan Legislature needs to address delay in the trial and appellate courts for FOIA lawsuits. Public bodies shouldn’t be able to force FOIA litigants to choose between bankruptcy and their right to receive public records. Loopholes that allow public officials, officers, and employees to use personal and other non-governmental communication methods to hide information from the public need to be closed. Under the current statute, FOIA requesters must choose between appealing to the same public body that denied their request or filing a lawsuit, incurring legal fees and costs. A state department should be created and funded that would allow aggrieved FOIA requesters an opportunity to also have their FOIA appeals considered independently before having to hire an attorney to vindicate their rights.

Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank the Michigan Coalition for Open Government for this honor. Your amicus support in the Michigan Supreme Court, along with the other media organizations, was invaluable, deeply appreciated, and most importantly, presented the statutory construction argument accepted by a majority of the Michigan Supreme Court. I also want to thank the many people who supported me during the litigation: Richard Bisio, my husband, champion, and the best FOIA litigator I could have asked for; Robin Luce-Herrmann, Butzel Long; Herschel Fink, Detroit Free Press, Inc.; the Clarkston News, our outstanding local newspaper; and, finally, all of Clarkston's "secret squirrels" for their unending support and encouragement (they know who they are). None of this would have been possible without the support of all of these people."

As Chair of the House Oversight Committee, McBroom (along with then-Rep. Jeremy Moss), was the first to develop and promote legislation that would make the Michigan governor and the legislature subject to FOIA. Currently, Michigan is one of two states that exempts its executive office and one of eight that exempts its lawmakers from FOIA. He continues to fight for this legislation in the Senate. Over the course of his time in Lansing, McBroom has championed more open meetings and transparency from Michigan's public universities.

When receiving the Jane Brigg-Bunting Award, Senator McBroom stated:

Thank you so much for your kind recognition of the efforts of all people seeking to increase and promote transparency in our government. Trust of the citizens is essential for a representative government to maintain legitimacy amongst the people it serves. Even small things that are held back without simple, understandable reasons, erode that trust leading to suspicion and frustration.

MICOG is proud to honor both of these transparency pioneers for their passionate efforts to promote open government.

The Michigan Coalition for Open Government is a broad-based nonprofit committed to securing, protecting, expanding and maintaining the people's right to know what goes on within their governments. [Learn more here.](#)

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Formed in 2012, MICOG is a nonprofit, nonpartisan coalition that protects the right to open government through educational activities, policy recommendations and the legal process. It is governed by a board with members from the American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan, Michigan Press Association, Mackinac Center, Center for Michigan, and two Michigan chapters of the Society of Professional Journalists in Detroit and Mid-Michigan.