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## **Freedom Fund to Benson: What Are You Hiding?** *Inexcusable Delays the New Normal as Democratic Secretary of State Talks About Transparency, But Refuses to Deliver*

**LANSING, MI, February 28, 2019** – The Michigan Freedom Fund today demanded Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson do her job and fulfill the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request for information related to her partisan and corrupt settlement with her political allies.

On January 14, the Freedom Fund filed a FOIA request seeking transparency from Benson behind her department's negotiations and controversial lack of enforcement of campaign finance penalties surrounding the Build a Better Michigan committee, after the state determined that the political group allied with Governor Gretchen Whitmer illegally engaged in "express advocacy" advertisements. It was later determined that Build a Better Michigan also engaged in illegal coordinated activities with the Whitmer campaign.

On January 18, Benson's Bureau of Elections notified the Freedom Fund that it would require an additional 10 business days to comply with the request. On February 8, Benson's office presented the Freedom Fund with an invoice to fulfill the FOIA request, which was paid on February 12.

Benson's office was expected to open its records to voters two weeks from the receipt of payment, but more than two weeks later, still refuses to comply with state law. To this date, and despite payment of the required invoice, no public records have been released.

"Jocelyn Benson continues her shameless disregard of both her campaign rhetoric and the law," said Tony Daunt, Executive Director of the Michigan Freedom Fund. "Longer wait times are apparently the new normal under Secretary of State Benson. But when it comes to Michigan's government transparency laws, delays like these are illegal. If Benson refuses to comply with state law, it's incumbent on the Governor and the Attorney General to hold her accountable."

Benson's open records violations come on the heels of an executive directive signed by Whitmer to force state government to improve speed and reduce the cost of responding to open records requests.

State government "must be open, transparent and accountable to taxpayers," Whitmer earlier this year told attendees at the annual convention of the Michigan Press Association, as she announced her directive. "Extensions are going to be the exception and not the general rule."

Democratic Attorney General Dana Nessel issued a press release the same day, supporting the executive directive. "The people's business should never be conducted behind closed doors and we should do everything in our power to respond quickly, efficiently and thoroughly to every Freedom of Information request we get," she said.

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