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BILL ANALYSIS

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Senate Bill 1299 (as introduced 5-7-08)
Sponsor: Senator Michelle A. McManus
Committee: Campaign and Election Oversight

Date Completed: 5-14-08

CONTENT

The bill would amend the Michigan Campaign Finance Act to require the Secretary of State to do the following:

- Post on the internet any complaint, response, or rebuttal statement regarding an alleged violation of the Act.**
- Post on the internet, within 60 business days after receiving a rebuttal statement, whether there could be reason to believe that a violation of the Act had occurred.**
- Commence a hearing to determine whether a civil violation of the Act had occurred.**
- Require a violator to pay a civil fine.**

The bill also would increase the fine for an improper contribution or expenditure under the Act to triple the amount of the contribution or expenditure plus a maximum of \$1,000.

Complaint, Response, & Rebuttal

Under the Act, a person may file with the Secretary of State a complaint that alleges a violation of the Act. Within five business days after a complaint is filed, the Secretary must give notice and a copy of the complaint to the person against whom it is filed. That person then has 15 business days to submit a response to the Secretary. The Secretary may extend this period an additional 15 business days for good cause. He or she must provide a copy of a response to the complainant, who has 10 business days to submit a rebuttal statement. The Secretary may extend this period an additional 10 business days for good cause. The Secretary must give a copy of the rebuttal statement to the person against whom the complaint was filed.

Under the bill, the Secretary of State would have to post on his or her internet website any complaint, response, or rebuttal statement received under these provisions.

The Secretary of State must investigate the allegations under the rules promulgated under the Act. Every 60 days after a complaint that meets the requirements of the Act is filed and until the matter is terminated, the Secretary must mail to the complainant and to the alleged violator notice of the action taken to date by the Secretary, together with the reasons for the action or nonaction. The bill would delete the requirement for the Secretary to mail a notice.

Correction of Violations

Under the Act, if the Secretary of State determines that there may be reason to believe that a violation of the Act has occurred, he or she must endeavor to correct the violation or

prevent a further violation by using informal methods such as a conference, conciliation, or persuasion, and may enter into a conciliation agreement with the person involved. If the Secretary is unable to correct or prevent further violation by these informal methods, then he or she may refer the matter to the Attorney General for the enforcement of a criminal penalty provided by the Act, or commence a hearing (as described below).

Under the bill, within 60 business days after receiving a rebuttal statement submitted as described above, the Secretary of State would have to post on his or her internet website whether there could be reason to believe that a violation of the Act had occurred. If the Secretary determined that there could be reason to believe that a violation occurred, he or she would have to endeavor to correct the violation or prevent a further violation by using informal methods such as a conference, conciliation, or persuasion, and could enter into a conciliation agreement with the person involved. If, after 30 business days, the Secretary were unable to correct or prevent further violation by these informal methods, he or she would have to refer the matter to the Attorney General and the appropriate county prosecuting attorney for the enforcement of any criminal penalty provided by the Act or commence a hearing for enforcement of any civil violation.

Hearings

Under the Act, the Secretary of State may commence a hearing to determine whether a civil violation of the Act has occurred. The bill would require the Secretary to do so.

A hearing may not be commenced during the period beginning 30 days before an election in which the committee has received or spent money and ending the day after that election, except with the consent of the person suspected of committing a civil violation. The bill would delete this provision.

The hearing must be conducted in accordance with the procedures set forth in Chapter 4 of the Administrative Procedures Act (which pertains to parties in contested cases, time and notice of hearings, evidence, official records of hearings, and rehearings). If after a hearing the Secretary of State determines that a violation of the Campaign Finance Act has occurred, he or she may issue an order requiring the person to pay a civil fine equal to the amount of the improper contribution or expenditure plus a maximum of \$1,000 for each violation. Under the bill, the Secretary would have to issue an order requiring the person to pay a civil fine equal to triple the amount of the improper contribution or expenditure plus a maximum of \$1,000 for each violation.

MCL 169.215

Legislative Analyst: Craig Laurie

FISCAL IMPACT

The bill could have a minimal fiscal impact on the Secretary of State's resources. The proposed time lines for responding to complaints along with the posting of information on the Secretary of State's web page could, at times, require additional staff and/or staff time. These potential costs, however, would be minimal and supported by current appropriations. The exact amount of the potential additional costs is indeterminate.

The bill also would increase the amount of civil fine revenue that is deposited in the State's General Fund.

The bill would have no fiscal impact on local government.

Fiscal Analyst: Joe Carrasco

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This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan Senate staff for use by the Senate in its deliberations and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.