



STATE OF MONTANA

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March 12, 2015

Honorable Jeff Essmann
Chairperson
House State Administration Committee
Bill Harris – Vice Chair
Casey Schreiner– Vice Chair

Members

- Bryce Bennett
- Bob Brown
- Moffie Funk
- Frank Garner
- Edward Greef
- Denise Hayman
- Jessica Karjala
- Austin Knudsen
- Debra Lamm
- Forrest Mandeville
- Wendy McKamey
- Dale Mortensen
- Jean Price
- Ray Shaw
- Kathy Swanson
- Susan Webber
- Art Wittich

Re: Senate Bill 151
Hearing Date: Wednesday, March 12,
2015 at 8:00 AM
Sponsor: Senator Doug Kary

Dear Chairperson Essmann and members of the Committee:

The Office of the Commissioner of Political Practices supports Senate Bill 151 and respectfully offers the following information to the members of the Senate State Administration Committee.

The 2011 Legislature removed the local campaign report filing requirement for all state district candidates. The requirement for local filing remained in statute for most political committees, county, municipal, and

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school candidates. In June of 2014, COPP launched an updated on-line filing service, a.k.a. CERS. The on-line service is working well for candidates and committees and in fact was nominated and selected for a Montana ITMC Project Excellence Award.

Election administrators frequently refer to the COPP website to obtain copies of campaign finance reports in order to complete the compliance check required for ballot certification. With electronic filing in place, the need to file paper copies of campaign finance reports locally is an unnecessary step for candidates and political committees. Election administrators have assured COPP staff that if a local individual is searching for a statement or report that is required to be submitted to COPP, they would simply retrieve the report from the COPP website. Candidates and political committees that choose not to file their statements electronically are still available on the COPP website. COPP staff spends at least a week after a filing deadline sorting, scanning, and uploading each statement and report to a searchable database. This process makes it possible for anyone to view a pdf version of all statements and reports that the COPP has received. Although, electronic filing is preferred, the COPP will continue this scanning process until all data is mandated to be submitted using the on-line service. Access to the information is key to transparency in government.

Many of you are aware that the COPP staff is required by statute to confirm compliance to the election administrators in writing prior to an elected official can take office. This process puts a candidate at risk of not being confirmed to take office due to a technicality. COPP staff works closely with elections staff to make this process run smoothly but they often have to chase down reports right up until the final hour. SB 151 simplifies this process and reduces the risk of being held off the ballot.

Thank you for your consideration of SB 151.

Sincerely,

Mary Baker
Program Supervisor