



TESTIMONY

February 8, 2022

HB 2359: ADDING LOCAL SALARY REPORTING TO THE MAP AND MLGED TRANSPARENCY PORTALS

By Patrick Ishmael

Testimony before the Missouri House Elementary and Secondary Education Committee

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony. My name is Patrick Ishmael, and I am the director of government accountability for the Show-Me Institute, a nonprofit, nonpartisan, Missouri-based think tank that supports free-market solutions for state policy. The ideas presented here are my own.

In my role at the Institute, I have been a vocal supporter of transparency in government salaries, especially at the local level. In a paper published in 2019, *Government Spending Records Should Be Free and Open to the Public*,¹ I noted that:

the last 12 years of state employee salary information are available to download and search on the Missouri Accountability Portal [MAP]. It shouldn't be that difficult for local governments

to do the same, either on their websites or through the portals discussed herein.

House Bill 2359 pursues this objective in a two-pronged manner: adding district salary information to MAP and expanding what is included in the Missouri Local Government Expenditure Database (MLGED) portal created last year by House Bill 271—a bill I also strongly supported. Making spending information available to the public is important, and doing so with particularity is crucial to allowing the public to see what their tax dollars are buying them.

The Show-Me Checkbook² and Show-Me CBAs [Collective Bargaining Agreements]³ projects helped to paint the local salary picture over the last five years, gathering data and contract

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language uncovered through Sunshine Law requests into a single file that the Show-Me Institute published online. But the Sunshine Law is weak in Missouri. The best way to make such information available to the public is for the state government to require publication of such local government information as a condition of being able to tax the public. In that regard, HB 2359 takes us in the right direction.

If I were to suggest any improvement to the MLGED portion of HB 2359, it would be to make local reporting to the MLGED database mandatory rather than voluntary, to capture the full picture of local spending regardless of whether local government wants that spending to be known.

HB 2359, as drafted, is well targeted to its purpose and is a solid step for transparency efforts generally. I hope policymakers support it, not only by voting for it, but by speaking out in its favor and in favor of similar transparency and accountability efforts in the future.

NOTES

1. Ishmael, Patrick. Government Spending Records Should Be Free and Open to the Public. Show-Me Institute, 2019. <https://showmeinstitute.org/20190417-government-spending-records-oehlerking-ishmael-web.pdf>
2. Oehlerking, Philip. Show-Me Institute Rolls Out Municipal Checkbook Project. Show-Me Institute, January 31, 2018. <https://showmeinstitute.org/blog/transparency/show-me-institute-rolls-out-municipal-checkbook-project>

3. Ishmael, Patrick and Oehlerking, Phil. Introducing the Show-Me CBAs Project. Show-Me Institute, August 21, 2018. <https://showmeinstitute.org/blog/transparency/introducing-the-show-me-cbas-project>



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