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For more information, contact Ben Eikey:
benjamin.eikey@wayne.edu, (810) 569-0747

Levin Center testified in Michigan Senate Committee on ways to improve legislative oversight



Jim Townsend and Ben Eikey of the Levin Center testifying in committee.

1/18/2021 - The Levin Center gave testimony today in the Michigan Senate Committee on Oversight on a recent report published by the Citizens Research Council of Michigan on legislative oversight in Michigan, the oversight resources available for Michigan lawmakers, and how Michigan can prioritize an institutional commitment to balanced, bipartisan, and bicameral oversight.

“All it takes is a set of structural arrangements that encourage bipartisan, fact-based oversight, a belief in the importance of oversight, and good faith on the part of the lawmakers. The CRC report and the recommendations made by the Levin Center offer ways that the Michigan Legislature can improve its structures to enable good legislative oversight.” said Jim Townsend, the Director of the Levin Center.

“Despite having a number of factors that encourage effective legislative oversight, the Michigan Legislature still needs to overcome several barriers that prevent it from becoming a national leader in oversight,” Townsend said. “These include extreme partisanship, term limits, and a need for greater commitment to legislative oversight. Extreme partisanship and oversight don’t mix. Partisan investigations are generally of lower quality and their findings are less credible than investigations where both the majority and minority members have a full say in determining the subject of the investigation and what information and witnesses to seek,” said Townsend, who represented the 26th District in the Michigan House from 2011 to 2016.

Testifying with Townsend from the Levin Center was Ben Eikey, who previously served as a staff member in the Michigan House of Representatives. His testimony highlighted the need for fact-based governance and civil discourse for problem solving. “If you think government is too large and tries to do too much, then there is no better tool than legislative oversight to expose government inefficiency or ineffectiveness and areas where certain functions or sectors should be left to the private or nonprofit sectors.”

Eikey conducts oversight workshops with state legislatures across the country and stated Michigan has potential to be a national leader in legislative oversight. However, Michigan must examine current legislative oversight structures and prioritize bipartisan fact-finding. “We have an abundance of information and recommendations from our state oversight research at the Levin Center and we stand ready to assist in Michigan and in any legislature across the country seeking enhancement of their legislative oversight,” Eikey said.

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The Levin Center at Wayne Law is named in honor of former U.S. Sen. Carl Levin, Michigan’s longest-serving U.S. senator who retired in 2015 after 36 years in the Senate conducting fact-based, bipartisan oversight investigations. The center’s mission is to promote high quality oversight in Congress and the 50 state legislatures through oversight workshops, research, events, commentary, and other activities. While the Levin Center is affiliated with Wayne State University Law School, its views do not present the institutional views, if any, of Wayne State University or the Law School.