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INTERNET ACCESS TO LEGISLATIVE INFORMATION

House Bill 4875 as enrolled
Public Act 403 of 1998
Sponsor: Rep. Nancy Quarles

House Bill 4884 as enrolled
Public Act 404 of 1998
Sponsor: Rep. Greg Kaza

House Bill 4886 as enrolled
Public Act 429 of 1998
Sponsor: Rep. Patricia Birkholz

House Bill 4895 as enrolled
Public Act 430 of 1998
Sponsor: Rep. Bob Brown

House Bill 5006 as enrolled
Public Act 431 of 1998
Sponsor: Rep. Lingg Brewer

Senate Bill 1086 as enrolled
Public Act 411 of 1998
Sponsor: Sen. Bill Bullard, Jr.

Senate Bill 1087 as enrolled
Public Act 414 of 1998
Sponsor: Sen. Art Miller, Jr.

Senate Bill 1088 as enrolled
Public Act 413 of 1998
Sponsor: Sen. Philip E. Hoffman

**House Committee: Advanced Technology
and Computer Development**
Senate Committee: Government Operations

Third Analysis (1-6-99)

House Bills 4875, 4884, 4886, 4895, 5006 and Senate Bills 1086, 1087 and 1088 (1-6-99)

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

The Internet -- a world-wide computer network that is used by government agencies, schools, colleges and

universities, libraries, private businesses, and individuals -- has reportedly grown to over six million

interconnected networks and more than 40 million users. Access to the Internet -- where a vast array of information and services awaits -- is possible from almost anywhere in the U.S. and from over 40

countries. Since September 19, 1997, Internet users have also been able to obtain access to a variety of Michigan legislative documents and information at the Michigan Legislature's website (<http://Michiganlegislature.org>).

The website enables Michigan residents and others around the world to have quick and easy access to introduced bills and joint resolutions, bills and joint resolutions as passed by the House and Senate, enrolled bills and joint resolutions, daily journals for the House and Senate, legislative calendars, bill analyses, fiscal analyses, and the status of bills and resolutions. (The website also provides a link to several other state government websites, including the House and Senate web pages, each of which provides additional legislative information such as membership lists of the standing committees.) The site received over 5,000 visitors and over 110,000 hits in the first month, with 1.4 gigabytes of information being downloaded. The website was developed by the Legislative Web Site Development Group -- a cooperative effort made up of staff from the information systems departments of the Senate, House, and Legislative Council through the Library of Michigan and the Legislative Service Bureau, and should not be confused with the Legislative Session Integration System (LSIS) project (see **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**). The documents and data for the Internet site originate with the House of Representatives, Senate, and Legislative Service Bureau, and the Library of Michigan provides administrative oversight.

Though there is no subscription fee to enter the website, a computer, modem, phone line, and an Internet access service are needed to connect to the Internet. Recent changes to the federal Telecommunications Act in 1996 required, among other things, that telecommunications carriers providing services on an interstate (between states) or an intrastate (state-wide) level provide telecommunications services to eligible schools and libraries at a discount. Public Acts 95 and 96 of 1997 created legislation that enabled schools and libraries to apply for the discounted telecommunications services offered through the Universal Service Support program. (For further information, see the House Legislative Analysis Section's analyses on Senate Bill 637 [Public Act 95 of 1997] and House Bill 4997 [Public Act 96 of 1997] dated 7-2-97). Reportedly, almost half of the K-12 schools in Michigan have submitted technology plans in compliance with P.A. 95's requirements. As more and more schools and

libraries across the state equip their facilities with computers and receive discounted telecommunications services (which would include reduced rates for an Internet access service), increased numbers of people can enjoy access to the Internet and to the Legislative website in particular.

The legislative website is viewed as a "work in progress" and plans include expanding the site in subsequent phases of the project to offer other legislative information, such as committee notices. However, though the current climate is conducive to promoting citizen access to legislative information via the Internet, some feel that it is advisable to ensure future accessibility by establishing a statutory requirement that certain legislative information be provided on the Internet.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILLS:

The package of bills would amend the Legislative Council Act to require that certain legislative information be made available to the public on the Internet. The bills, with the exception of House Bill 5006, would require that the information specified in each bill that was maintained by the council would have to be made available in the shortest feasible time after the information was available. If the information was not maintained by the council, it would have to be made available in the shortest feasible time after the information had been made available to the council. The bills would also specify that the requirement to make the information accessible would not alter or relinquish any copyright or other proprietary interest or entitlement of the state that related to any of the information made available under the bills. Further, the bills (with the exception of House Bill 5006) would specify that the information required to be available on the Internet pertained to the current session. All the bills would specify that the Legislative Council could not charge a fee for the information to be provided to the public on the Internet. The bills individually would amend the act to do the following:

House Bill 4875: Beginning July 1, 1999, require the status of each introduced bill and resolution to be offered online (MCL 4.1204e).

House Bill 4884: Beginning July 1, 1999, require that all bills introduced, passed by each house, and enrolled be offered online (MCL 4.1204b).

House Bill 4886: Beginning January 1, 2001, require that the legislative calendar, notices of committee

meetings and subcommittee meetings (including the agendas), and a listing of the committees of each house and their members be offered online (MCL 4.1204a).

House Bill 4895: Beginning July 1, 1999, require that each fiscal bill analysis prepared by the House Fiscal Agency be offered online (MCL 4.1204g).

House Bill 5006: Beginning July 1, 1999, require that the Michigan Compiled Laws (Questor database or comparable database) be offered online (MCL 4.1204). A fee could not be charged for the search and retrieval system for the MCL provided to the public on the Internet.

Senate Bill 1086: Beginning January 1, 2001, require the text of the House and Senate journals be offered online (MCL 4.1204f).

Senate Bill 1087: Beginning July 1, 1999, require that bill analyses prepared by the House Legislative Analysis Section and the Senate Fiscal Agency be offered online (MCL 4.1204c).

Senate Bill 1088: Beginning July 1, 1999, require that each fiscal bill analysis prepared by the Senate Fiscal Agency be offered online (MCL 4.1204d).

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:

The legislature currently makes available on the Internet all bills introduced, passed by each house, and enrolled; the status of each introduced bill and resolution; fiscal analyses and bill analyses prepared by the House Legislative Analysis Section, House Fiscal Agency, and Senate Fiscal Agency; calendars; committee schedules; session schedules; and public act tables. According to the Senate Fiscal Agency (SFA), the Michigan Compiled Laws database search and retrieval system is still being developed for the Internet. Costs incurred by the Library of Michigan have totaled approximately \$100,000 for hardware and \$400,000 for five full-time employees (FTEs) related to maintenance of these systems. The project for the Michigan Compiled Laws has an estimated cost of \$180,000.

In addition, the SFA reports that revenue generated by the Legislative Council from access fees to electronic databases (Questor and Bill Status) totaled \$79,360 in fiscal year 1996-1997. Under the bills, the council would not be able to charge for information provided from access through the Internet. (5-12-98)

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Reportedly, the Michigan Legislative website began as a side project of the Legislative Session Integration System (LSIS) project. The LSIS project, due to be completed in early 1999, will integrate the components of the legislature -- House of Representatives, Senate, and Legislative Service Bureau (LSB) -- into one computer system. Currently, the LSB and each house operates on a separate computer network, which drastically limits the types of information that can be shared electronically between the three. As part of the integration project, the Tandem computer housing the Questor database (Michigan Compiled Laws) will be replaced with a database offering easier search capabilities. Also, LSIS will provide some automation between the session floor and legislative offices, and will automate some of the tasks of the session staff. It is important to note that LSIS will be a closed system within the legislature. Though, as now, subscriptions to the MCL database may be offered, LSIS will not be accessible to the public. However, LSIS may be a source of some information to be fed into the Internet site.

Due in part to unforeseeable delays in the development of LSIS, it was deemed important to provide some increased access to legislative information in an electronic format for legislative staff. Thus, in August 1997, the "Intranet" website was established for members of the House, Senate, and LSB. The Intranet site operates as a "private slice", so to speak, of the Internet and is accessible only by members of the legislature and their staffs. Then, in September of 1997, the Michigan Legislature website was established on the Internet so that the public could have a similar accessibility to legislative documents. Information and updates are initially made to the Intranet site, and then copied over to the Internet site. Though additional documents and information are scheduled for subsequent phases of the Internet site, such as adding committee schedules, the Intranet and Internet sites will provide a different service -- and therefore different types of information -- than LSIS will when the integration project is complete. Further, the website project, unlike LSIS, does not receive separate funding. Funding for the website project has been absorbed within the operating budgets of the information systems departments of the House, Senate, and LSB. In addition, the Library of Michigan used \$50,000 to purchase some hardware and software to put the Intranet and Internet sites online. By contrast, the LSIS project received an

appropriation of \$2,178,000 for fiscal year 1997-98 (Public Act 111 of 1997).

ARGUMENTS:

For:

The Internet continues to grow in importance as a resource tool for research and, with the price of computers dropping in recent years and the establishment of some free Internet servers (e.g., HyperNet offers free Internet access by running continual advertisements in a small window), more and more people can utilize the Internet. Plus, the Universal Service Support fund, established by recent federal telecommunications legislation, will enable schools and libraries to receive discounted telecommunications services, thus opening up the world of the Internet to even more students and citizens around the state, and even the world.

The bills would place in statute a requirement for legislative information to be accessible electronically, and thus would ensure continued access to legislative information via the Internet. Not everyone has the opportunity to travel to Lansing to watch the legislature in session or to pick up copies of bills that they may be interested in. Though copies of bills and other documents can be mailed to residents making requests, some bills move through the House and Senate too quickly for requests to be addressed in a timely enough fashion by mail. Though faxing information and documents can help fill some requests, it is not economical to rely on faxes to meet the great need for information requested by constituents. The Internet, therefore, can provide a quick and relatively inexpensive way for people to track a piece of legislation, and, when the Michigan Compiled Laws go online, to look up current law on a subject of interest.

In addition, as more schools gain access to the Internet, the legislative website can be incorporated into lesson plans and class projects. From an earlier age, students can learn in depth how the legislature works and can grow up feeling more comfortable about and secure in being involved with state government.

Further, the fact that the site had about 5,000 visitors and 110,000 hits in the first month shows what a necessary and desired service this is. (A "visitor" is a person accessing the website; a "hit" is each thing that

a visitor does when visiting a site, e.g., clicking on a highlighted phrase to get more specific information.) The bills' requirements to provide such information and documents as bill analyses, fiscal analyses, committee schedules, and so on will only add to the educational experience available to residents who use the Internet, and should result in more politically aware and involved citizens in the state.

Response:

The information services staffs of the House, Senate, and Legislative Service Bureau have been able to absorb the costs of the website within their yearly operating budgets so far, but the addition of the Michigan Compiled Laws will exceed the yearly allocation. For the MCLs to be added to the information offered online and to be maintained and updated properly, additional operating funds would need to be appropriated.

Against:

The bills really are not needed. The legislative website is already up and running. The high usage experienced in the first month of operation already ensures that a significant public outcry would be raised if the site were, for any reason, discontinued. The website is considered to be a work in progress, and plans are already underway to expand the documents available on the site.

Response:

As the administration of the executive branch and membership in the legislature change through the coming years, it is hard to predict which issues will continue to be deemed important or of interest. The bills would ensure public access via the Internet to at least some of the legislative documents available to legislative staff and government workers.

Analyst: S. Stutzky

■ This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan House staff for use by House members in their deliberations, and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.