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New Report Assesses Government Transparency in Maryland

ROCKVILLE, MD—As fiscal pressures mount on state budgets, the need for transparency in government operations and policies also increases. Citizens are demanding greater access to public information. In response, the Maryland Public Policy Institute in Rockville, MD has released a detailed study of Maryland's state and county government web sites: "Government Transparency in Maryland," by Gabriel J. Michael.

Transparency is critical to the effective participation in a democratic government, and also holds members of government accountable for their actions, states Michael. "Citizens must be able to find relevant information without undue burden," he says, especially budgetary information. "By examining the budget, citizens can see exactly where a government obtains its revenues and how much it spends on various services."

Today, the most effective way of achieving this goal is through the use of the Internet. Government websites can offer an enormous amount of information to thousands of interested citizens simultaneously, serving constituents far more efficiently than a telephone system or public records hall ever could. Michael examines government portals, county by county and agency by agency, to see how well they serve citizens.

Hopefully this information will be useful in constructing a transparency website for Maryland, which citizens can use as a portal to various government websites. "We were encouraged by the legislature's effort and the O'Malley administrations' effort in 2008 in passing and signing into law the Maryland Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2008," said Christopher Summers, president, the Maryland Public Policy Institute, "which brings more transparency and accountability to Maryland government. This is a big first step in bringing transparency to Maryland government; however, there is still more work that needs to be done not only statewide, but also on the local level to ensure that Marylanders can see how their tax dollars are being spent."

The full report can be viewed online at: http://www.mdpolicy.org/research/pubID.234/pub_detail.asp

Founded in 2001, the Maryland Public Policy Institute is a nonpartisan public policy research and education organization that focuses on state policy issues. The Maryland Public Policy Institute's work can be found on the Internet at mdpolicy.org.

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