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## **34 STATES PASS CAMPAIGN DISCLOSURE ASSESSMENT -- 13 STATES IMPROVE THEIR GRADES; 16 FAIL TO MEET BASIC STANDARDS**

Washington State Ranks First; Virginia Makes Greatest Improvement with Jump  
from "D+" to "B"

Davis, CA – States across the country provided better access to candidates' campaign disclosure records in 2005 and particularly improved the usability of their official disclosure web sites, according to *Grading State Disclosure 2005*, a comprehensive, comparative study of candidate campaign finance disclosure laws and practices in the 50 states. *Grading State Disclosure 2005* follows two prior annual reports, and is online at: [www.campaigndisclosure.org](http://www.campaigndisclosure.org)

Washington State ranked number one in the country for the third year in a row, followed by Florida and California. Overall, 34 states' disclosure programs passed the assessments earning a grade of D or better, while sixteen states' disclosure programs failed. The assessment was conducted by the Campaign Disclosure Project, which seeks to bring greater transparency and accountability to money in state politics. The project is a collaboration of the California Voter Foundation, the Center for Governmental Studies and the UCLA School of Law and is supported by The Pew Charitable Trusts.

"The number of positive changes states are making to their disclosure web sites is encouraging," said Kim Alexander, president of the California Voter Foundation, which produced the study. "Since 2004, 14 state disclosure agencies have redesigned their web sites, making them easier for the general public to access and navigate. This activity shows a number of agencies are increasingly responsive to the public's demand for meaningful access to campaign data."

The Campaign Disclosure Project evaluates, grades, and ranks all 50 states' performance in four campaign finance disclosure areas: the strength of campaign disclosure laws; availability of electronic filing programs; the degree of public access to campaign finance information; and the usability of state disclosure web sites.

Of the 34 passing states, eleven received grades in the A or B range, up from eight in 2004 and only two in 2003. Washington received the highest grade (A-) and rank, Florida ranked second with a B+, and California came in third, also with a B+. Overall, the study found that 13 states' grades improved, while seven declined. Among the study's significant findings:

- States with the best overall campaign disclosure programs, in rank order from one to ten, are: Washington (A-); Florida (B+); California (B+); Hawaii (B); Georgia and Illinois (B, tied); Virginia (B); Michigan and Texas (B-, tied); Rhode Island (B-); and Ohio (B-).

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- States with the weakest overall campaign disclosure programs, all receiving Fs and in rank order from 40 to 50, are: Delaware, Nevada and New Mexico (tied for 40<sup>th</sup>); North Dakota; Vermont; New Hampshire; Montana; Alabama; South Dakota; South Carolina; and Wyoming.
- Virginia was the most-improved state, climbing from a D+ to a B and from 22<sup>nd</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> place, followed by Iowa, which moved from 38<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> place, and Hawaii, which improved from 12<sup>th</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup>.
- Among the four grading categories, the most improvement was found in Online Contextual and Technical Usability, followed by Disclosure Content Accessibility.

“States have improved dramatically since we first evaluated their disclosure programs in 2003,” said Bob Stern, president of the Center for Governmental Studies. “The changes made in 2005 demonstrate a continuing commitment on the part of state disclosure agencies to further enhance access to campaign finance records, and we hope the trend continues.”

Each state was assessed, graded and ranked for its overall performance as well as its performance in each of the four grading categories. States across the country performed best in the Campaign Disclosure Law category, with 40 states receiving passing grades and ten states failing. Twenty-four states passed in the Electronic Filing Program category, while 26 failed. Twenty-eight states passed in Disclosure Content Accessibility, and 22 failed. Thirty-nine states received passing grades in Online Contextual and Technical Usability, while eleven failed.

Criteria in each category were developed by the Campaign Disclosure Project partners, the project's advisory board and a panel of expert judges, who also assisted with the grading process. The project sets a high, but not impossible, standard for state campaign finance disclosure programs. In developing the criteria, efforts were made to balance the concerns of practitioners and government officials with the public's need for timely, complete and effective disclosure.

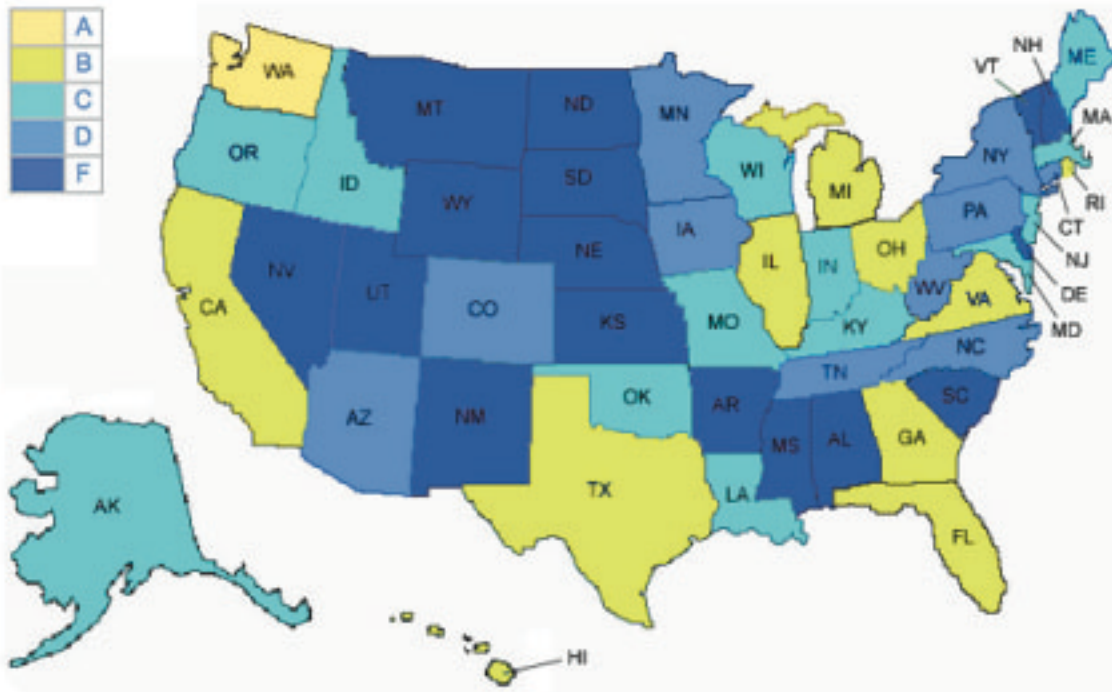
Assessments of each state were based on research of state laws as of December 2004, web site visits and research from April to June of 2005, responses from state disclosure agency staff and activists working on campaign financing at the state level, and web site testing by outside evaluators in June 2005. State grades are a reflection of not only the work of state disclosure agencies, but also state legislatures and governors, who are responsible for enacting and funding state campaign disclosure laws and programs.

*Grading State Disclosure 2005* features a written assessment of each of the fifty states' disclosure programs, a U.S. map of the states color-coded by grade, comparison charts, and an analysis of campaign disclosure trends across the states, such as the number of states that require disclosure of independent expenditures and donors' occupations and employers.

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2004 Grade Results Map



2003 Grade Results Map

