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Macomb County sues campaign finance violators

Mount Clemens, MI – With the July 27 deadline approaching for Warren, Eastpointe, and St. Clair Shores primary election candidates to file campaign finance reports, Macomb County Clerk / Register of Deeds Carmella Sabaugh and Macomb County Treasurer Ted Wahby announced they are getting results from their lawsuits against campaign finance violators.

"This kind of serious enforcement action has been missing at all levels of government for far too long," said Rich Robinson, Executive Director of the Michigan Campaign Finance Network, a Lansing-based, non-partisan campaign finance watchdog organization. "Disclosure requirements don't have real meaning unless there are appropriate consequences for failing to comply."

The violators include candidate committees, ballot question committees and political action committees required to file with the county clerk a list of every contribution received and expense paid.

The violations deal with unpaid late filing fees, which after 60 days become debts to the county. Under the Michigan Campaign Finance Act, the county clerk collects the filings and the county treasurer is responsible for collecting unpaid fees in a manner similar to how other debts to the county are collected.

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Sabaugh and Wahby quietly cracked down on campaign finance violators by filing lawsuits against 13 in March. As of today, 10 cases were resolved, and three cases are pending. More lawsuits are expected to be filed soon.

Sabaugh is one of the few county clerks to post local campaign finance reports on the Internet, letting the public follow the money. See the Macomb County Clerk's web site at <http://www.macombcountymi.gov/clerksoffice>.

“Macomb County candidates are among the most accountable in the state,” said Sabaugh. “Broad public disclosure is a good non-partisan way to have real campaign finance reform.”

“Campaign finance fines are debts owed to the county and we will collect them as we do all other debts,” said Wahby. “All candidates for public office should follow through with their reporting obligations. This is good for taxpayers.”

Candidates or committees that do not expect to spend or receive over \$1,000 for an election may request a reporting waiver. It is important to note that the committees do not automatically receive a waiver unless one is actually requested in writing. Once they have the waiver they are not required to file campaign finance statements, as long as the waiver is properly maintained.