



**House
Legislative
Analysis
Section**

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**PUBLIC FUNDING AND PUBLIC
DEBATES**

House Bill 4290

Sponsor: Rep. Larry Julian

**Committee: Local Government and
Urban Policy**

Complete to 2-27-03

A SUMMARY OF HOUSE BILL 4290 AS INTRODUCED 2-26-03

House Bill 4290 would amend the Michigan Campaign Finance Act to require that candidates who accepted public funding participate in public debates. Under the bill, this section of the act would be known as the “Candidate Accountability Law.”

The bill specifies that a candidate who received money from the state campaign fund, and whose name was eligible to appear on the primary election ballot, would be required to participate in the public debates with all other candidates of the same party who received money from the fund, and whose names would appear on the *primary* election ballot. Under the bill, a public debate would be scheduled in each calendar month, beginning in the month in which the names of the candidates were eligible for the primary ballot, and ending in the month before the primary election was held. The bill specifies that each debate would be held in a different geographic region of the state, and that the participating candidates would designate the regions upon mutual agreement. If the candidates were unable to agree, the secretary of state would designate the regions.

In addition, a candidate who received money from the state campaign fund, and whose names would appear on the *general* election ballot, also would be required to participate in public debates with all other candidates who received money from the fund, and whose names would appear on the general election ballot. A public debate would be held in each media market of the state, beginning in the month in which the names of the candidates were eligible, and ending the month before the general election was held. As used in the bill, the term “media market” would be defined to mean the market areas served by media from: a) Detroit; b) Flint; c) Traverse City; d) Grand Rapids; e) Lansing; f) Alpena; g) Marquette; and h) southwest Michigan. The public debates would be scheduled upon mutual agreement between all candidates, and if the candidates were unable to agree upon a schedule, then the secretary of state, after reasonable consideration of the candidates’ schedules, would establish the debate schedule.

The bill specifies that the public debates would be held under the following circumstances:

- a moderator who was a neutral party would be present, designated by the candidates upon mutual agreement, or, if the candidates were unable to agree, then by the secretary of state;

House Bill 4290 (2-27-03)

- each candidate would have equal opportunity to ask any other candidate a question, and the responding candidate could have two minutes to respond, followed by a one-minute rebuttal from the candidate who posed the question; and

- each candidate would be positioned behind a podium.

Under the bill, a candidate who did not participate in a public debate would be required to return the money received from the state campaign fund. However, a candidate who was not able to participate because he or she was physically or mentally unfit, or because of other circumstances that were mutually agreed to by all candidates, would not be required to return the money received from the campaign fund.

MCL 169. 201 to 169.282

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■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.