

FEDERAL ELECTION COMMISSION

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FEC SETS PILOT TEST OF REMOTE ACCESS TO IT'S CAMPAIGN FINANCE DATA

WASHINGTON -- A pilot program will be started by the Federal Election Commission this month to test sharing of its computerized disclosure data base with Secretaries of State and other statutorily-mandated offices of record throughout the country. Funds permitting, the test period will extend through election day.

Announcing the test today at a meeting of the Advisory Panel to the Federal Election Commission's National Clearinghouse on Election Administration, the Commission said that its efforts are to broaden public access to campaign finance information. While the Federal Election Campaign Act requires Congressional candidates to file campaign finance reports with the Secretary of State in which they are candidates, and with the Clerk of the House of Representatives and Secretary of the U.S. Senate, only the FEC provides public access to all reports filed by candidates, political party committees, political action committees and those making independent expenditures and the communication costs of corporation and labor unions. The Commission also captures much of this information on a computerized data base.

Five states have been selected for the pilot program, based on willingness to participate; a mix of large and small states; a geographic spread of states; states whose record office would be in major media centers; states with good computer facilities in those offices and which have adequate space, staff and expertise.

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The tests will start in Georgia with offices in Atlanta. Following in order of their participation are the state and cities with access offices: Illinois, in Chicago; Massachusetts, in Boston; California, in Los Angeles; and Colorado, in Denver.

While each of the test states will follow basic procedures established by the FEC, each Secretary of State's office will set its own rules on public access to the information. Among computer information available during the pilot program will be: 1) An index which provides a cross index to all records including receipts and disbursements relating to individual candidates; 2) An index which includes the name of each political committee, its ID number, a list of each document filed, total gross receipts and disbursements; 3) An index which includes for each political committee its connected organization, a notation if it is "qualified" as a multicandidate committee, and all Federal candidates supported, together with total aggregate contributions to or expenditures on behalf of or against each candidate.

Additional information through computer printouts will be made available to each of the test offices by the FEC.

At the end of the test, following the general election, each of the participating offices will be asked to assess the usefulness and success of the program. Results of the pilot program will permit the Federal Election Commission to measure the public and media demand for campaign finance data available through a network of disclosure offices throughout the country. The Commission's final study would be made available to the Congress for use in its deliberations on full disclosure efforts.