

Virginia Media Alert:

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Local Government Transparency Study Released: Study Analyzes Website Financial Transparency On all 134 Virginia Jurisdictions

The Thomas Jefferson Institute today released a study analyzing and ranking the level of financial transparency provided on all 134 county and city websites in Virginia.

“Virginia can do better and the citizens expect that,” says Michael Thompson, President of the Thomas Jefferson Institute for Public Policy, in light of the study. The Institute analysis rated these governmental entities and found them to be severely lacking.

This study was researched and completed by Thompson and Jeremy Beales, a Visiting Fellow at the Thomas Jefferson Institute.

Generally speaking, high population counties scored the best, with the Northern Virginia counties of Arlington, Fairfax and Prince William leading the way, while 23 counties and cities scored zero in this analysis. “Scoring zero means that the citizens have no online ability to see how their tax money is being spent. In this day and age that is really inexcusable,” said Beales.

The report analyzed jurisdictions based on the web availability of budget documents, the extent and detail of those budget documents, expenditures including having the government checkbook on line and information on contracts with the private sector. Each category was given a value and then the totals for each county or city were calculated.

Beales and Thompson said that the Thomas Jefferson Institute wanted to see how well the state’s local governments were doing on this important issue of financial transparency since citizens are demanding a more open government. And they said that each county has within its borders people who can build websites at a very small cost and some may well do it for nothing.

“There is no excuse in the 21st century not to have a basic website and not to post on that website basic financial information,” said Thompson. The Jefferson Institute plans to suggest to

the McDonnell Administration that open, transparent governments become a requirement for receiving state money.

“Basic transparency should be a requirement for the receipt of taxpayers’ money,” Thompson said. “Today there is no reason for governments not to have basic budgets and expenditures on line for their citizens to examine.”

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