



**JENNIFER BRUNNER'S BLUEPRINT FOR BETTER BUSINESS SERVICES
IN THE OHIO SECRETARY OF STATE'S OFFICE**

"The Office of Secretary of State should be a catalyst for improving the ease for new start-up businesses and for companies to move to Ohio. As Secretary of State, I will work with our business communities to create a business climate that makes it easier to create more jobs for Ohioans."

— Jennifer Brunner

Over the past eight years, filing and other document fees in the Ohio Secretary of State's office have soared. Generally, when these fees are paid, they are captured into one or more Secretary of State special funds to pay contractors who now perform office responsibilities instead of Secretary of State employees. While the current Secretary of State touts level or decreased general revenue funding for the office in the past few years, the real story is told by looking at the increased spending by the office through these special funds. The funding for this increased spending are on the backs of business in Ohio, making it even more difficult to do business in this state and to compete against businesses from other states or nations who do not similarly share this burden.

Jennifer Brunner has a plan for government business services that will promote the growth of jobs for Ohio. She wants to:

1. Revise forms for better legal compliance and restructure filing and document fees to reflect a business' ability to pay and the urgency of the need for documents—eliminating the current "one size fits all" approach
2. Support small business growth and development by providing specific, useful information in an easy-to-use format online and by providing customer service technicians who can be reached by telephone, electronic mail and walk-in service.

3. Create an International Business Relations Office within the Secretary of State's office to facilitate and encourage international investments in Ohio and by Ohio corporations
4. Research and determine the value of a safe and reliable Electronic Authentication Program to allow for the use of digital signatures in electronic commerce, using a system based on stringent certification and operating standards
5. Create a Secretary of State's website that is useful and easy to use by Ohioans

RESTRUCTURING FILING AND DOCUMENT FEES AND REDRAFTING FORMS FOR LEGAL COMPLIANCE

Filing and document fees have increased significantly in the current Secretary of State administration and are generally standardized regardless of the type of legal entities, whether it be non-profit organizations or large for-profit corporations. Some states have a varied fee structure based upon the type of corporation. In Ohio, with the exception of changes in the amount of authorized shares of a corporation, all for-profit corporations are charged the same fee amounts regardless of size or purpose. Jennifer Brunner would work with a panel of corporate attorneys, paralegals, business leaders, non-profit corporations, and others, as identified, to review and modify current forms for better legal compliance and would work with this group on revising the current document fee structure to reflect practical considerations such as the size and nature of the corporation.

The outsourcing of business services in the Secretary of State's office has made many business service functions less accountable to the public. No longer are state employees who must answer to the Secretary of State providing critical services to Ohio's business customers. When things go wrong—and they have—service is slower to address business complaints, because there are more layers of people to get to the heart of the problem and address it, than when state employees are providing the services. Current and unnecessary problems that have resulted for businesses include:

- The placement on the Secretary of State's website of 1.2 million social security numbers in Uniform Commercial Code filings, for which a federal class action was filed to remove those numbers from the public domain
- Over-standardized business forms that limit language on formation documents that is required by the Ohio Corporation Law (OCL) and the Uniform Corporation Code (UCC). As a result, these standardized forms are requiring the corporate attorneys to file amendments to the formation documents in order to comply with other federal and state requirements. These amendments create additional costs to a corporation and often hinder time-sensitive business mergers and acquisitions.
- Turnaround time for many documents has decreased to the point that to get reasonable service a corporation has to pay nearly twice the amount listed

on the fee structure to expedite documents. Currently, corporations pay an additional \$100 to expedite document turnaround, and the quickest time is next day. Many times same day service is necessary but not available. A graduated fee for expediting document turnaround based on time sensitivity should be examined.

SUPPORTING SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT IN OHIO

As Secretary of State, Jennifer Brunner will collaborate with the Ohio Department of Development to support the growth of small business enterprises in Ohio. Brunner will also partner with the various Chambers of Commerce throughout the state to increase accessibility to needed business information and minimize unnecessary startup requirements. Some specific programs within the Secretary of State's office that Jennifer Brunner plans to offer are:

- Re-engineering the Secretary of State's website to provide easy links to other state offices providing assistance to small businesses, local Chambers of Commerce and state universities, including information on the state's franchising laws and a starter kit for small businesses
- Creating a Small Business Ombudsman Program with customer service technicians to help new and small business navigate Ohio's various required filing requirements for small businesses across state agencies and within local communities

CREATING AN INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS RELATIONS OFFICE IN THE SECRETARY OF STATE'S OFFICE

As Secretary of State, Jennifer Brunner will investigate and create stronger connections between the international business community and the State of Ohio and its localities. Though some international services are currently available through the Secretary's Office, it is weakly publicized. In a global economy, the Secretary of State should be proactively promoting international investments to generate jobs for Ohioans. Making it easier for Ohioans to conduct business outside of the United States and for foreign corporations to conduct business in Ohio is the goal.

Brunner will begin by improving the international services that currently exist and promoting these services, including:

- Creating an International Business Relations Office
- Adding several different languages to the Secretary of State's website to include, at a minimum, Spanish, French, German, Japanese and Chinese, to provide a more friendly system for international users of the site
- Having multi-lingual staff available for personal assistance to foreign customers seeking to do business with Ohio

- Developing specialized assistance for foreign filers on filing and reporting requirements with the Secretary of State's office with tracking of filing and processing for timely document handling
- Serving as a liaison and collaborating with other state agencies for a seamless business registration process to facilitate investment and growth of Ohio jobs

INVESTIGATING THE USE OF DIGITAL SIGNATURES AND AN ELECTRONIC AUTHENTICATION PROCEDURE

As Ohio Secretary of State, Jennifer Brunner would research and determine the value of an Electronic Authentication Program to promote commerce in Ohio. She would determine ways to coordinate the Ohio Business Gateway electronic filing system to work with the Secretary of State's filings, to make filings more efficient, quick and cost effective. After determining that there are clearly secure means, she would work to implement a digital signature system through the use of safe and reliable electronic messaging. This program would be designed to promote and enhance economic development and trade through the use of digital signatures in electronic commerce. This would be administered by the Secretary of State's office using stringent certification and operating standards.

IMPROVING THE SECRETARY OF STATE'S WEBSITE SO THAT IS USEFUL AND EASY TO USE BY OHIOANS

The current website for the Secretary of State has several good features but it pales in comparison to the usefulness of many other Secretary of State websites. The website should be a friendly tool for the general public to locate information held by the office. Jennifer Brunner would institute a new website that helps to grow jobs for Ohio. The Secretary of State's website should provide high-quality content, opportunities to transact business or interact with government officials and feature easy-to-navigate pages.

Jennifer Brunner wants to provide important links to government agencies, local organizations and institutions of higher education to assist Ohioans and other users to find the information they need. The Secretary of State has been described as the "repository of state records." These records belong to the people of the State of Ohio and should be accessible by them. Jennifer Brunner will not use the Secretary of State's website to promote private or religious concerns, such as the current "Community Character Building." She understands that the role of the Secretary of State is to maintain and provide information for Ohioans that belongs to Ohioans and to conduct fair elections.

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