

BUSINESS ADVOCATE

New Michigan Legislation Poses Problems

*End of year legislation will impact
Great Lakes Bay businesses*



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LETTER from the President

Dear Members,

On behalf of our Board of Directors and staff members, I would like to extend our **sincere thanks** to you for your continued membership with the Saginaw County Chamber of Commerce. Your support enables us to continue to grow and strengthen the Saginaw County and Great Lakes Bay economic climate resulting in a better quality of life for everyone who lives, works, learns, and plays here.

We continue to dedicate resources and a great deal of energy to live up to our Mission Statement:

"We lead on behalf of business. We communicate, connect and influence". We believe that when local business succeeds, we all succeed.

This past year, our efforts focused on talent attraction and retention, diversity and inclusion, redevelopment of the medical diamond, and connecting educational opportunities and job creation. And we are committed to providing you with valuable resources and communications to help your business thrive.

The Saginaw County Chamber continues to be the lead organization convening diverse groups to work together on issues and projects designed to improve the economic climate for our members, the business community, and the region. We have a strong legislative advocacy program that strengthens your voice in government as we work with federal, state, and local elected officials to create a thriving economic environment. Heading into an election year, these connections will be more important than ever as we strive to make the voices of our business community heard.

We continue to fulfill our promises to **Connect, Communicate, and Influence** on your behalf and to provide you with a truly valuable membership.

Again, thank you for your investment and continued support of this community's Chamber team. As we move forward into 2024, we wish you prosperity, growth, purpose, health, and joy.



Veronica Horn, President/CEO
Saginaw County Chamber of Commerce



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New Michigan Legislation Poses Problems

End of year legislation will impact Great Lakes Bay businesses

Undoubtedly, a collective desire exists for a cleaner environment, and there is widespread empathy for the working conditions of nurses. Similarly, there is broad agreement on the need for a higher minimum wage. However, Michigan legislation—passed and pending—to address these issues may inadvertently result in more significant challenges in the long term.

Clean Energy Future Package ambitious but questionable

Michigan has embarked on a significant journey towards environmental sustainability through the recent enactment of the Clean Energy Future Package. This legislative initiative, crafted in response to the MI Healthy Climate Plan, seeks to align the state's objectives with those outlined in the Paris Climate Agreement.

Comprising five bills, the package embodies a comprehensive effort to reform

and bolster the utilization of clean and renewable energy sources across the state.

- Elevate the state's electricity grid from 16% clean energy usage to 50% by 2030, 60% by 2035 and 100% by 2040.
- Major utility companies in Michigan are now mandated to offer expanded energy efficiency programs to their consumers.
- The Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC) assumes the roles of deciding on clean energy proposals and the location of large-scale wind, solar and storage projects.
- Increase energy storage capacity to 2,500 megawatts.

Despite the laudable goals of the legislation, its swift passage has stirred skepticism. Wendy Block, Senior VP of Business Advocacy and Member Engagement at the Michigan Chamber of Commerce, said of the rushed legislation, "We are certainly not suggesting that there isn't

room for improvement to do things to help our climate and to move us more toward renewable and clean energy, but we just feel like the legislation goes too far too fast and will push up rates too far and too fast."

Critics have delved into the feasibility and economic implications of the new laws, particularly scrutinizing potential repercussions on energy reliability, affordability and equity for both individual consumers and businesses. Furthermore, reservations have surfaced regarding the expansive definition of clean and renewable energy sources. The inclusion of less environmentally friendly alternatives such as biomass, landfill gas, gas from methane digesters, animal manure, trash incinerators, and natural gas carbon capture has raised eyebrows.

Another hurdle lies in the statewide adoption of renewable energy projects, as potential hosts express reluctance due to aesthetic and noise concerns. While the MPSC now holds the authority to site new energy projects, the concentration of power raises apprehensions about potential backlash that might hinder the process.

The transition to cleaner energy sources will necessitate substantial investments in Michigan's energy infrastructure. The financial burden is anticipated to be shouldered by consumers as power companies grapple with the challenge of raising billions to meet the stringent requirements outlined in the legislation.

Michigan now stands among a select group of states taking aggressive measures towards cleaner energy, mirroring the paths of California and New York. However, the experiences of these states, marked by instances of recalibration, prompt reflections on the sustainability and potential amendments that Michigan may encounter in its pursuit of a greener future.

Mandatory nurse ratios not the answer

The Michigan House and Senate are currently in the throes of deliberation over the proposed legislation known as the Safe Patient Care Act, which specifically targets nurse-to-patient ratios and aims to eliminate forced overtime for registered nurses (RNs). The impending vote on this legislation is set to take place in 2024. ▶▶



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Championed by nurse associations, the Safe Patient Care Act has been praised as a means to enhance patient care and mitigate nurse burnout. However, notable skepticism has emerged from entities such as the Michigan Chamber of Commerce, the Saginaw County Chamber of Commerce, and the Michigan Health and Hospital Association (MHA), all casting doubt on the viability of the proposed legislation. Wendy Block, Senior Vice President of Business Advocacy at the Michigan Chamber of Commerce, expressed reservations, stating, “We recognize there is a lot of burnout, but we aren’t sure the nurse-to-patient ratio is really the solution.”

One of the primary challenges posed by the legislation is its potential impact on the existing nursing shortage. According to a recent survey by the MHA, Michigan hospitals are currently grappling with the task of hiring 8,400 nurses, and the implementation of nurse-to-patient ratios could exacerbate this shortage.

MHA CEO Brian Peters contested claims made by advocate groups, particularly disputing the assertion that there are 50,000 inactive nurses due to working conditions. Peters argued that a substantial portion of this demographic comprises retirees or individuals who have consciously opted for



alternative career paths, a trend unlikely to be significantly altered by legislative changes.

The proposed mandated ratios, if enacted, could entail significant financial burdens, potentially adding \$2 billion annually to the healthcare system. This, in turn, might lead to higher costs for patients and longer wait times. Also, the inflexibility imposed by rigid ratios could force bed closures, patient rejections, and even the complete shutdown of departments, thereby compromising access to care, especially in emergency situations.

Furthermore, the legislation’s exclusive focus on RNs raises concerns about the broader care team. If hospitals can only

“We recognize there is a lot of burnout, but we aren’t sure the nurse-to-patient ratio is really the solution.”

Wendy Block, Senior Vice President
of Business Advocacy at the
Michigan Chamber of Commerce

afford to hire RNs, then all bedside work would fall to them instead of auxiliary workers and result in an inefficient use of their skills and education. The legislation also neglects the potential of emerging technologies that could revolutionize healthcare delivery, hindering the adoption of cost-effective virtual nursing programs.

Ultimately, the Michigan Health and Hospital Association, Michigan Chamber of Commerce, and Saginaw County Chamber of Commerce converge on the belief that localized judgment, based on daily patient acuity data, should prevail over a one-size-fits-all approach in addressing the complexities of patient care staffing. ▶▶

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Debate on minimum wage persists

The Improved Workforce Opportunity Wage Act passed in Michigan in 2018 put in place a schedule for an annual minimum wage increase for all Michigan workers. As per the current law, the minimum wage will go from \$10.10 per hour to \$10.44 per hour in 2024. Also passed in 2018 was the Michigan Paid Sick Leave Act, which states that medical leave is accrued at a rate of one hour for every 35 hours worked. But now all that might change.

At that time, a legislative maneuver known as adopt-and-amend was utilized to alter the implementation of these policies. While the Court of Appeals (COA) supported the legislature's authority to modify initiated legislation in 2020, proponents of the proposals contested this in the state's highest court, the Michigan Supreme Court (MSC), which is now deliberating the constitutionality of these changes.

The potential outcomes of the MSC ruling could have significant implications for employers across various industries. If the COA decision is overturned, Michigan's minimum wage may surge to \$13.03 an hour and the tipped wage would rise to \$11.73 an hour since the legislation reverts back to the increase Michigan voters approved in 2018, not the amended version.

Additionally, that legislation extends paid sick leave mandates to small businesses, requiring substantial adjustments to policies and procedures for businesses statewide. To manage increased costs, some businesses might explore tech-centered service and automation, potentially leading to job losses and significant industry changes.

The Saginaw County Chamber of Commerce, in conjunction with the Michigan Chamber of Commerce, opposes the supreme court overturning the appeals court's 2022 decision. Wendy Block, Senior VP of Business Advocacy and Member Engagement at the Michigan Chamber of Commerce, emphasized the potential adverse impact on businesses, stating, "For employers and businesses, this could be a three-hundred percent increase overnight with an already very slim profit margin of three to five percent. This could not only threaten the success, but even the sustainability of restaurants." ■

Growing Michigan Together Council Report:

A follow-up to the Chamber's 2023 Out of the Frying Pan Legislative Luncheon

In early November, the Saginaw County Chamber of Commerce held its annual legislative luncheon, Out of the Frying Pan. Presenters included Former Michigan Senator Ken Horn in his new role as Executive Vice President of Strategic Development for the Great Lakes Bay Regional Alliance, Kelly Watkins, Director of Business Marketing for the Michigan Economic Development Corporation, and Hilary Doe, Chief Growth Officer for the State of Michigan. The presenters offered information on regional and state efforts to attract and retain talent to the State of Michigan which has been steadily losing population and currently ranks 49 out of 50 states in growth since 2020.



Hilary Doe, Chief Growth Officer for the State of Michigan, presents Growing Michigan Together at the 2023 Chamber Legislative Luncheon.

As part of Michigan's efforts to address the issue, Governor Gretchen Whitmer announced the creation of the Growing Michigan Together Council in early 2023. They were charged with setting aside differences, appointing workgroups of experts and practitioners, engaging the public, and developing recommendations that support Michigan's population growth through investment in people, places, and education system. During the process, they "reached two milestones on the road to recovery – an in-depth analysis of the challenges we face and a set of actionable recommendations to regain our competitiveness." A third milestone of ensuring momentum through constructive debate and shared commitment lies ahead.

On December 14, the Council published a report of their recommendations which they cite as the beginning of a long process that will require collaboration across all sectors – public, private, and philanthropic. Next steps, according to the Council, are

in the hands of legislators, government officials and the public to act on the findings of the report.

To address identified challenges, the Council landed on transformational strategies that are interwoven and mutually reinforcing to create a Michigan poised for shared prosperity and growth. They include:

1. **Establish Michigan as the Innovation Hub of the Midwest and America's Scale-up State.**
 - a. Develop an economic growth plan that establishes Michigan as the Innovation Hub of the Midwest and America's Scale-up State.
 - b. Target efforts to attract and retain young talent.
2. **Build a lifelong learning system focused on future-ready skills and competencies.**
 - a. Commit to the Michigan Education Guarantee that all students will develop future-ready skills and competencies to thrive in work and life and guarantee up to an additional year of schooling to ensure that all students achieve this standard.
 - b. Reimagine the job of teaching and the structure of the school day, enabling educators to innovate so students can learn for life.
 - c. Make postsecondary education attainment more accessible and affordable by providing all students with access to up to two years of free postsecondary education and creating a seamless lifelong learning system.
 - d. Align governance and accountability across an equitably and efficiently funded lifelong learning system while clarifying roles, eliminating inefficiencies, and bolstering capacity.
3. **Create thriving, resilient communities that are magnets for young talent.**
 - a. Develop robust and reliable regional public transit systems across the state.
 - b. Develop and revitalize housing stock to meet Michigan's housing demands.
 - c. Future proof our infrastructure to ensure Michigan has reliable and resilient infrastructure that serves as an asset to the economy.

The full report is available at <https://growingmichigan.org/wp-content/uploads/2023-12-14-GMTC-Final-Report-2.pdf>.



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