



**March 2021**

## **MICHIGAN IN LINE FOR BILLIONS FROM FEDERAL RELIEF BILL**

As a result of passage of the \$1.9 trillion Federal relief bill, Michigan lawmakers are debating spending scenarios for the COVID-19 Federal aid.

Michigan is due to receive:

- \$10.3 billion in recovery funds for state and local governments.
- Local school districts are expected to receive about \$3.5 billion to help schools reopen safely or address lost learning.
- Head Start programs in the state are set to receive an additional \$34 million.
- Some 1.3 million Michiganders now receiving food benefits under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program will continue to receive an additional \$27.

The Senate has given Majority Leader Mike Shirkey (R-Clarklake) the power to sue Governor Gretchen Whitmer if she allocates COVID-19 relief funds given to the state but not appropriated by the Legislature. Senator Shirkey did not say why this power was needed, but a spokesman described the move as a precaution.

## **GOVERNOR WHITMER SIGNS \$4.2 BILLION SUPPLEMENTAL SPENDING BILLS, BUT WITH SOME VETOES**

Governor Gretchen Whitmer has signed into law supplemental spending to provide more money for vaccine distribution, COVID-19 testing, a \$2.25-an-hour direct care worker pay increase, emergency rental assistance and money for Title 1 schools, but put her veto pen to a legislative property tax relief program, state dollars for the state's unemployment fund, payments to non-public schools and any relief to state liquor and license fees.

The House tried to restore the spending vetoes through four override votes but came up about 10 Democratic votes short. House Republicans countered by sending Governor Whitmer SB 1, which would require public health officials to get legislative approval to extend a public health emergency beyond 28 days.

However, that bill is expected to get the same response as a similar bill – HB 4049 – which puts local health officials, not the state, in charge of closing K-12 schools for in-person instruction due to pandemic concerns which the Governor vetoed.

### **CONTROVERSY OVER COVID-19 HEATS UP**

With a Republican request to investigate the Governor’s nursing home policies having been turned down by Attorney General Dana Nessel, some Republicans are considering appointing a special prosecutor.

Meanwhile, Senate Republicans have started an online petition drive to urge Attorney General Nessel to begin investigating the Governor’s nursing home policies.

The Senate has also passed a resolution denouncing Attorney General Nessel for not investigating whether the Whitmer administration’s decision to allow COVID-19 positive patients back into nursing homes caused more deaths.

### **STATE HOUSE ROLLS OUT HEALTH CARE PLAN**

The Michigan House of Representatives introduced a sweeping bipartisan 15-bill package of legislation aimed to increase access to health care and reduce costs for patients, according to House Speaker Jason Wentworth (R-Farwell).

The proposals include capping insulin co-pays at \$50 for a 30-day supply, give pharmacists more leeway to discuss medication options and pricing with patients, regulate prescription drug “pharmacy benefit managers,” “Right to shop” for medications, expand telehealth, limit gifts to doctors, and prevent providers from charging higher co-pay or deductibles for chemotherapy treatments.

### **HOUSE PASSES ELECTION REFORM BILLS**

Under House-passed election reform legislation (HBs 4127 and 4128), electors who have “placeholder birthdates” on the Qualified Voter File (QVF) or have not voted in the last 20 years would receive a mailing from the Secretary of State asking them to verify they are still eligible to vote.

If the card is not returned or the notice comes back as undelivered the Secretary of State would have to remove those names from the QVF.

## **SENATE DEMOCRATS: NO IMMEDIATE EFFECT IF “BILLS DON’T SOLVE PROBLEMS”**

Any bills that “we know don’t solve problems” will no longer be given passive immediate effect support from the Senate Democrats, lead Senate Democrat on appropriations, Senator Curtis Hertel, Jr. (D-East Lansing) warned the GOP-controlled Senate.

This means if the Democrats stick to that position, any spending bill or policy bill that doesn’t receive at least four Senate Democratic votes on an immediate effect motion goes into legislative purgatory until March 2022.

## **STATE SUPREME COURT DECLINES TO RECONSIDER NONPUBLIC SCHOOL ISSUE**

The Michigan Supreme Court has declined to reconsider its deadlock decision that allows non-public schools to receive financial reimbursement from the state’s General Fund or the School Aid Fund.

The case, Council of Organizations And Others for Education About Parochiaid v. State of Michigan, now returns to the Court of Claims to finalize the Supreme Court ruling.

## **DISTRICTING PANEL TO SEEK NEW MAP-DRAWING DEADLINES**

The state redistricting commission has given its legal counsel permission to team with the Secretary of State to ask the Michigan Supreme Court to change the commission’s constitutional deadline to draw new district maps.

The move comes in light of the United States Census Bureau saying the 2020 census data will not be available until at least September 30 this year, a delay from the originally intended March 31 date.

The issue with the September 30 date, however, is that under the redistricting constitutional amendment the commission is supposed to have its proposed maps out for public comment for 45 days before voting to approve it. The commission is required by the Constitution to get the maps done and voted on by November 1.

## **HOUSE DEMOCRATS WANT STIFF PENALTIES FOR SOME BUSINESSES**

Employers who are delinquent on their unemployment insurance taxes due to fraud would face higher penalties under a six-bill package of legislation rolled out by House Democrats as part of their “Hardworking Michiganders Recovery Plan.”

The package also includes:

- Requiring the Unemployment Insurance Agency (UIA) to submit annual reports to the Legislature regarding employers who are delinquent on their unemployment taxes.
- Having employers keep track of all waitstaff tips and then reporting them in their quarterly reports to the UIA.
- Lowering rework requirements to four weeks for involuntary leave cases and six weeks for discharge cases, instead of the current 12 and 17 weeks, respectively.
- Shifting the burden of proof in cases of involuntary leave for medical reasons to claimants.
- Getting rid of a section that presumes an employee has quit when he or she has been absent without contacting their employer for three straight days.

### **STATE TAX DEADLINE EXTENDED TO MAY 17**

At least once in a while the Governor and lawmakers can agree on something – state taxes don't need to be paid until May 17.

The state tax deadline now matches the extended deadline for federal taxes recently announced by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS).

House Tax Policy Committee Chair Matt Hall (R-Marshall) said the Republican majority plans to introduce legislation to extend the tax deadline for cities as well.