

# MICHIGAN COUNTIES

Official Voice of the Michigan Association of Counties | August 2019

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# MAC

MICHIGAN ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES

MICHIGAN COUNTIES (ISSN 0896-646)

Published By:

Michigan Association of Counties  
110 W. Michigan Ave., Suite 200  
Lansing, MI 48933  
Editor: Derek Melot  
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## LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Unity and cooperation are themes you will see throughout this edition of *Michigan Counties*.

President Ken Borton, for example, discusses how his initial concerns about rural counties being crowded out by their bigger neighbors were quickly allayed with his experience on the MAC Board of Directors. As he says, it's not rural vs. urban, it's rural AND urban.

State Rep. Sue Allor, in her Q&A, touches on the theme by noting her positive experiences in working collectively on problems on the Cheboygan County Board of Commissioners — and contrasting that with her experience at a State Capitol deeply divided by party labels.

And Kent County Administrator Wayman Britt, in urging action on the many fiscal and policy challenges mounting for counties big and small, argues, "The time is now to plan for the counties we want for the future. We must engage now in a unified approach to solving the issues that are plaguing us now and forthcoming on the horizon."

Each day when we are working for you here in Lansing or across the state, MAC staffers operate under these principles: unity, strength in numbers, collaboration, cooperation. Of course, there will be differences of opinion — as there are in your board rooms each month. But we all know the power of working together vs. working separately. And we also know the importance of doing so now, when the demands for services are so high and the cooperation from state officials is, well, so ... inconsistent.

If county leaders join together to express a unified county viewpoint, the news out of Lansing will, I'm sure, become more positive for everyone.

As we see summer winding down, I did want to share some fine news to match the fine weather.

First, we recently concluded our 2019 Regional Summit series, with 151 registered attendees at the four locations used in June and July. This is record attendance for this event, which we have run since 2013. Feedback we received at the sites was uniformly positive about the issues and content presented. Rest assured that the MAC staff will be working hard to top this success, though, with our offerings for the 2020 summits. (And if you have ideas for issues for them, please send along to me at [scurrie@micounties.org](mailto:scurrie@micounties.org).)

The 2019 Annual Conference is just days away. Registrations are again strong for what will be some busy days at the Grand Traverse Resort. If you have not signed up yet, you still can use our **digital platform** to do so by Aug. 16. With interest building in the 2020 elections, I expect Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson will have some intriguing points for attendees during her keynote address.



**Stephan W. Currie**  
MAC Executive Director





## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Has it been a year already? A few days from when you read this, I'll turn over the office of MAC Board President to my colleague and friend Veronica Klinefelt of Macomb County.

I'm confident her energy and passion will serve MAC and Michigan's counties well over the next year.

Change is a constant in life, they say, but I do want to share some parting thoughts formed by my year as President and my years on the MAC Board.

Having been first elected a commissioner to Otsego County in 2010, when the population was 24,164, I am quite familiar with the vantage point of smaller and rural counties. "Who is going to listen to us," I thought, "when they are hearing from the likes of Wayne County, Oakland County, Kent County — counties large enough to have staffers dedicated to making their case to lawmakers in Lansing?"

For my rural colleagues, don't say you haven't had the same thoughts. I know you have, because I've heard a fair number of you say it.

But being involved with MAC has proven to me that even the smallest counties can have a strong voice in Lansing when we work together as MAC. We don't have to feel like a small fish in a big pond, or a fish out of water entirely.

We have an effective, experienced staff that knows how to make a case in Lansing, on Capitol Hill or in your county seat. And they work under the direction of a **Board that reflects Michigan's variety of experiences, circumstances and viewpoints.**

At our conference this month, I, Ken Borton of small Otsego, will step aside for Veronica Klinefelt of rather large, rather urban Macomb (pop. 874,759). And Veronica will have plenty of large county colleagues on the Board she leads — Stan Ponstein of Kent (pop. 653,786), Joe Palamara of Wayne (pop. 1.82 million) and Eileen Kowall of Oakland (pop. 1.2 million). But she also has Joe Stevens of Dickinson (pop. 26,168), Richard Schmidt of Manistee (pop. 24,747) and Joe Bonovetz of Gogebic (16,424).

Board debates at MAC can be just like those in your own counties — vigorous and full of different points of view. If you don't believe me, attend a MAC Board meeting sometime, perhaps at our conference on Aug. 18. Seeing is believing, after all.

Also, study the **policy platforms that guide MAC's work with lawmakers.** These platforms are developed by the Board with help from seven policy committees made up of more than 50 commissioners from, again, counties big and small. (At the Annual Conference, we will vote on these positions for the coming year, so be ready.)

So, if I can leave you with just one thought about MAC, it's this: every county matters. Do your county a favor and be involved.

**Ken Borton**  
President, MAC Board of Directors

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Thank you to all MACPAC members. To support MACPAC, please visit our website, [micounties.org](http://micounties.org).



## LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

# WHAT WILL, MIGHT AND WON'T HAPPEN IN A MICHIGAN GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN

By MAC Governmental Affairs Staff

Government shutdowns seem to happen with increasing frequency. Since 1976, the federal government has had 22 funding gaps, 10 of which have resulted in furloughed employees. The most recent shutdown was the longest in U.S. history and lasted 35 days.

Shutdowns happen when the legislative branch fails to provide appropriations by the beginning of the next fiscal year. At the federal level, we are all familiar with the battles over funding the border wall and immigration in general. But the states have had their share of budget standoffs, too. Minnesota, Michigan, New Jersey and Pennsylvania all have experienced a shutdown (or two) since 2006, when New Jersey shut down for three days.

This year, we appear to be heading down the same path we did in Michigan in 2007 and 2009 due to a stalemate on budget plans. Democratic Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's budget for fiscal year 2020 is predicated on more money to fix our roads and to clean up the funding issues for our schools. The Republican-led Legislature, on the other hand, has shown no hurry to increase revenue, nor has it come up with an agreeable solution to fix our crumbling roads.

In Michigan, our fiscal year runs from Oct. 1 to Sept. 30. If the Legislature and the governor don't agree on a budget prior to 12:01 am on Oct. 1, the government shuts down. Based on the lengthy summer recess from Lansing and the aforementioned stalemates on key priorities, another Michigan shutdown is quite possible.

While Michigan's 2007 and 2009 shutdowns lasted only a few hours, we can use those experiences to glean what will, might and won't happen if they fail to reach an agreement by the deadline.

### What will happen

At 12:01 a.m., all rest areas, parks and campgrounds will close. The Secretary of State's branch offices will not open in the morning. All nonessential state personnel will be furloughed for the duration of the shutdown. All state transportation projects will halt. The departments of Natural Resources, Agriculture, Treasury, Transportation and various agencies, including the Michigan Lottery, Casino Gaming Control Board and State Police posts, will close.

Emergency personnel, however, will remain on duty. The Department of Corrections will close, but the prisons will stay open and be staffed with minimal personnel.



The Department of Energy, Great Lakes and Environment will close, but some staff will likely remain to handle emergencies. The Department of Health and Human Services will also close, but again some staff will remain to handle Medicaid authorizations, emergency foster care placements and respond to child protection and adult protection calls.

Although the State Police posts will close, some law enforcement personnel will remain on duty. And the state's mental hospitals will be open, but, again, with limited staff.

With the closure of the Casino Gaming Control Board, all Detroit casinos would have to close their doors since a casino inspector must be present at all times.

### What might happen

During late-night, last-gasp negotiations prior to a shutdown, the governor and the Legislature may pass a temporary funding plan to keep all governmental operations running until a deal can be reached. This would likely be a short-term budget, known as a "1/12th budget" in the Lansing lingo. It could provide for only the essential personnel and services or it could keep all the cogs turning normally.

If the shutdown lasts for any real length of time (say, two weeks or more), revenue sharing payments to locals could be late and payments to schools would also be suspended. Losses in state revenue would begin to mount due to park, casino and lottery closures.

### What won't happen

The state won't stop its work to keep the public safe. All critical personnel necessary to protect the health and welfare of our citizens will be retained. Prisons, state mental hospitals and protective services will not close.

To be clear, an extended shutdown is unlikely, given how disruptive it would be to services and the economy.

Both the governor and legislators have strong political incentives to keep government operational, even if they can't agree on road dollars or new revenue. County leaders are advised to consult with lawmakers now back in their districts on ideas to resolve these debates well before the clock strikes 12.



## CRC ANALYSIS

# BONDING FOR ROADS: HOW QUICKLY WE FORGET

By Eric Luper, President, Citizens Research Council

As an observer and commenter on state and local government finances in Michigan, I feel compelled to remind our policymakers and finance managers to follow the KISS principle - Keep It Simple, Stupid.



Luper

Much of the state's attention in the first part of the year was focused on Lansing's efforts to find resources to fix the roads. Most agree that more money is needed to fix roads that have slipped into poor condition and better maintain those in good or fair condition. We would also expect the Legislature to look at opportunities to use new and existing funding more efficiently and effectively. This might involve reexamining truck weights, jurisdiction of roads, and funding for transit.

Yet state policymakers are drawn to plans that make funding schemes overly complicated. This erodes confidence in government and makes each subsequent effort to address funding needs more difficult.

The quality of our roads has been a long-standing issue. The first, recent effort to address this issue culminated in the May 2015 constitutional amendment that would have increased the permissible sales tax rate to pay for schools and state revenue sharing so that motor fuel taxes could pay for roads. I started calling this the Rube Goldberg contraption of policy initiatives: Flip a switch, and a complicated chain of reactions leads to a simple result. It was too complicated; voters rejected it.

That led to a lame-duck effort to fund the roads. You'll recall the final agreement settled on a plan to raise \$1.2 billion — an amount acknowledged to be too little — over a long, drawn-out period. Half was to come from new revenues and half from the redirection of existing revenues. We're now four years removed from that agreement and full funding has yet to materialize.

With term limits, many of our current legislators were not around to learn lessons from these unsuccessful efforts. Once again, they seem hell-bent on devising a funding scheme that is as complicated as possible.

I felt the taxpayers of Michigan collectively roll their eyes when the proposal to issue pension obligation bonds was floated recently, in association with a plan to change the amortization period for the teacher pension plan.

Nobody understands the problems of cash flow and frustration with being unable to access financial resources better than county and municipal officials.



But kicking the can further down the road is a gimmick that creates new problems for tomorrow's leaders to address. And the road-funding can has been kicked so often, it's as dented as a car after a demolition derby, if it hasn't been lost in a pothole by now.

What is the lesson for county officials? The KISS principle is best adhered to when the pleasure of spending money is attached to the pain of raising it in the most simple, straightforward way possible.

Often, state and local government officials look for funding schemes that will export taxes to people in another jurisdiction. Pension obligation bonds and lengthening amortization periods are ways to export taxes to future generations — i.e., your children and grandchildren.

These gimmicky schemes are not a replacement for taxes. The simple approach is to understand that governments raise sustainable funding by levying taxes or charging fees. Assets can be sold, but that only provides one-time funding.

Governments do not raise revenue by selling bonds. They borrow against future revenues. Because bonds are sold as investments, the investors want to be paid back with interest. The net result is the creation of extra costs for tomorrow's taxpayers for services provided yesterday.

Yes, pension obligation bonds have been used productively in some places, but employing this financial tool comes with great risk. (Ask anyone in Detroit.)

Likewise, lengthening amortization of liabilities for a closed pension plan asks future taxpayers to

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contribute to the cost of services that were provided in earlier periods. Intergenerational equity suggests that the taxpayers 30 years from now should not be left with a bill for services provided years ago.

Both amortization and bonding are designed to export the financing of a cost over the period when a service or item of infrastructure will be consumed. They are perfectly legitimate funding mechanisms when the pension plans remain open to new participants or to fund infrastructure that will be used for many generations. To use these mechanisms for other purposes, as a means of exporting financial burdens to future generations, is not good government practice.

We have learned that funding schemes are not a replacement for taxes many, many times over the years. That lesson seems to be lost on the current crew in Lansing. How quickly we forget.



MAC strongly supports the work of the **Citizens Research Council of Michigan**, a nonpartisan, independent public policy research organization. MAC Executive Director Stephan Currie currently sits on the CRC Board of Directors.

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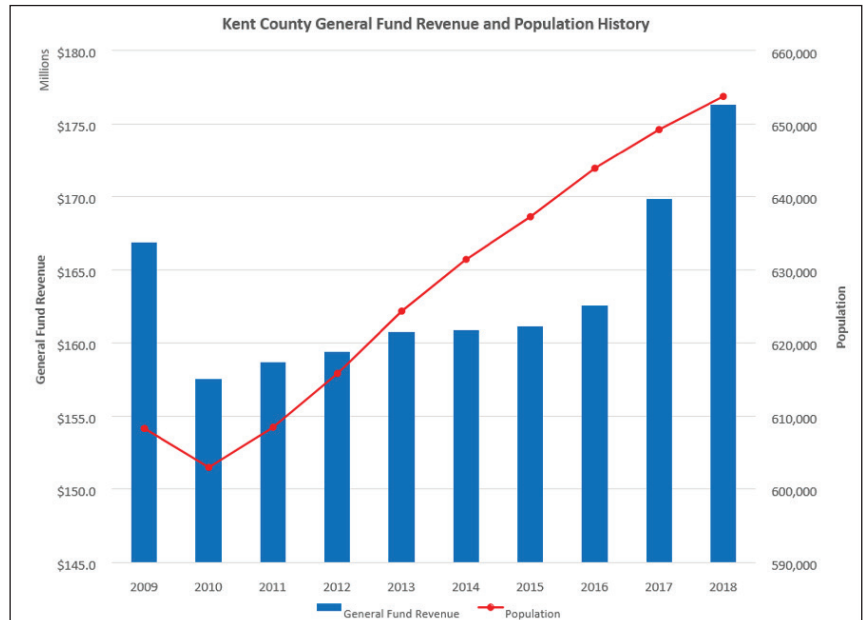


## MACAO ARTICLE

# WHAT SYSTEMS ARE WE CREATING?

By Wayman P. Britt, Kent County Administrator

For the past 15 years, I have had the opportunity to serve in county government as an assistant county administrator and now county administrator/controller. The traditional maxim of “every system is perfectly designed to give you the results you’re getting” that I learned during my previous 20-plus years in operations management at Steelcase, Inc. has become even more evident to me over these last 15 years in local government. As we have worked to address complex problems in our community — such as child welfare reform, environmental issues such as lead base paint abatement and PFAS contamination, housing affordability, criminal justice reform, educational achievement, needed mental health services, and diversity, equity and inclusion — this same adage continues to ring in my ears. In fact, often these social issues are tied together in vexing ways, with multiple incentives and disincentives tied to laws, rules and business practices that limit and/or impair progress.



One of my priorities as county administrator has been to reduce and/or remove organizational silos that harm system improvements and that impede the quality of services. One way we have achieved this is by creating cross-functional leadership teams to oversee both our Parks Department and our labor relations function. These cross-functional teams have improved communication and decision-making.

We have also created a Data Steering Committee with leaders from several departments that work together to leverage organizational data toward better decision making. In fact, to help facilitate this work we hired the county’s first data scientist. If this term is new to you as it was to me, a data scientist is an analytical data expert who has the technical data skills to work toward solving complex problems, and the curiosity to explore what problems need to be solved. They are part math expert, part computer scientist and part trend-spotter. Our belief is that by creating this role we can begin to identify root causes, change our organization’s response, and then measure if our response is changing the results as measured by the data.

Today, many of the big, systemic challenges counties face result from decisions made at the state and federal level. Between the constraints of the Headlee Amendment, Proposal A and tax increment financing districts, county revenue has limited growth potential. Even though property tax values have rebounded from the Great Recession, the constitutional limits on values and revenues will hamper revenue growth for years to come. For Kent County, it took us eight years to surpass our General Fund revenue from 2009. Whether a growing county, like Kent, or a county with stagnant growth, the costs of business are growing faster than the general fund is growing ... just like the system is designed.

As we continue to work together, I encourage us to ask ourselves: What is our systemic response to the state as county leaders? How do we collectively respond to new policy ideas that will harm residents? How do we design and reengineer our business practices to become more efficient and show value to state leaders? How do we create an agenda that drives policy discussion rather than just reacting to the ideas of others? How do we create a system that is perfectly designed to get the results we know we need as local leaders?

The time is now to plan for the counties we want for the future. We must engage now in a unified approach to solving the issues that are plaguing us now and forthcoming on the horizon. We need to change the narrative to read “Our system is flexibly crafted to produce the results we seek.” The words “our system” imply that this effort is a collaboration of many, a collaboration of county and state leadership to stand with a united voice to support our residents. “Flexibly crafted” demonstrates both the precision of craftsmanship as well as the agility of adaptation to the future needs of the greater whole. It is designed with ‘flex’ in mind, knowing that it must continue to evolve as the needs of our communities evolve. “To produce” is action.

Our system demands performance, it demands “results.” Results are outcomes; results are tangible, measurable, reproducible. Results are not happenstance, they are not accidents; they are, in fact, results that “we seek.”

We, a collaborative group of county leaders, must define the results that we seek for our communities. We can no longer exist as reactionaries to the decisions of others, we must lead the way through a system that is flexibly crafted to produce the results that we seek.



## AFFILIATE CORNER

# SHERIFFS ARE DOING MORE WITH LESS

By Pete Wallin/Emmet County Sheriff

The office of sheriff is the oldest form of law enforcement in the world. And sheriffs not only run a law enforcement agency; they also are the warden of a correctional facility and in charge of court security and civil process.

Michigan's 83 sheriffs are faced with an ever-increasing demand for service these days, which they must confront with shrinking resources. The number of officers in sheriff's offices and law enforcement agencies in Michigan has dropped by 1,774 since 2009.

Sheriffs are charged with a multitude of duties that are required by statute. There are more than 300 separate statutes that empower, restrict, provide and direct the sheriff of each county in Michigan. There are other statutory requirements and duties placed on each sheriff, such as court and civil process statutes, correctional law and criminal law.

Some of the duties you might not know that sheriffs carry include: attend Circuit Court, District Court and Probate Court sessions when required by the judge; execute writs of attachment; serve civil and criminal processes; **recover drowned bodies**; and patrol local waters.

Now that many agencies can hire again, we are finding it difficult to recruit qualified officers; this is especially difficult in Northern Michigan, where pay and benefits are less than that of agencies downstate. Many agencies find that after hiring and training new officers, they soon leave for agencies that have better pay and benefits. I have personally witnessed this over the last several years with deputies from my office leaving for agencies or counties adjoining my own. We do an exit interview to see why they are leaving. I always get the same answer: economics (money), retirement plans and better overall benefits.

Current legislative challenges include:

- Changes to civil asset forfeiture
- "Raise the Age" legislation
- A prohibition on using facial recognition software (Senate Bill 342)
- Warrants for Electronic Data (SB 341)
- Expungement of Criminal Records
- Secondary Road Patrol Funding
- Withholding County Jail Reimbursement Program funds for not cooperating with federal immigration officers
- Creating a Forensic Lab Commission (SB 267/277)

Besides these issues, sheriffs have not felt the impact of the recreational marijuana law, which took effect in December 2018. State regulators were given up to a year to develop rules and regulations that will govern the recreational marijuana industry in the state before it begins accepting applications for recreational licenses. Marijuana won't be commercially available for sale until probably early 2020. As

in Colorado, Michigan will see a lag between passage of the law and the negative effects that legal recreational use will bring — and which sheriffs will have to address.

Another challenge for sheriffs today is perception. Since the incidents in Ferguson, Mo., in 2014, sheriffs, like other law officers, have faced a growing negativity. We are now second-guessed on everything we do.

To be clear, law enforcement, like every profession, has a few bad apples. But there are between 750,000 and 850,000 federal, state and local sworn police in the United States and fewer than one-half of 1 percent of them are guilty of misconduct or arrested for crimes.

Michigan sheriffs are proud of the men and women who represent their offices. There is no other profession, besides the military, where men and women put their lives on the line for us every single day. Citizens need to remember their sheriff office is the first line of defense in local self-government. I know as sheriff of Emmet County, and as a representative of the 82 other elected Sheriffs, that it's an honor and privilege to serve and protect the citizens we represent.

*Pete Wallin is president of the Michigan Sheriffs' Association.*  
[www.misheriff.org](http://www.misheriff.org)



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## EXPERT CORNER

# 911 CHANGES AND HOW THEY AFFECT YOU

By Dan Aylward/Abilita

We are all familiar with calling 911 and the simplicity yet significant value it has for our health and well-being. Behind the scenes is a vast and complex infrastructure in our communities. However, with changes in technology come necessary changes with this telecommunications infrastructure. By the end of 2019, every business in Michigan with a phone system will need to comply with changes in regulations governing 911 (with the exceptions below). What are the changes? Below are eight FAQs to help you understand the changes, as well as information that all organizations must understand for compliance.

### What is it?

Not long ago we all used POTS lines (Plain Old Telephone Service) and PRI circuits (think phone lines bundled into one digital circuit). Since these phone lines terminated at one physical address, almost all calls originated from a reasonable physical distance from the phone system. Today with VoIP (Voice over IP) and UC (Unified Communication), someone could literally be anywhere when calling 911. This is a problem when you need to get Emergency Responders on-site ASAP AND to the right area within a large building. The best solution is to send specific geographic identifier information to the PSAP (Public Safety Answering Point) when calling from a MLTS (Multi-Line Telephone System or phone system). This could be address, floor, wing or room information.

### What is the law?

Consider this: An employee has a heart attack after normal working hours with nobody around. He or she dials 911 and the ambulance goes to the wrong address. Worse yet, the emergency responders don't know where the caller is in the building! This is a reality today with VoIP and multiple buildings tied to one phone system. It is for this reason that 911 is being enhanced to E911.

Every business in Michigan with a phone system in a location with more than a 40,000-square-foot building(s) or multiple physical addresses must install equipment and software that reveals where in the building a 911 call comes from. Single floor locations (and farms) with less than 20,000 square feet and fewer than 20 communication devices (i.e., phones) are exempt.

### Is this the same as Next Gen 911?

No. NG 911 is a technology standard that allows PSAPs to adapt to receiving texts, video chat, social media and VoIP. This will also allow the 911 Call Centers to transfer calls to other call centers and deal with call overload. However, many are not ready for this technology. It is also very difficult to know if your local PSAP is capable of handling anything besides calls and SMS (Short Message Service).

### Does 911 need to do anything different?

Yes, the PSAPs need to update their systems as well — and most will because the Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act of 2012 authorized \$112 million to do this and prepare for NG911. But this does not mean all are compliant.

### When will this happen?

With House Bill 4249 recently signed by the governor, one must have a plan in place by the end of this year and changes in effect by Jan. 1, 2021.

### What do we have to do?

Almost all phone equipment eight years old (or newer) is compliant. However, you will need to make sure the phone system database is populated to send the appropriate information to the PSAP. Then you'll need to make sure your telecommunications company (e.g., AT&T) is pushing this information to the PSAP. Every extension on the phone system needs to have the capability to do this. For example: 734 Evergreen Terrace, Springbrook, MI 2nd floor northwest corner. Alternatively, you will have to identify the building(s) into 7,000-square-foot sections as identifiers.

### Is there any ongoing maintenance involved with this?

Yes, when you have MACDs (Move, Adds, Changes, Deletions), you will need to update this database with your telecom carrier. For example, if Michelle from Accounting moves from the 2nd floor to the Marketing Dept on the 1st floor, this information will need to be updated. In addition, if you have connected buildings with one phone system, the street address will need to be updated when an employee moves between buildings.

### What if we don't?

Penalties can be \$500 to \$5,000 per offense; however, the greater concern is a lawsuit for noncompliance where compliance could mean saving someone's life! Exceptions are if the building maintains, on a 24-hour basis, an alternative method of notification and adequate means of signaling and responding to emergencies or the phone system is not serviced by E911.

### Conclusion

The telecommunications industry and services have changed radically over the past decade. These transitions may bring difficulties, but it is important to incorporate standards for public safety of all staff.

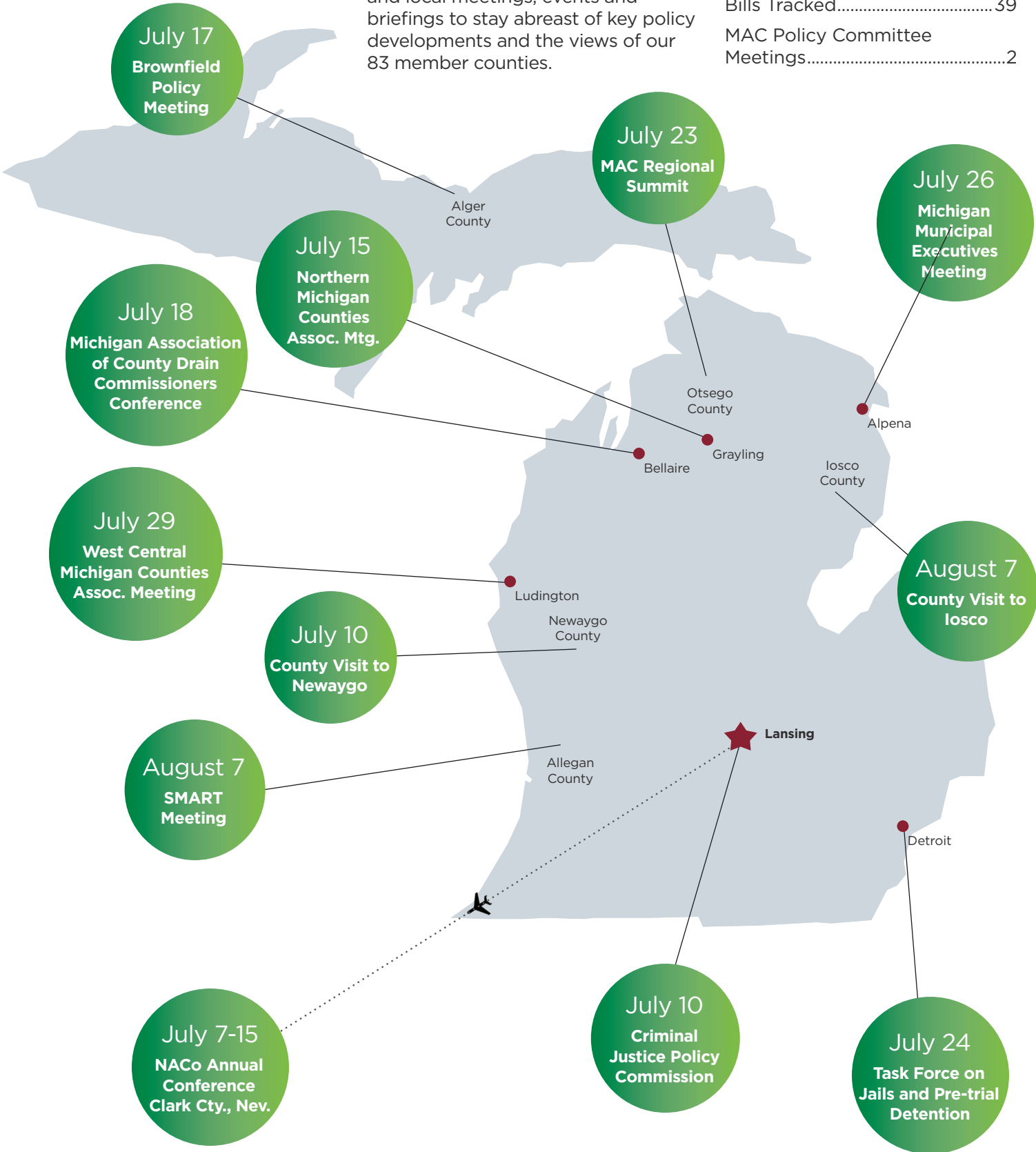
*Dan Aylward is a senior consultant with Abilita, one of MAC's sponsored programs. To learn more about what Abilita can do for you, [click here](#).*



# MAC IN ACTION

MAC staffers regularly attend state and local meetings, events and briefings to stay abreast of key policy developments and the views of our 83 member counties.

- Legislative Meetings.....19
- Bills Tracked.....39
- MAC Policy Committee Meetings.....2



July 17  
Brownfield Policy Meeting

July 23  
MAC Regional Summit

July 26  
Michigan Municipal Executives Meeting

July 15  
Northern Michigan Counties Assoc. Mtg.

July 18  
Michigan Association of County Drain Commissioners Conference

July 29  
West Central Michigan Counties Assoc. Meeting

July 10  
County Visit to Newaygo

August 7  
SMART Meeting

July 7-15  
NACo Annual Conference Clark Cty., Nev.

July 10  
Criminal Justice Policy Commission

July 24  
Task Force on Jails and Pre-trial Detention

August 7  
County Visit to Iosco

## BEST PRACTICES

# OTTAWA TAKES BOARD MEETING ON ROAD

Your county might not make history like his did, but Ottawa County Board Chair **Greg DeJong** urges all his Michigan colleagues to take their meetings “on the road” to meet young people — and anyone else.



DeJong

DeJong and his Ottawa County colleagues held what was called a **“historic” board meeting** on Nov. 15, 2018, on the campus of Grand Valley State University (GVSU) in Allendale.

“Once or twice a year, I go in front of (the GVSU) Student Senate and talk to them about things that would be interesting to them: public safety, parks, etc.,” said DeJong, “and try to find out if there is any feedback from senators that would be good for the county. It’s fun. When you speak to these young people ... it clicks with them.”

DeJong asked the students about an on-campus session of the county’s Board and they liked it. Approval from his county colleagues came swiftly — and not just from fellow commissioners.

“I spoke with other elected officials, too — sheriff, register of deeds, clerk, prosecutor — everyone said they wanted to be part of this first meeting,” DeJong added.

But first came the prep work.

“We worked with a couple of the Student Senate members to plan the event,” said Misty Cunningham, assistant to County Administrator Al Vanderberg, “and Janessa Smit, executive director of the Allendale Chamber of Commerce, was also extremely helpful in the planning process. We had to be sure the location was posted well in advance and communicated really well that it was different than usual. We also made sure to give a map of the campus with directions on where to go as well as park so the public attending the meeting didn’t have to get a parking permit.”

At his end, DeJong worked to make sure the meeting itself would be attractive. “I (advise others) to try to have stuff on agenda that would be informative to group you are in front of,” he explained.



Ottawa Commissioner Matthew Fenske (standing) makes a point during a November 2018 meeting of the Ottawa Board at Grand Valley State University in Allendale. (Photo courtesy of Ottawa County)

Among the topics for the session were: a Clean Vessel Grant Agreement; a grant request for the Ottawa Sands Master Plan; a building sale and a lease agreement; and approval of county park fees.

Interesting they must have been, since attendance at the session was pegged at 150 in mid-afternoon. “The room was packed,” DeJong said. “We had lots of leadership members of the university there, too. And we may have another (meeting) in the fall.”

Not all counties have a large public university within their borders, but DeJong said that shouldn’t deter them from finding new or different audiences.

“Go, even if it’s a high school government class,” he said. “We have talked about that in pulling together two or three of them (for a meeting). ... It’s educational and it shows whatever group you are in front of that you truly care. ... Sometimes people think government officials are way out in the distance and they don’t have opportunities to interact. This gives them chance to do so.

“I’m old school. I like to put faces and names together,” he added.

## SHARE YOUR ‘BEST PRACTICES’ WITH MAC

From challenges come creativity, and boy have Michigan’s counties been challenged in the 21st century.

MAC continues to highlight how counties have found ways to continue or expand services in the most hostile of fiscal environments. Our “Best Practices” initiative isn’t a competition, but a celebration — of Great Lakes ingenuity, passion and plain ol’ grit.

Big or small, technical or simple, we want to hear how you have found a new way to serve your constituents.

Please send a brief description and contact information for the point person of your “Best Practice” to Derek Melot, [melot@micounties.org](mailto:melot@micounties.org).

For questions, call Melot at 517-372-5374.



HOW COUNTIES ARE TURNING CHALLENGES INTO OPPORTUNITIES



## MACNEWS

# AGENDA FINALIZED FOR 2019 GATHERING AT GRAND TRAVERSE RESORT

The 2019 Michigan Counties Annual Conference, “People and Places,” will be held Aug. 18-20 at the Grand Traverse Resort in Grand Traverse County.

More than 300 county leaders and others are expected to attend this year’s event, which will include:

- Three plenary sessions featuring addresses from Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson, Ellisa Johnson of the U.S. Census Bureau, MAC Executive Director Stephan Currie, incoming MAC Board President Veronica Klinefelt of Macomb County and more. (Please note that this schedule is subject to change.)
- Fifteen policy breakout sessions on trending topics ranging from the tips on hiring in the 21st century and the Open Meetings Act, to electric vehicle tech and trends in Michigan’s economy. (See the **Attendee Registration Packet** for details.)
- The annual President’s Banquet, with after-dinner

entertainment from “Jasen Magic.”

- Two receptions with complimentary beverages and snacks.
- Regional caucuses to fill five seats on the MAC Board of Directors
- The annual MAC Business Meeting, during which members will approve our policy platforms for 2019-20.
- An Exhibitor Show with dozens of vendors that provide services of use to counties big and small.

Jocelyn Benson has more than a decade of experience as a national leader in election law and administration. She is the author of *Secretaries of State: Guardians of the Democratic Process*, the first major book on the role of the Secretary of State in enforcing election and campaign finance laws, and promoting fair, accessible and secure elections. Benson has a proven track record of success in leading institutions, cutting costs and improving services. As the former dean of Wayne State University Law School, she froze tuition,



expanded access to scholarship funds for all students and bolstered the school’s reputation and bar passage rates. She also established programs to promote government oversight, provide free legal services for veterans, and help aspiring entrepreneurs participate in the economic revival of Detroit. She is currently CEO and Executive Director of the Ross Initiative in Sports for Equality (RISE), a national nonprofit. Benson serves on several national boards including the advisory board of iCivics, a nonprofit founded by retired U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O’Connor and dedicated to engaging students in meaningful civic learning.

## OPEN MEETINGS ACT WILL BE FOCUS OF BREAKOUT SESSION AT 2019 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Matt Nordfjord, a shareholder with the firm of Cohl, Stoker & Toskey, P.C. in Lansing, will present on the Michigan Open Meetings Act (OMA) during a breakout on Tuesday, Aug. 20 at the 2019 Michigan Counties Annual Conference at the Grand Traverse Resort.

The topics covered will include:

- The purpose of the OMA
- Rights of the public
- Legal requirements and best practices for public comment
- Notice requirements for regular and special meetings
- The permitted basis to enter closed sessions (identifying their purpose)
- When and how to formalize a decision after a closed session
- Minutes and penalties for violations
- Recent changes to the OMA related to participation by video or phone and options for your board to consider

This is an excellent opportunity to get all your meeting questions answered in a single spot by a top expert on the law.

If you have not registered for the conference, there is still time to do so via MAC’s **online portal**.

**MACNEWS**

**CANDIDATES FILE FOR MAC BOARD SEATS**

Six commissioners met the July 18 deadline to file for election to the MAC Board of Directors at the upcoming Annual Conference.

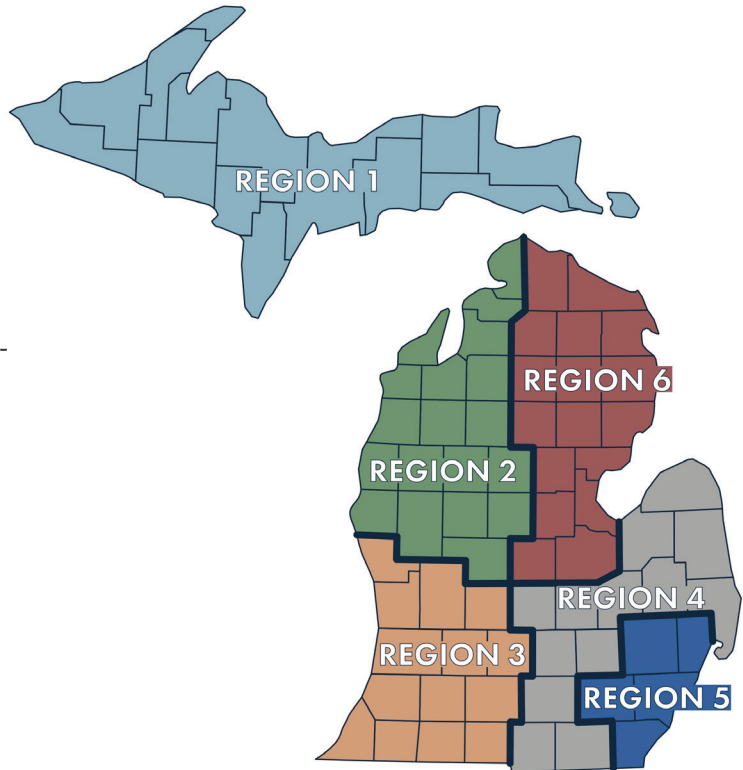
Incumbent Board Directors Vaughn Begick (Bay - Region 6), Donald Parker (Livingston - Region 4), Robert Showers (Clinton - Region 4) and Kyle Harris (Saginaw - At-large) did not draw opponents.

For the fifth seat, one being vacated by MAC Board President Ken Borton, two candidates filed for a three-year term:

- Scott Noesen of Midland County
- Rob Pallarito of Otsego County

To learn more about the candidates, [click here](#).

Seats representing regions are filled by a vote in regional caucuses at the conference. At-large seats are filled by the candidate that wins a majority of the six regional caucuses. The caucuses will meet at 3:15 p.m. on Monday, Aug. 19 at the Grand Traverse Resort. Commissioners must be registered for the Annual Conference in order to participate in MAC elections.



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**MACNEWS**

**FORMER MAC BOARD PRESIDENT TAUB APPOINTED TO NACO BOARD AS PART OF LARGE MICHIGAN CONTINGENT ON NATIONAL PANELS**

Oakland County Commissioner Shelley Taub, who served as president of the MAC Board in 2016-17, was appointed to the Board of the National Association of Counties (NACo) during NACo's recent Annual Conference.

At the same event, Taub also was re-appointed as chair of NACo's **Arts and Culture Commission** and vice chair of its **Human Services and Education Steering Committee**.

"I am honored to have been reappointed to these leadership roles," Taub stated in an Oakland County release. "I look forward to building on the work that we've already accomplished and continuing to address important issues that impact all of us."

Joining Taub on the Arts and Culture Commission are fellow MAC Board members Julie Rogers of Kalamazoo and Stan Ponstein of Kent County. Overall, 34 county leaders from Michigan are serving on one of NACo's committees or panels, including other MAC Board Directors Vaughn Begick (Bay), Christian Marcus (Antrim), Phil Kuyers (Ottawa), Joe Stevens (Dickinson) and current Board President Ken Borton (Otsego).



Taub



Rogers



Ponstein



Begick



Marcus



Kuyers



Stevens



Borton

Taub was first elected to the MAC Board in 2012. As president in 2016-17, she spearheaded the creation of **MAC's Commissioners Forum**, an online message board where Michigan commissioners can post questions and share best practices.



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## MEET YOUR MAC BOARD

# PHIL KUYERS AND VERONICA KLINEFELT



**Name:** Phil Kuyers  
**County/MAC Region:** Ottawa County/  
 Region 2  
**Position:** Second Vice President  
**County Service:** Ottawa County  
 Commissioner, 2001-present

**Profession:** Retired dairy farmer, though still working part-time for Victory Farms; part owner of Pigeon Creek Golf Course

**Previous public service:** Ottawa County Parks Board; past president of Ottawa County Farm Bureau

**If you could tell Michigan commissioners one thing about MAC's work in Lansing, what would it be?**

MAC staff does a great job of being our eyes and ears in Lansing to help serve the counties and be our lobbyists so we, as commissioners, can better serve our constituents.



**Name:** Veronica Klinefelt  
**County/MAC Region:** Macomb County/  
 Region 5  
**Position:** First Vice President  
**County Service:** Macomb County  
 Commissioner, 2014-present

**Previous public service:** East Detroit School Board Member, 8 years; Eastpointe mayor pro tem, 6 years

**What will be your top priority as MAC Board President for 2019-2020?**

Participation in MAC is crucial to have a real time working knowledge of the actions being considered by our Legislature and how those actions may affect your county. MAC's staff is in the halls of the Capitol daily. They monitor all new legislation introduced into committee to evaluate the impact on counties. MAC staff members frequently testify during committee hearings and have had a significant impact protecting the interests of counties and the residents who receive county services. MAC is a valuable source of information and offers Regional Summits to educate commissioners on topics important to them. I would encourage all commissioners to take advantage of the services offered to them by MAC.



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## LEGISLATOR Q&A

# SENATOR JEFF IRWIN



**Name:** Sen. Jeff Irwin

**District/counties:** 18th Senate District/  
Washtenaw

**Committees:** Senate Appropriations (Universities and Community Colleges, General Government, Community Health and Human Services subcommittees), Judiciary, Oversight, JCAR

**Term #:** 1

**Previous public service:** State representative, 2011-2016; Washtenaw County commissioner, 1999-2010.

### What is the most pressing issue facing Michigan now?

Michigan used to be a state that invested heavily in public education. Great educators came from and came to Michigan. We had strong K-12 and higher education systems and our economy benefitted from this investment in our human capital.

Now, Michigan is lagging the pack. Our per pupil K-12 allocation to classrooms is less than average for states and we are falling further behind inflation every year. Even as some leaders tout the “highest allocation ever” each year, costs are increasing faster than budgets. At the same time, higher education is being pushed out of reach for middle class families and Michigan is in the bottom quartile for need-based financial aid.

### Based on your experience, how important are counties to the effective delivery of public services?

Counties are essential units that are well-sized for service delivery. From more visible services like public safety and mental health care to more discreet community needs like environmental health or veterans services, counties are great vehicles for service. Counties also play an important role in providing local accountability and governance.

### The state has faced several environmental challenges over the past few years, including within Washtenaw County. What are your goals for Michigan environmental policy moving forward?

I would like a greater focus on maximizing Michigan’s participation in the response to climate change. I care about pollution prevention and public health but to put it in purely economic terms, Michigan has a lot to gain from getting in front of the big changes ahead.

Our energy economy is changing; the state can lead and finance projects that make Michigan more energy-efficient and self-sufficient. From helping homeowners and local

governments save money and reduce waste to pushing the transition to cleaner, cheaper sources of energy, I want Michigan to be a leader in this growing space.

Michigan is already a leader in agriculture and agricultural research. We know that small changes in climate can make a big difference to our farms and our food. We can be leaders in managing these changes. These are just a couple examples of how we can see the changes ahead and prepare in ways that minimize damage and maximize our potential.

### Based on your experience as a county commissioner and as a member of the General Government Appropriations Subcommittee, how do you think counties fare on state funding, compared to other local units? What changes, if any, would you advise for Michigan’s system of financing local government?

Our municipal finance system is broken. If the state is going to prevent options for counties to raise revenue, then the state should be more attentive to the needs of local governments. This isn’t a new problem and revenue sharing often seems like one of the first line items to be squeezed when the state budget is under pressure. I’d like to open up some of those options.

### Criminal justice reform has been a key issue for all branches of government, as well as counties. What do you hope to be the next big issue Michigan tackles regarding the criminal justice system?

I am hopeful that the next big criminal justice issue that the legislature will handle is expungements. Many people in Michigan have a record for some sort of criminal conviction in their past that holds them back from employment or from help with an education. In many cases, those people deserve a second chance and I am excited about a few different ideas to make that more available.

Specifically, I am hopeful that my bill, Senate Bill 416, or something similar, will be passed soon. This bill automatically sets aside the records of low-level marijuana offenders and gives individuals with a manufacture or distribution charge additional opportunities to get in front of a judge to seek a set aside of their record.

One important element of this change affects county courts. I think it is essential that we automatically set aside the lowest level offenses (use and possession) because I don’t want to make our people pay more or to make them file more paperwork. Similarly, I don’t want the county courts to be burdened with the process and paperwork associated with the 235,000 people who are affected by these lowest-level crimes.

## LEGISLATOR Q&A

# REPRESENTATIVE SUE ALLOR



**Name:** Rep. Sue Allor

**District/counties:** 106th House District/Alpena, Presque Isle, Alcona, Iosco, Cheboygan

**Committees:** House Appropriations; Natural Resources & Environmental Quality Appropriations Subcommittee

(chair); Health & Human Services Appropriations Subcommittee; General Government Appropriations Subcommittee; School Aid & Michigan Department of Education Appropriations Subcommittee

**Term:** 2nd

**Previous public service:** Cheboygan county commissioner, three terms; North Country Community Mental Health Board; District Health Department #4 Board; Northeast Michigan Council of Service Associations

### What is the most pressing issue facing Michigan now?

Two words/one issue: Identity politics. As a county commissioner on a seven-member board, there were times when discussions ended in disagreements, but decisions were made. Those decisions did not necessarily satisfy all the parties involved, but at least there had been discussion allowing a commissioner to explain his/her rationale on his/her views.

The current situation within state government and the general populace is such that when disagreements occur, there seems to be no discussion, no explanation of rationale and no to little compromise. It seems it is "You're either with us or you're not," rather than "We can work together."

Unfortunately, these behaviors do not benefit the state. It's time to have more frank, open and honest discussion at all levels and realize that quite often people want the same thing, it's just the route taken that may vary.

### Based on your experience, how important are counties to the effective delivery of public services?

Local governments – cities, villages, townships and counties – are the foundation of effective government. They provide opportunities for residents to become involved, to express their concerns and to participate. The role of the county in delivering services to its residents is effective, however, due to many of the state mandates, their effectiveness in providing the services is threatened.

As an example, the revision to the revenue sharing process hit counties hard and forced them to re-structure budgets, quite often with significant, ongoing cuts. Additionally, the operational costs related to the Child Care Fund, sheriff departments, health departments and mental health care increase with additional mandates, while revenues from the state are reduced. Counties focus on cost-effectiveness through partnerships with other counties in areas such as recycling, regional transportation and economies of scale in the areas of health and welfare.

Elected officials truly KNOW their county. They KNOW the dynamics and the needs. They are focused on delivering needed services to the populace. There are no other levels of government capable of providing effective local services within a county. The importance of counties in the effective delivery of public services cannot be understated, but their ability to provide effective public services should not be compromised through state mandates.

### As a ranking member on the House Appropriations Committee, what do you see as the biggest financial challenge for the state budget?

The single biggest issue, which unfortunately impacts many other areas of government, is spending continues to rise. Although there have been attempts to reduce spending and/or increase revenue, those attempts seem

**Continued on page 19**

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Trust is earned. We are committed to doing what it takes to uphold our pledge to protect our Great Lakes while safely meeting Michigan's energy needs.

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entered into an agreement with the State of Michigan. This agreement includes seven key actions that we are undertaking to move toward a long-term solution for the future of Line 5.

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## LEGISLATOR Q&A : REPRESENTATIVE SUE ALLOR from page 18

to impact counties and taxpayers through unfunded mandates, funding reductions, increased taxation, etc.

### **PFAS affects many areas of the state. What steps have you taken to understand and address the issue?**

Perfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) have been identified as a chemical family of great concern globally. I first became aware of PFAS in 2016 and began reading various reports that included U.S. Environmental Protection Agency documents and the C-8 Science Panel Study. The health concerns identified in the research were significant, prompting me to bring this issue to the attention of House leadership.

In December 2017, a \$23 million supplemental appropriation, focused on PFAS, was approved to enhance data collection and research. Gov. Rick Snyder established the Michigan PFAS Action Response Team (MPART), which currently has an advisory board with representation from seven state agencies that reports biweekly. Since its inception, I have participated in those conference calls and discussions. I've had frequent communication with the directors of local health departments regarding needs, well-testing results and actions taken. In addition, I've many PFAS public forums in my district.

A tour of Lake VanEtten in Oscoda Township, which has extremely high levels of PFAS chemicals, allowed me to see the PFAS foam generated by wave action on windy days and hear from the residents on the lake as to the impact this contamination has had on their lives — health

concerns, declining property values, inability to swim in the lake and a ban or limitations on eating certain fish found in the lake. Recently, I had the opportunity to tour the GAC Filtration System in place at the former Wurtsmith Air Force Base that filters out a variety of chemicals, including several found in the PFAS family.

It's extremely important to have ongoing communication with citizens and elected officials in the impacted communities and continued discussion and updates from the military, as the sites in my district are primarily due to military base activities. Additionally, as chair of the Appropriations sub-committees for the Departments of Natural Resources and Environment, Great Lakes and Energy, it was important to secure funding for wildlife research to further explore the impact of these "forever" chemicals on our wildlife, as the consumption of deer, fish and fowl by Michiganders is quite often a "way of life."

### **Would you support a proposal that would change the length of a county commissioner term from two years to four?**

Yes. As a former county commissioner, I realized early on that there was a LOT to learn — not only knowledge of governmental process and current issues, but also the background on issues that affected counties. A commissioner's first two years (one term) carry a high learning curve. While the knowledge gained in that time is a great foundation for subsequent terms and continued growth, the ability to focus on learning and growing should not be interrupted with having to campaign for another term just two years later.

## MAC EVENTS CALENDAR

### **Aug. 18-20, 2019**

**Michigan Counties Annual Conference**  
Grand Traverse Resort,  
Acme, Grand Traverse County

### **Sept. 6, 2019**

**MAC Finance Committee Meeting**  
10 a.m. to 12 p.m.  
MAC Offices, Lansing

### **Sept. 13, 2019**

**MAC Environmental, Natural Resources and Regulatory Affairs Committee Meeting**  
10 a.m. to 12 p.m.  
MAC Offices, Lansing

### **Sept. 20, 2019**

**MAC General Government Committee Meeting**  
10 a.m. to 12 p.m.  
MAC Offices, Lansing

### **Sept. 23, 2019**

**MAC Health and Human Services Committee Meeting**  
10 a.m. to 12 p.m.  
MAC Offices, Lansing

### **MAC Judiciary and Public Safety Committee Meeting**

2 p.m. to 4 p.m.  
MAC Offices, Lansing

### **Sept. 27, 2019**

**MAC Transportation Committee Meeting**  
10 a.m. to 12 p.m.  
MAC Offices, Lansing

### **October 4, 2019**

**MAC Finance Committee Meeting**  
10 a.m. to 12 p.m.  
MAC Offices, Lansing