

MICHIGAN COUNTIES



Devastating blow

'Ax Tax' plan would lay waste to county finances



Contents



- 3 Letter from the Executive Director**
- 5 Letter from the President**
- 10 MAC News**
MAC HONORS RECORD CLASS FOR COUNTY COMMISSIONER ACADEMY
MAC JOINS BALLOT CAMPAIGN TO RESTORE LOCAL CONTROL ON ENERGY FACILITIES
MAC SEEKS NOMINATIONS TO HIGHLIGHT OPIOIDS EFFORTS
LAKE'S ARQUETTE PASSES
- 12 CRC Analysis**
BALLOT 'AX' WOULD DEVASTATE LOCAL FINANCES
- 14 Legislative Update**
COUNTY FUNDING SQUEEZE: CAUGHT BETWEEN A HEADLEE AND A PROPOSAL
- 16 Legal Corner**
WHAT HAS CHANGED WITH ARBITRATION UNDER PA 312?
- 18 Expert Corner**
DIGITAL HEALTH TOOLS AREN'T JUST GOOD FOR EMPLOYEES — EMPLOYERS BENEFIT, TOO
- 20 Affiliate Corner**
TREATMENT CENTER EFFORTS CONTINUE ON POSITIVE TREND
- 22 MACAO Corner**
KALAMAZOO COUNTY'S SUCCESS STORY ON CHILD CARE
- 25 Legislator Q&A**
REP. JOHN FITZGERALD
- 27 Meet Your MAC Board**
STAN PONSTEIN AND JOSEPH PALAMARA

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Letter from the Executive Director



STEPHAN W. CURRIE
MAC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

“County prosecutor offices are being squeezed by a staffing crisis and a related increase in workloads prompted by Michigan’s indigent defense system.”

The breadth and depth of the challenges confronting Michigan county government have rarely been more evident than during an April 8 meeting at MAC.

County prosecutor offices are being squeezed by a staffing crisis and a related increase in workloads prompted by Michigan’s indigent defense system.

Michigan sheriffs are increasingly concerned about the requirements to serve in their field.

County clerks are busy as usual — it is an election year, after all — but also contending with the requirements brought by Proposal 2 of 2022 and a flurry of potential election law changes being discussed in the State Capitol.

County treasurers have their eyes on Senate Bill 705, the so-called “Zillow bill,” which would impose a huge new administrative duty on them to fulfill practically any data request you could imagine.

Have you been paying attention to “deed fraud”? Well, registers of deeds have, as they are caught between this trending crime to steal houses and the restrictions of state law that force them to basically accept any properly filled out form.

These and other topics were discussed at our County Summit, a regular gathering of the representatives of county groups in our state. Summit sessions date back to 2019, an outgrowth of MAC’s strategic planning emphasis on enhanced collaboration with countywide elected officials.

The value of such sessions, and the spirit behind them, was as bright that day as the sun prior to the moon’s passage across it on that eclipse day.

Michigan elects different county officers to perform different tasks, but the job is the same: provide quality public service to our communities. To ensure that, all of us involved in county government need to grab every opportunity to speak in unison, to prevent a united front before state and federal lawmakers.

Rest assured, MAC will continue to lead such collaboration to strengthen the voice of county governments. ♦



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Letter from the President



Jim Storey

JIM STOREY
PRESIDENT, MAC BOARD OF
DIRECTORS

“It takes thousands of solar field acres to generate electricity equivalent to one smallish traditional generating station.”

Energy. As Michigan and the nation enter the second half of the century’s second decade, increasing demand for electric energy is becoming a problem.

The turn towards electric vehicles is but one new source of demand. Another is the rapid development of artificial intelligence, AI for short. The exponential growth in the use of this technology is driving the development of large data centers that have outpaced, several times over, projections utilities developed to predict demand growth.

A recent *Washington Post* story reported that one data center project in Portland, Oregon, would require an electrical demand equal to that of 45,000 homes.

Here in Michigan the scramble for enough power for the future has led to emerging conflicts. As utilities large and small switch-off coal-fired generating stations, finding enough replacement power is focused on locating green energy sources, windmills, and solar fields, combined with low-carbon emitting natural gas fueled generators and, surprisingly, nuclear.

It takes thousands of solar field acres to generate electricity equivalent to one smallish traditional generating station. One of our MAC committees was informed that 700,000 acres in the southern half of the lower peninsula is eyed by one utility for solar field installations. Most of those acres are now in agricultural use.

This green energy scramble led the legislature last November to strip location decisions for solar fields and windmills away from local governments. It invested that authority in the state’s three-member public service commission.

This latest attempt to remove local land use decisions sparked the creation of an initiative group, Citizens for Local Choice. Led by Lenawee County Commissioner Kevon Martis, the group is in the midst of a drive to collect 500,000 petition signatures to allow voters to adopt legislation that would return these land use decisions to local elected officials.

Because of the core issue, local control, your MAC Board, along with the townships’ association and Michigan Farm Bureau, has endorsed the Citizens for Local Choice drive. The board also authorized a financial contribution to the group. (If you want to collect signatures, the citizens group will send petitions to you. See page 10 for details.)

Powering Michigan’s future requires abundant electric supplies. That future also requires preserving local land use decisions. The two futures are complementary if, to adapt a phrase, not subjected to unnecessary power grabs. ♦



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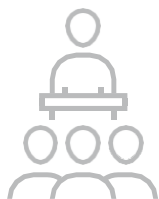


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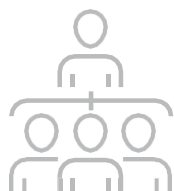
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MAC seeks nominations to highlight opioids efforts

The Michigan Association of Counties aims to spotlight local governments that are demonstrating promising practices on the opioids crisis, in alignment with national guidance.

Individuals can nominate their local government (jurisdiction) for recognition by the MAC. There is no deadline on when you can submit a nomination.

Through a nomination, the work of local governments may also be shared with the National Association of Counties' Opioid Solutions Center (www.naco.org/program/opioid-solutions-center) for recognition and with the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health as a nomination for its Awards for Excellence in the Application of the Opioid Litigation Principles.

Go to <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/93XJ7FG> to nominate your local government.



MAC honors record class for County Commissioner Academy

MAC's County Commissioner Academy (CCA) honored its largest graduating class ever during festivities at the 2024 Michigan Counties Legislative Conference.

Sixty-six county commissioners earned recognition as "certified" or "advanced." Commissioners who attended the conference were presented their certificate by MAC President Jim Storey. Those who were unable to attend will be shipped their certificate.

Participants in CCA earn continuing education "hours" by attending designated events and workshops. "Certification" is offered at two different levels: "Certified" is reached at 10 hours, while "Advanced" is reached with 20 hours. In addition to MAC events, credit-qualified presentations also are offered by MSU Extension and the Michigan Department of Treasury.

For more information, visit micounties.org.

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- William Miller, Oakland
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- Mike Chappell, Van Buren
- Kurt Doroh, Van Buren
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- Brian Potter, Wexford
- Julie Theobald, Wexford
- John Taylor, Kalamazoo
- Carol Hennessy, Kent
- Monica Sparks, Kent
- Walter Bujak, Kent
- Clyde Welford, Lake
- Gwenne Allgaier, Leelanau
- Terry Collins, Lenawee
- Doug Helzerman, Livingston
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- Sarah Lucido, Macomb
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- Mai Xiong, Macomb
- Linda Howard, Mecosta
- Tom O'Neil, Mecosta
- Chris Jane, Mecosta
- Raymond Steinke, Mecosta
- Jerrilynn Strong, Mecosta

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- Dennis Poirier, Bay
- Karen Cunningham, Benzie
- Chokwe Pitchford, Berrien
- Robert Harrison, Berrien
- Jon Houtz, Branch
- Joyce Locke, Cass
- David Hoefling, Clare
- Brian Gutowski, Emmet
- Michelle Davis, Genesee
- Scott Sieffert, Grand Traverse
- Tom Tikkanen, Houghton
- Irene Cahill, Ingham
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- Jack Shattuck, Ionia
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- Thomas Emery, Shiawassee
- Gail Patterson-Gladney, Van Buren
- Paul Shincariol, Van Buren
- Richard Godfrey, Van Buren
- Caroline Sanders, Washtenaw



MAC joins ballot campaign to restore local control on energy facilities

The MAC Board of Directors has voted to join the Citizens for Local Choice, a coalition of groups pushing for a statewide vote to repeal sections of a state law that put an unelected state panel in final charge of siting of energy generation facilities.

“What we have heard from our own counties, and from colleagues across the state, is that this law enacted last year is a clear attack on local control, an attack Michigan’s 83 counties cannot to continue,” said Jim Storey, president of the MAC Board of Directors and chair of the Allegan County Board. MAC is aware of at least nine counties that already have passed resolutions in support of the ballot campaign.

MAC consistently opposed the act as it worked its way through the State Capitol last year, testifying on the consequences of usurping local control and suggesting changes that could facilitate the generation of clean energy without making the state Public Service Commission the final answer on local land use.

“It’s unfortunate we have reached this point, but this measure is so ill-conceived, so counter to the interests of communities and good governance, that MAC has to take this stand,” added Stephan Currie, executive director.

The coalition now has petitions in the field to collect the 550,000 signatures the group thinks is advisable to meet state requirements for ballot proposals. Only 356,958 valid signatures are needed under state law, but the coalition has set a higher goal to ensure the legal requirement is easily met.)

Time is short, though, as the deadline to collect signatures is approaching on May 29, the deadline to reach the November 2024 ballot.

For the latest on this topic, visit micounties.org.

Lake’s Arquette passes

Donald Arquette, a Lake County commissioner, passed on March 23.



ARQUETTE

Arquette took office on the Lake County Board in 2019, but he had already engaged in long commitment to public service, including 16 years in the Lake County Sheriff’s Reserves and 14 years on the County Building Authority. He also was a member of the county’s Planning Commission and the Elk Township Board of Review.

He was 74.



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Ballot ‘ax’ would devastate local finances

BY ERIC LUPHER/CITIZENS RESEARCH COUNCIL OF MICHIGAN



Eric Luper is president of the Citizens Research Council of Michigan.

Michigan’s county leaders are well-advised to start learning today about the group “AxMITax” and the realities of a world in which they succeed at the ballot.

revenue, as it is for schools, local governments and more. Overall, property taxes yielded a total of \$17.9 billion in 2022.

This group is pushing a proposed constitutional amendment that would:

- Prohibit the state, counties, municipal governments and school districts from levying property taxes;
- Require supermajorities of voters to approve other local taxes and of the Legislature to increase state taxes;
- Increase the percentages of state sales, income, marijuana, alcohol and tobacco tax revenues distributed to local governments; and
- Require that tax revenue distributed by the state to local governments could be used only to fund essential government and infrastructure services.

The proposal, after wiping out all this revenue, suggests replacing it with what money the state has — and the proposal would lop \$3 billion out of the state’s resources before any sharing even begins. While this could add mean \$600 million for local governments, you can see quickly the chasm opening beneath every public service budget.

Also, the provision for a per capita distribution of revenues to counties and municipal governments does not begin to recognize the variances in local governments service responsibilities driven by population density and other factors.

The state funds could be used only to fund infrastructure, public safety, courts and court personnel, emergency management personnel and the workers and vendors that support

The property tax is the primary source of county



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.

their operations and service delivery. Funding for many other services would simply ... end — unless a new non-property tax is authorized for local governments.

No one likes paying taxes. And property taxes tend to be the least liked among the disliked taxes because they're paid in lump sums and based on the property value — rather than the ability to pay. Property taxes also create negative consequences such as a negative business environment and foreclosures that put people out of their homes.

Still, it must be recognized that people and businesses choose where to locate based on the quality of life. Government services contribute

to that quality of life. Government services are funded with taxes, and, like it or not, property taxes are the primary source of revenue for local governments here.

The campaign to qualify this proposal for the ballot has many challenges. Its appearance on the statewide ballot is far from certain. Still, I do not advise ignoring it in the hope that it will fade away. Public education about the role of property taxes and their role in funding key services provided by your counties will serve your needs well.

While municipal finance reform could use some pruning, the AxMITax approach of clear-cutting the landscape is quite clearly not the answer. ♦

“The proposal, after wiping out all this revenue, suggests replacing it with what money the state has. The proposal, after wiping out all this revenue, suggests replacing it with what money the state has.”

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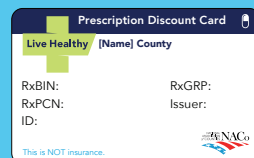
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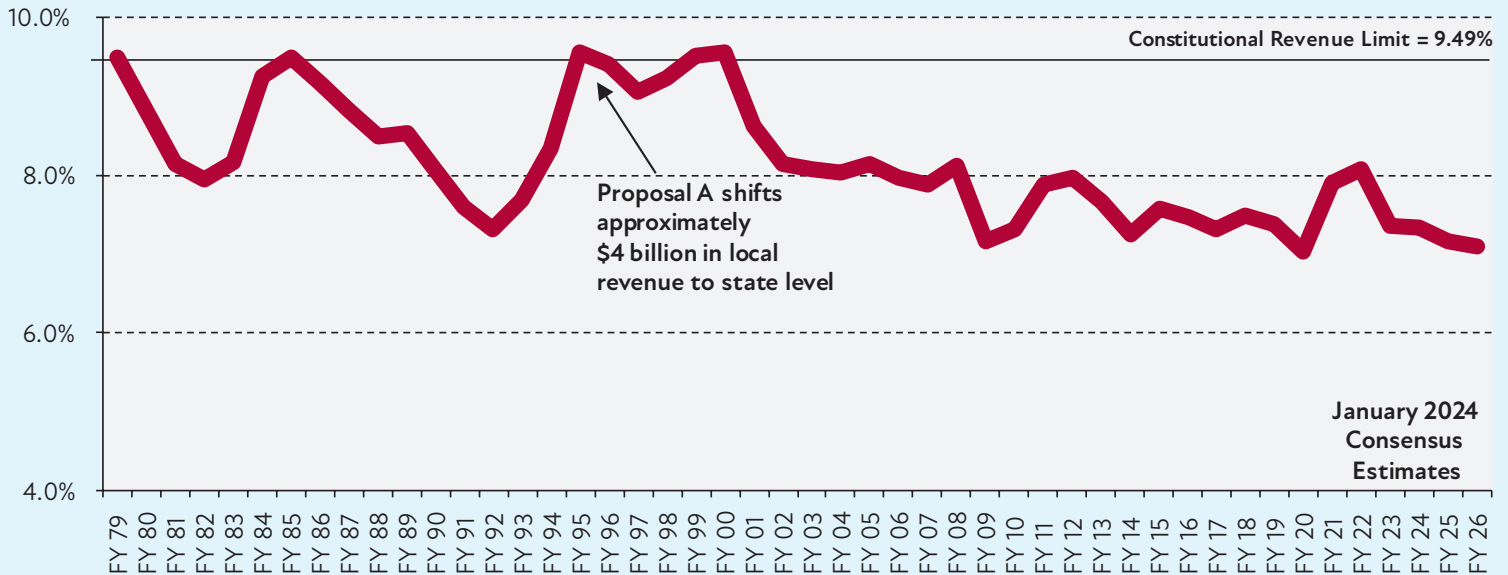


County funding squeeze: Caught between a Headlee and a proposal

BY DEENA BOSWORTH/DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

Constitutional Revenue Limit

TOTAL STATE TAX AND FEE REVENUE AS PERCENTAGE OF PERSONAL INCOME



“Proposal A fundamentally altered Michigan’s property tax system by shifting the burden of school funding from local property taxes to the state sales tax.”

In the realm of state governance, the delicate balance between state and local government funding often comes under scrutiny. In Michigan, this dynamic is particularly regulated by two significant constitutional provisions: the Headlee Amendment and Proposal A. These constitutional amendments profoundly influence the collection and distribution of revenue to support our citizens, our infrastructure and our schools.

The Headlee Amendment, added to the Michigan Constitution in 1978, was crafted to restrain the growth of state and local government revenues by limiting their ability to levy taxes without voter approval. One particularly crucial aspect of the Headlee Amendment for counties is its provision concerning the minimum amount the state must allocate to local governments. Specifically, the Headlee Amendment requires the state maintain a minimum payment to local governments calculated at 48.97 percent of all state spending from state resources. Another critical limitation imposed by the amendment

was the cap on state revenue based on a percentage of personal income in Michigan at 9.49 percent. The interaction of these two provisions limits the revenue available for county revenue sharing.

Compounding this interaction is the calculation and impact of another constitutional amendment: Proposal A, passed in 1994. Proposal A fundamentally altered Michigan’s property tax system by shifting the burden of school funding from local property taxes to the state sales tax.

The interaction between the Headlee Amendment and Proposal A is crucial in understanding the financial landscape of state and local governments in Michigan. While Proposal A shifted significant funding for our schools from local property taxes to the State, it allowed the State to count those payments toward their constitutionally mandated minimum payment to local governments, thus eventually supplanting the otherwise healthy sharing of state revenue to counties and

municipalities. The first year after the adoption of Proposal A saw the payments to local governments jump to 58.5% indicating a 9.5% increase. The percentage allocated to local governments dropped to 52.8% in FY 22.

Compounding this reallocation of funding to include schools under the local share percentage is the fact the state is hovering far below their Headlee Amendment revenue limit. Unlike in 1995, when the state hovered right at the state revenue limit, and again in 2001, Michigan is expected to be more than \$12.2 billion below collections for FY24. Just a quick calculation of that difference implies almost \$6 billion is unavailable for local governments, on top of the funds that go to schools for the local share of the revenue.

For those local governments struggling with declining infrastructure, housing troubles, property tax exemptions, need for additional public safety resources and pension liabilities, the interaction between these two constitutional amendments and the decisions the state has made regarding revenue and the sharing of that revenue leaves no doubt that investment in communities is not a priority.

Case in point is the continued battle over funds for county revenue sharing. If we look back at revenue sharing payments from 2001, county revenue sharing, adjusted for inflation to FY24, should be \$398 million this year, instead it is \$256 million. That's a \$142 million difference in just one year.

MAC's legislative efforts now are focused on rebalancing the sharing of state revenue with local units of government via House Bills 4274-75, which would require a portion of the sales tax to be dedicated to a revenue sharing trust fund. The legislation's method of carving out a percentage of the sales tax for the fund is what revenue sharing was originally designed to do — share in the state's revenue. If sales tax revenue goes up, local allocations go up, if sales tax revenue falls, so do allocations, just like it does for constitutional revenue sharing for cities, villages and townships.

Unfortunately, we hear all too often from lawmakers that they do not wish to have their hands tied as far as what is available for sharing with local units of government. Perhaps this history lesson will highlight how, over the decades, a concerted effort has been made to safeguard state revenues at the expense of the financial stability of local governments.

The Headlee Amendment and Proposal A remain pivotal components of Michigan's fiscal policy. Together, they shape

the distribution of resources and influence the capacity of our local governments to provide for their citizens and manage their finances. The Headlee Amendment ensures local governments receive a minimum level of support from the state regardless of the self-imposed restriction on state revenue, while Proposal A changes allowed the state to supplant school funding for traditional municipal financial support.

The sustainability and effectiveness of Michigan's fiscal framework will depend on policymakers' ability to recognize the deviation from the original intent of the constitutional amendments and responsibly provide the funds necessary to support our constituents and our communities.

For questions about MAC's advocacy on county funding, contact Governmental Affairs Director Deena Bosworth at bosworth@micounties.org or 517-372-5379. ♦



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What has changed with arbitration under PA 312?

BY MATT NORDFJORD/COHL, STOKER AND TOSKEY P.C.

Matt Nordfjord is a principal with the firm of Cohl, Stoker and Toskey P.C. and speaks regularly at MAC events on the legal details of the Open Meetings Act and Freedom of Information Act.

“The appointed MERC arbitrator must consider a county’s ability to pay, external and internal comparable contracts and the merits of each party’s positions.”

Public Act 312 of 1969 (MCL 423.231, et seq, “Act 312”) established a procedure to address impasse in bargaining between public employers and their public safety unions (police or fire). Mandatory binding arbitration is a critical part of the collective bargaining process. The arbitration panel is comprised of three members: one delegate from the union, one delegate from the employer, and one assigned by the Michigan Employment Relations Commission (MERC).

For economic issues (i.e., wage, benefits), each party submits their last and best offer to the arbitration panel, and the panel is required to choose one or the other. For non-economic issues (i.e., work schedule, selection of vacation days, etc.), each party submits their request, and the arbitrator may issue an award that represents a compromise. The appointed MERC arbitrator must consider a county’s ability to pay, external and internal comparable contracts and the merits of each party’s positions. The outcome is uncertain, and the process is long and expensive, and to be avoided if it is possible.

Act 312 has been amended several times since 1967. This update explains the most recent amendment, Public Acts 171 of 2023, which includes two new categories of employees and went into effect on **Jan. 22, 2024**:

1. **Corrections** officers who were previously not subject to Act 312 are now covered. The new definition of “public police or fire employee” adds coverage for “. . . a corrections officer employed by a county sheriff in a county jail, work camp, or other facility maintained by the county and that houses adult prisoners . . .” (MCL 423.231(1) (d), *as amended*). This represents a significant change in Act 312. Any collective bargaining agreement with corrections officers which expires on or after January 22, 2024, will be subject to the mandatory binding arbitration described above. Please



note that this does not apply to facilities housing juvenile offenders, or CBAs which expired prior to Jan. 22, 2024.

2. Act 312 previously included “**emergency telephone operator[s]**,” but only if directly employed by a public police or fire department” and specifically excluded them if they were “employed by a 911 authority or consolidated dispatch center.” MCL 423.232(1)(c). The amended Act 312 defines an emergency telephone operator as including “a person employed by a police or fire department for the purpose of relaying emergency calls to police, fire, or emergency medical service personnel.” It goes on to state that Act 312 does not apply to an emergency telephone operator “employed by a 9-1-1 authority or consolidated dispatch center.” The difference between the new language and the old language is subtle and may have been intended to be a clarification. Act 312 continues to apply to emergency dispatchers who are directly employed by a police or fire department, and not to other emergency dispatchers. The legislative fiscal analysis makes no mention of any change for emergency telephone operators.

There are other changes in the act which do not directly implicate county services. Please do not hesitate to contact Bonnie Toskey (btoskey@cstmlaw.com) or Matt Nordfjord (mnordi@cstmlaw.com) if you have any questions. ♦

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Digital health tools aren't just good for employees — employers benefit, too

BY ELIZABETH CARR, PROJECT MANAGER, CORPORATE MARKETING AND CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE, BCBSM, AND
CHELSEA MOORE, SOLUTION MANAGER, DIGITAL HEALTH, BCBSM

“With digital solutions, patients have access to advice, vetted resources, and real-time data about their health at their fingertips.”

While health care providers work tirelessly to help patients reach their health goals, they have a finite amount of time with each patient. An annual primary care visit lasts about 15-25 minutes (Statista) and patients only spend about five hours every year in a health care setting (Diabetes Hand Foundation). When patients need support between visits or have barriers to convenient care, digital health tools make all the difference. These tools — including those that provide virtual care options — are a critical part of every employer's health care benefit strategy.

With digital solutions, patients have access to advice, vetted resources, and real-time data about their health at their fingertips. For those living with chronic conditions, family-building challenges, mental health or other ongoing health concerns, round-the-clock access makes a big difference. Digital tools tailored to patient-specific health concerns offer in-depth, in-the-moment support. Even common health issues, like strep throat or a bout of poison ivy can be quickly resolved with a virtual health visit.

The convenience and accessibility of digital health tools come into particular focus when considering employees who live in rural areas or health deserts, where access to adequate medical care is an even greater challenge. No matter where they live, work, or play, employees with access to digital health tools on their smart devices can take control of their health and engage with their care in new ways.

Beyond convenience for patients, digital health tools provide a critical advantage for employers at a time when employees are willing to change jobs for better benefits. In fact, one in three millennials (Statista), who are expected



to make up 75 percent of the global workforce by 2025 (Deloitte), say they have considered switching employers for better health and other benefits.

In addition to talent retention, digital health tools support productivity. Consider the time away from work required to attend an in-person appointment. On average, Americans spend about 34

minutes driving to a doctor's visit and another 11 minutes in the waiting room (Altarum). It's possible that a mid-day appointment would require employees to be away from work for nearly an hour and a half — about 20 percent of a standard 8-hour workday — despite the short time spent with their provider.

Not so with a virtual visit, which can be conducted on a smart phone during a coffee break.

With a digital health strategy, employers can demonstrate they are forward-thinking, provide benefits that give employees 24/7 access to care, and make the most of their health care dollars. Business leaders should ask their health insurance carriers about digital tools and ensure they offer robust solutions reflective of the employee population and their unique needs.

To learn about how the digital health tools and virtual care options available through Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan help employers set themselves apart in the labor market, reduce gaps in care, and support productivity, visit [bcbsm.com/employers](https://www.bcbsm.com/employers).

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Treatment center efforts continue on positive trend

BY ROBERT SHEEHAN/COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION OF MICHIGAN



Robert Sheehan is executive director of the Community Mental Health Association of Michigan, a MAC affiliate.

Built on decades of innovation, Michigan's county-based public mental health system is again at the national forefront with three distinct community-based initiatives designed to increase the access and comprehensiveness of mental health and addiction treatment services to Michiganders.

Several years ago, several Community Mental Health (CMH) centers — all of them linked to county governments — and private nonprofits became Behavioral Health Homes (BHH). BHHs provide comprehensive care management and coordination services to adults and children with serious mental illness. These Health Homes serve as the central point of contact for providing and coordinating person- and family-centered care across the broader health care system.

Clients work with an interdisciplinary team of providers to develop a person- and family-centered health action plan to best manage their care. The model also elevates the role and importance of Peer Support Specialists and Community Health Workers — persons with lived experience who are central to the overall health and wellness of clients. A study conducted by state found BHHs reduced the cost of providing health care services to clients by 19 percent — a dramatic reduction when compared with the increased costs of health care found in the control group who were not served by health homes. See the directory of BHHs in Michigan at <https://bit.ly/4ayOweo>.

Akin to BHHs, but focused on persons with opioid disorders, are Michigan's


Opioid Health Homes (OHH). The same care management and coordination efforts, using Peer Recovery Coaches and based on whole-person care, are provided at OHHs to Michiganders working to recover from opioid use. The list of OHHs in Michigan can be seen at <https://bit.ly/3U1yUuC>.

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS), seeing the success of Behavioral and Opioid Health Homes, wishes to expand their geographic and clinical reach. MDHHS has requested federal approval to: expand BHHs to all of Michigan; expand the mental health needs of youth that can be treated at BHHs; and add alcohol and stimulant use disorders to the range of needs that OHHs can meet, creating Substance Use Disorder Health Homes.

A more recent innovation in our field is Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHC). These are designed to provide a broad array of mental health and substance use disorder services to all persons in the community served by the CCBHC, regardless of severity of condition or ability to pay. While some of the state’s CCBHCs are funded by time-limited federal grants, others, termed State Demonstration CCBHC sites, are funded by an innovative pre-paid funding system. The map of Michigan’s State Demonstration CCBHCs can be seen at <https://bit.ly/4clq8Ju>.

The positive results of Michigan’s Demonstration CCBHCs can be seen at <https://bit.ly/3VHYtly>. These results have prompted MDHHS to increase the number of Demonstration CCBHCs, with additional sites planned for 2025. ♦

“The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS), seeing the success of Behavioral and Opioid Health Homes, wishes to expand their geographic and clinical reach.”



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Kalamazoo County's success story on child care

BY KEVIN CATLIN/KALAMAZOO COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR



“Since its implementation, the Tri-Share Program has had a significant impact on both retention and recruitment within Kalamazoo County’s public service sector.”

In an innovative step towards supporting its workforce, Kalamazoo County has partnered with the State of Michigan to implement the Tri-Share Dependent Child Care Program, a cutting-edge initiative aimed at enhancing employee retention and optimizing recruitment in public service. This groundbreaking program addresses a critical need for affordable child care, a common barrier to employment for many potential and current public service employees. Here’s how Kalamazoo County is leading the way in supporting its workforce through this transformative partnership. This initiative is made possible through a strategic use of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds, earmarked to pilot this transformative offering for an initial period of three years, with intentions for long-term continuation based on its success.

The Tri-Share Dependent Child Care Program is a unique model where the cost of child care is shared equally among the employer, the employee, and the State of Michigan. This initiative not only makes child care more affordable for public service employees but also illustrates a commitment to supporting workers in a holistic manner. By acknowledging and addressing one of the key challenges faced by working parents, Kalamazoo County is setting a precedent for public sector employment practices.

Since its implementation, the Tri-Share Program has had a significant impact on both retention and recruitment within Kalamazoo County’s public service sector. Employees have expressed increased job satisfaction and loyalty, attributing this to the tangible support provided by the county in addressing

their work-life balance needs. Moreover, the program has become a key selling point in recruitment efforts, attracting a diverse pool of talented individuals who might otherwise have been unable to consider public service roles due to the high cost of child care.

Kalamazoo County’s commitment to the Tri-Share Program goes beyond mere financial support; it is also about expanding access to quality child care and supporting workforce diversity. By making child care more accessible, the county is effectively supporting a more diverse and inclusive workforce. This includes not only women, who are disproportionately affected by child care responsibilities, but also low-income families and minority communities. The program’s success in Kalamazoo County has highlighted the importance of addressing child care as a critical factor in workforce participation and diversity.

The success of the Tri-Share Dependent Child Care Program in Kalamazoo County

serves as a model for other counties and municipalities considering similar initiatives. It demonstrates that with innovative thinking and collaborative partnerships, it is possible to address some of the systemic barriers to employment. The program underscores the potential of such partnerships to not only enhance the quality of public service but also to improve the overall wellbeing of the community by supporting its workforce.

Kalamazoo County’s partnership with the state to implement this program is a testament to the county’s forward-thinking approach to public service employment. By prioritizing the wellbeing of its workforce through such supportive measures, the county is not only improving the lives of its employees but also enhancing its service delivery. As Kalamazoo County continues to build on this success, it sets a benchmark for how public entities can effectively support their workforce, ensuring a stronger, more resilient public service sector for the future. ♦



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Rep. John Fitzgerald

LEGISLATOR
Q&A

What is the most pressing issue facing Michigan?

Depending on your specific area of interest, an argument could be made for a few to be considered a “top priority.” With my experience on the Transportation Committee, I do believe the expected funding cliff for our roads and infrastructure must be given special attention.

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

Counties play a critical role in the deployment of public services. From public safety to road maintenance, counties provide services that provide safety and stability to Michigan residents every day.

How do you feel your experience as an elected local official impacts your policy decisions in the Legislature?

I am responsible for considering many factors when making policy decisions, including the diverse perspectives of various stakeholders and organizations. My previous experience as a local official helps to understand the nuances of policy implementation for local governments. When policies come forward that will interact with locals or require them to fulfill the duties of the policy, I certainly take time to investigate what intended and unintended consequences may be to our local government partners.

As chair of the House Local Government Committee, what policy issues do you hope to advance?

I am very pleased with the work the committee has already accomplished during this legislative term. Advancing the Revenue Sharing Trust Fund out of committee and

helping to shepherd that through the House was a major accomplishment in 2023, and I believe that the work we did with tourism excise taxes will help promote infrastructure and placemaking efforts across Michigan.

This year, I see more work to be done as it pertains to zoning and development, housing and transparency and accountability.

Various proposals by the Legislature have threatened local control in recent years, most notably regarding siting renewable energy facilities, aggregate mining and short-term rentals. How important is preserving local control? Are there any circumstances in which the state should be granted regulating authority over local units of government?

Local control of issues is important to preserve, but we must also consider when and how the state’s ability and capacity can lead to the best result for Michiganders. There are services that the federal government is responsible for rather than the states, take air travel for example, due to health, safety, and economic concerns. Many, if not most, local issues are best heard and dealt with by local officials, but there are numerous examples of state oversight due to the complex and ranging implications of a policy. A good example of this is oil and gas pipeline siting, which is a state responsibility. In my experience, when we give local governments the ability to make decisions specific to their community, we have quality results due to the intimate knowledge of the local conditions. Balancing this with the state’s responsibilities to promote public health, safety and well-being can be challenging, and I take my work very seriously to consider when and where this might be necessary. ♦



Name:
Rep. John Fitzgerald

District/County:
83rd/Kent

Committees:
Local Government and Municipal Finance, Chair; Agriculture; Health Policy; Insurance and Financial Service; Transportation, Infrastructure and Mobility

Term:
First

Previous Public Service:
City Council, city of Wyoming, 2020-2022



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Stan Ponstein

Name: Stan Ponstein

County/MAC Region: Kent/At-large

Position: Immediate Past President

County Service: Kent County Commissioner, 2009 to present

Profession: Costco Wholesale, Grand Rapids

Previous Public Service: Member, Grandville School Board, 1980-2001; Member, Grandville City Council, 2001-2008

What do you see as the biggest challenge for your county, or all counties, in 2024?

In the past few years, money has been allocated by state and federal governments in record amounts. MAC staff has worked and lobbied effectively for a seat at the table where we offered solutions and fought for fair

revenue allocations from state and federal budgets. Those efforts enhanced all counties.

I have been in public service long enough to know fiscal cycles can change quickly and unexpectedly. Moving forward, counties and MAC will need to continue our advocacy efforts so we can tell our story and offer suggestions and best practices so we can be a partner, not just someone who continues to want more money.

Communication will be crucial to be effective in the next fiscal downturn. You will need to communicate a message to your employees, voters, businesses and elected officials at all levels. There are a lot of resources to improve communication effectiveness for counties. I know many of you feel you do not want to be involved in the politics of government, but you will need to be engaged and have resources in the upcoming years. Lucky for Michigan counties that knowledge and expertise is just a phone call away at MAC.



Joseph Palamara

Name: Joseph Palamara

County/MAC Region: Wayne County Appointee

Position: Director

County Service: Wayne County Commissioner, January 1999 to present

Profession: Attorney and Consultant

Previous Public Service: Member, Michigan House of Representatives, 1985-1999

What do you see as the biggest challenge for your county, or all counties, in 2024?

The biggest challenge facing Wayne County is trying to maintain quality staffing levels

across all departments within county government. Sheriff deputies and court clerks are the two areas where this challenge is most pronounced. It is also difficult to hire and retain attorneys as assistant prosecutors in the Prosecutor's Office. Frequently it is a matter of offering appropriate pay and benefits to attract and retain the type of people who understand providing high quality county services is more than a job — it's a way of life. The county has stepped up to acknowledge and address deficiencies in these areas, but more work needs to be done to attract high quality workers and people who are proud to make a career in providing excellent services while working for county government.

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