

# MICHIGAN COUNTIES



**County leaders convene  
in Lansing for 2025  
Legislative Conference**





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REP. DAVID MARTIN

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**MAC**  
MICHIGAN ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES

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**Correction:** Jeff Dontz' name on page 18 of the February 2025 edition was incorrect. MAC regrets the error.

## 83 COUNTIES MANY MORE STORIES



Michigan Counties is your gateway to all things related to county government in the Great Lakes State. For an annual fee of \$15, you will receive all six printed editions of the magazine (February, April, June, August, October and December).

To subscribe, send your name and mailing address to [melot@micounties.org](mailto:melot@micounties.org) with the email header of "MI Counties Subscription." To pay, visit MAC's digital payment center at [micounties.org/macsc](http://micounties.org/macsc).



# Letter from the Executive Director



A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'SLC'.

**STEPHAN W. CURRIE**  
MAC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**“Managing a network of commissioners, administrators and county leaders across Michigan requires more than just emails and file folders. With Association Sphere, we now have a centralized system that brings together membership management, event planning and real-time communication.”**

## Remarks to the 2025 Legislative Conference:

**A**s executive director of the Michigan Association of Counties, it's my honor to welcome you to this year's MAC Legislative Conference. Whether you've traveled from across the state or from the next county over, we're grateful you're here.

This year, we are proud to welcome over 300 attendees and representatives from 45 Michigan counties — a strong reflection of the commitment, energy, and leadership you all bring to the table. Your presence here speaks volumes about your dedication to service, and your willingness to be part of the statewide conversation that shapes public policy at the local level.

This conference is more than an annual gathering — it's a reflection of your commitment to your communities. As county commissioners, you wear many hats. You are budget managers, infrastructure planners, economic developers, and in many cases, the most direct link between government and the people. It's often challenging, thankless work; however, it's also impactful. Michigan's progress starts with its counties, and MAC is proud to be your partner in strengthening our state.

At MAC, our mission is simple: to empower county governments to be effective, responsive and future-focused. Today, I want to highlight two key initiatives that reflect that mission in action: our transition to Association Sphere and our leadership in opioid settlement fund management.

Let's begin with Association Sphere.

MAC has always worked hard to be a strong advocate and resource for our members. Now, we're taking a big step forward with the launch of Association Sphere — a powerful, all-in-one platform that modernizes how we serve and engage with you.

Managing a network of commissioners, administrators and county leaders across Michigan requires more than just emails and file folders. With Association Sphere, we now have a centralized system that brings together membership management, event planning and real-time communication.

For you, this means:

- faster access to legislative updates;
- easier registration for conferences and training; and
- a more personalized, connected experience with MAC.

Association Sphere is a strategic investment in how we strengthen relationships with our members, reduce administrative burden, and better understand what you need to succeed.

Now, turning to our second initiative — the Opioid Settlement Center.

Over the next 18 years, Michigan will receive more than \$1.5 billion from national opioid settlements. This is a historic and urgent opportunity to make a difference in the fight against addiction — and counties will be at the forefront of this effort.

Through MAC's nationally recognized Opioid Settlement Center, led by Amy Dolinky, we are:

- providing expert guidance to help counties make informed, compliant funding decisions;
- creating channels for collaboration across county lines and sectors; and
- ensuring that transparency and accountability remain top priorities.

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 27**





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# Letter from the President



Melissa A. Daub

**MELISSA DAUB**  
PRESIDENT, MAC BOARD OF  
DIRECTORS

**“I have not missed a NACo Legislative or Annual Conference since. It is always an incredible opportunity to connect with county leaders from across the country at these events.”**

## NACo is an outstanding resource for commissioners

I attended my first National Association of Counties (NACo) conference in Clark County, Nevada, in July 2029. I was a brand-new commissioner in the first year of my first term and the Wayne County Commission had just voted in a new chair: Commissioner Alisha Bell.

Commissioner Bell had been an active member of NACo for many years. When she became chair of our board, she was eager to get other commissioners involved as well. As a new commissioner, I wanted to learn as much as I could about county government. I had already gone to MAC's New Commissioner School and decided that I wanted to join a MAC committee, so I jumped at the chance to attend a conference with county officials working on federal issues.

I have not missed a NACo Legislative or Annual Conference since. It is always an incredible opportunity to connect with county leaders from across the country at these events. The discussions we have help us identify best practices, shape national policy, and ensure that our county's interests are represented at the federal level.

In early March, 60 Michigan commissioners joined nearly 2,000 county leaders from across the country at this year's Legislative Conference in Washington, D.C. Over two general sessions, featured speakers included two Cabinet secretaries and members of the U.S. House and Senate. Attendees also participated in a Federal Agency Expo, with over 60 federal program offices sending representatives to meet with conference participants and build intergovernmental partnerships. The conference culminated in a Capitol Hill Day of Action, and a special briefing for Michigan commissioners with Sen. Gary Peters (D-Michigan).

Additionally, Commissioner Bell announced her candidacy for NACo second vice president. With her platform of “Resiliency, Infrastructure and Innovation, Sustainability and Member Engagement,” we are excited for Alisha to bring her extensive experience and Michigan values to the NACo Executive Board. Thank you to everyone who helped at the campaign booth in D.C.

This year's NACo Annual Conference will be held on July 11-14 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Registration is now open at [naco.org](https://naco.org). If you haven't been to a NACo event and have questions, let's talk. Just as Commissioner Alisha Bell encouraged me all those years ago, I want to encourage you to get involved with NACo! ♦

For information on the 2025 NACo Annual Conference & Exposition, visit [www.naco.org/event/2025-naco-annual-conference-exposition](https://www.naco.org/event/2025-naco-annual-conference-exposition)





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- MISS DIG 811
- Prosecuting Attorneys Association of Michigan
- Southeast Michigan Council of Governments
- Southwest Michigan Behavioral Health
- UPCAP Services
- Upward Talent Council



# MAC launches new era in commissioner education

A new era in commissioner education is under way at MAC, members were told during a presentation at the 2025 Legislative Conference on April 8.

County Commissioner Academy (CCA), first launched in 2019, is moving to its “2.0” stage, explained MAC Communications Director Derek Melot, to keep pace with the rapidly changing demands on commissioners via their new four-year service terms.

While much is changing with CCA, several key elements will carry over from the popular program’s “1.0” variant, Melot noted:

- The ability to earn annual certificates, with graduates being honored each year at the Legislative Conference
- The participation of educational partners, such as MSU Extension, the Michigan Department of Treasury and the National Association of Counties
- The use of credits earned by attending MAC and allied events

But much is new, as well, Melot noted.

The academy shifts to a series of one-year cycles designed around specific issue areas:

- Budgeting/finance
- Board operations
- County board as employer
- County board as “Legislature”

At the end of a four-year cycle, each commissioner who is still serving (i.e., re-elected) and who has earned all the one-year certificates is deemed “Advanced.”

## How a cycle works

The four-year study cycle starts from the New Commissioner School (NCS) and ends in October prior to the next NCS. **For example, the current cycle began with the 2024 NCS and will conclude in October of 2028.**



## Earning credits and certificates

The number of credits offered and needed for certification in an issue area will change year by year in the four-year cycle, as reflected in the table below:

Year/Issue Area	# of Credits Offered	# of Credits to Certify
1/Board Operations	10	7
2/Budget and Finance	8	5
3/County as Employer	8	5
4/County as Policymaker	8	5

## Credits per event

Each event in the academy is assigned a number of credits, as detailed in the table below:

Type of Event	Credits Assigned
New Commissioner School	3
Legislative Conference	2
Annual Conference	2
Webinars	1

## Tempo

MAC will work with its educational partners to spread credit opportunities across the entire calendar year, with the goal of offering a credit-earning opportunity every two months.

## 2025/Year 1 Events

- 2024 New Commissioner School – concluded
- 2025 Legislative Conference – concluded
- MSU Extension Governing Essentials Webinars – August or December 2025 series; [click to register](#)
- MAC Webinar (topic TBD) – June; registration to open in early May
- MAC Webinar (topic TBD) – August; registration to open in early July
- 2025 Annual Conference – September

For questions about the program, start with the academy page at the MAC website under “Education,” then “Training/Events.” You also may contact Melot at [melot@micounties.org](mailto:melot@micounties.org).





**MAC PRESIDENT MELISSA DAUB PRESENTS BERRIEN COMMISSIONER RAYONTE BELL WITH HIS CERTIFICATE AS A 2025 GRADUATE OF COUNTY COMMISSIONER ACADEMY. BELL WAS AMONG 40 COMMISSIONERS EARNING THEIR CERTIFICATE IN THIS YEAR'S CLASS.**

## MAC honors 40 CCA graduates in class of 2025

In the traditional ceremony at the 2025 Legislative Conference, MAC honored its County Commissioner Academy graduates. This year, 40 commissioners earned recognition at either the certified or advanced levels. Each commissioner in attendance received their CCA certificate from MAC Board President Melissa Daub.

Name	County	Level
Donald "Jay" O'Farrell	Iosco	Certified
Katie DeBoer	Kent	Certified
Joseph Derocha	Marquette	Certified
Stephen Adamini	Marquette	Certified
Dana Lalonde	Marquette	Certified
William Routley	Mecosta	Certified
Jeff Carlson	Menominee	Certified
Jessica Cook	Muskegon	Certified
Greg Gydesen	Osceola	Certified
Mark Gregory	Osceola	Certified
Dana Wingo	Otsego	Certified
Jack Tany	Saginaw	Certified
Mark Piotrowski	Saginaw	Certified
Craig Reiter	Schoolcraft	Certified
Rick Shaffer	St. Joseph	Certified
Bill Lutz	Tuscola	Certified
Tina Leary	Van Buren	Certified
Cara A. Clemente	Wayne	Certified
Terry Marecki	Wayne	Certified



## MAC chosen for national role on opioid solutions

MAC has been chosen as one of 10 state associations to participate in the National Association of Counties' Opioid Solutions Leadership Network. The newly created "Ambassador," or state association-focused, cohort is focused on the critical role that state associations of counties play in scaling the impact of resources, navigating state-specific terms and conditions on the opioid settlements and fostering timely, responsive solutions for counties across the nation.

Over the next eight months, the new cohort will support state association staff to:

- Identify ways to adapt national resources to the specific needs of counties in their home state
- Serve as hubs for collaboration and innovation within and across their states

CONTINUED ON PAGE 15

Name	County	Level
Mark De Young	Allegan	Advanced
Dave Vollrath	Berrien	Advanced
Julie Wuerfel	Berrien	Advanced
Rayonte Bell	Berrien	Advanced
Randall Hazelbaker	Branch	Advanced
Jon Houtz	Branch	Advanced
Robert Showers	Clinton	Advanced
Joe Stevens	Dickinson	Advanced
TJ Andrews	Grand Traverse	Advanced
Lauren Flynn	Grand Traverse	Advanced
Howard Lodholtz	Lake	Advanced
Gwenne Allgaier	Leelanau	Advanced
Mike Patrick	Mackinac	Advanced
Jeff Dontz	Manistee	Advanced
James Maike	Newaygo	Advanced
Travis Konarzewski	Alpena	Certified
Lisa Salgat	Arenac	Certified
Tim Banaszak	Bay	Certified
Beverly Brown	Genesee	Certified
Michael Visnaw	Gladwin	Certified
Penny Morris	Grand Traverse	Certified



# Commissioners learn about road funding, digital defenses and more at 2025 Legislative Conference

**“The conference offered an invaluable opportunity for county leaders to unite, exchange ideas and strengthen our collective voice in shaping statewide policy.”**

**M**ore than 300 county and business leaders from across Michigan gathered in Lansing this week for the 2025 Michigan Counties Legislative Conference, hosted by MAC and the Michigan County Medical Care Facilities Council.

MAC Board President Melissa Daub of Wayne County urged attendees to be able and consistent advocates for county services in remarks welcoming county leaders to the DoubleTree Hotel in downtown Lansing.

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer also welcomed attendees, via a video message played on the morning of April 8.

During the event, the first of MAC's two major conferences for the year, commissioners also enjoyed a new format that ensured all attendees could participate in the 11 different policy presentations, or “pods,” which ran the gamut from road funding and the ongoing threat posed by ransomware attacks on public websites and data systems to the flurry of changes in federal policy in Washington, D.C.

“The conference offered an invaluable opportunity for county leaders to unite, exchange ideas and strengthen our collective voice in shaping statewide policy,” said Benzie County Administrator Katelyn Zeits, who also presented as part of a panel on cybersecurity. “These events help county leaders broaden their skills, expand their network and stay current on the issues.”

On the morning of April 9, MAC members honored the association's 2025 County Advocate Award winners, Sen. John Cherry (D-Flint) and Rep. Mark Tisdell (R-Oakland), for their stalwart efforts to create a dedicated Revenue Sharing Trust Fund, one of MAC's legislative priorities in 2025.



**BOARD PRESIDENT MELISSA DAUB OF WAYNE COUNTY WELCOMES ATTENDEES TO THE 2025 LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE. (PHOTO: ROD SANFORD PHOTOGRAPHY)**

Elected county commissioners from 45 of Michigan's 83 counties traveled to Lansing for the event.

“I totally enjoyed the new format this year,” said Commissioner Mark Wiley, chair of the Hillsdale County Board of Commissioners. “I found it all very interesting and informative. I look forward to seeing everyone next April!”

“Staying abreast of policy changes is more important than ever, now that county commissioners are elected to four-year terms,” said Stephan W. Currie, executive director. “This was our first major gathering with members under the four-year term system, so it was gratifying to see so many commissioners on hand and grappling with everything from email security protocols to incentivizing more housing in their communities.”

To see materials from the event, visit the “conferences” tab at [micounties.org](https://micounties.org). ♦







# Getting the ‘dys’ out of Michigan’s dysfunctional Legislature

BY ERIC LUPHER/CITIZENS RESEARCH COUNCIL OF MICHIGAN

*Eric Lupher is president of the Citizens Research Council of Michigan, a nonpartisan, not-for-profit, research group dedicated to improving state and local government.*



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.



**“For years, both parties have relied on judicial interpretation of a provision that protects laws that include appropriations from being subject to referendum. It was intended to prevent a referendum-caused shutdown of state government. Instead, it has been used to referendum-proof controversial bills.”**

Many observers have bemoaned the dysfunction in Michigan’s legislature. We cannot legislate away the dysfunction, but several reforms could provide some fixes to root problems.

To overcome the “winner-take-all” nature of the two-party political system, we need to think about the structures within which the legislature operates.

The results of past budget cuts on staff still affect the functioning of the full-time legislature. The dysfunction is motivation to decide whether to make the Legislature more professionalized or changed to a part-time body. A professionalized legislature, with larger staff budgets and higher salaries available to those staff, is warranted by the serious nature of many issues.

Alternatively, a part-time or hybrid legislature could work well within the current available

resources. Even with a limited number of session days, legislators could work throughout the year to address constituent needs, meet in committees, and perform other tasks.

We should address the habit of addressing issues, often with little time or opportunity for debate, in lame-duck sessions. This is the period after the election and before sine die adjournment, when all unpassed bills die and legislators seemingly feel safer voting on controversial subjects.

One way to address this issue is to send the legislators home, as would happen with a part-time legislature (see <https://bit.ly/CRClege>). Alternatively, requiring a supermajority of legislators in each chamber to pass legislation in lame-duck sessions would concentrate the focus on addressing important issues during the legislative session and discouraging bills being pushed into the lame-duck sessions.



The Citizens United U.S. Supreme Court decision limits what can be done to constrain the role of money in politics. With that in mind, it is important to strengthen the reporting and accountability mechanisms to identify who is wielding influence. Proposal 22-1 attempted to address this issue, but the requirements are weak (see <https://bit.ly/CRCdisclose>). Strengthening these and the reporting requirements for lobbyists would help. Similarly, extending the Freedom of Information Act requirements to the Legislature would shine more sunshine on all processes.

Rather than focusing on the conduct of legislators, we could address how they become legislators. If the composition of the elected representatives is made to look more like the state, extreme positions may become less common.

“Safe” legislative districts, those with a preponderance of voters from one party, give the winners of primary elections a pass in general elections. The result is candidates campaign to be the most conservative or liberal to win primary elections. Then, they are elected in the general elections with little connection or concern for undecided voters or voters in the minority party.

Voting methods employed elsewhere change these dynamics so that candidates on the fringes must lean into the middle to garner sufficient votes to win the general election. A top two election has a runoff of the two candidates receiving the most votes in the primary election regardless of party affiliation, akin to many municipal mayoral races. Rank choice elections ask voters to list their preference for candidates and the system finds the one acceptable to most voters.

Another approach is to strengthen the people’s voice through the Michigan Constitution. For years, both parties have relied on judicial interpretation of a provision that protects laws that include appropriations from being subject to referendum. It was intended to prevent a referendum-caused shutdown of state government. Instead, it has been used to referendum-proof controversial bills. This empowers the Legislature to act on controversial topics without fear of pushback, but it deprives the people of a power meant to be a check on legislative overreach.

The question of convening a constitutional convention will be on the ballot in November of 2026. Voters should consider these issues when assessing their vote on that question. ♦

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# Protecting county services and citizens through safe digging practices

BY ERIC URBAIN/MISS DIG 811



**“Please consider us at your service, and we look forward to the opportunity to work with you.”**

Each year, thousands of excavation projects take place across Michigan, from small home landscaping jobs to large-scale infrastructure developments. While digging may seem straightforward, one wrong move can lead to dangerous and costly consequences. That’s where MISS DIG 811 steps in to keep county services and citizens safe by preventing damage to underground utilities.

## WHAT IS MISS DIG 811?

MISS DIG 811 is Michigan’s free, statewide notification system that helps homeowners, contractors, and municipalities avoid striking underground utility lines. Since its inception in 1970, MISS DIG 811 has played a vital role in preventing damage to essential services such as water, gas, electricity, and telecommunications. By providing a simple, one-call solution, MISS DIG 811 ensures that digging projects are conducted safely and efficiently.

## HOW MISS DIG 811 KEEPS COMMUNITIES SAFE

1. **Preventing utility damage and service disruptions:** One of the primary ways



MISS DIG 811 enhances safety is by preventing accidental utility strikes. When someone calls 811 or submits an online request at [missdig811.org](https://missdig811.org) before digging, MISS DIG 811 alerts local utility companies, who then mark the locations of underground lines. This precautionary measure prevents interruptions to vital services, ensuring that homes, businesses, and emergency responders maintain access to essential utilities.

2. **Reducing the risk of injuries and fatalities:** Striking a buried gas line or electrical conduit can have catastrophic consequences, including explosions, fires, and electrocution. By using MISS DIG 811, diggers significantly reduce their risk of injury or death. The organization’s commitment to education and awareness campaigns helps ensure that individuals understand the dangers of unmarked digging and the importance of safety compliance.



- Provide direct, localized support to counties in their home state as they look to implement settlement-funded initiatives, and
- Help counties measure and monitor the impacts of their settlement funds spending plans

The other associations participating are Hawaii State Association of Counties; Alaska Municipal League; Utah Association of Counties; Association of Minnesota Counties; Kentucky Association of Counties; Tennessee County Services Association; County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania; Florida Association of Counties; and North Carolina Association of County Commissioners.

For more information on opioid settlements, or for no-cost technical assistance, contact Amy Dolinky at [dolinky@micounties.org](mailto:dolinky@micounties.org).

## MAC and members focused on contributions of county workers in 2025 National County Government Month activities

A legislative resolution sponsored by MAC was among activities in April to mark National County Government Month.

Rep. Steve Frisbie, a former Calhoun County commissioner now serving his first term in the Michigan House of Representatives, sponsored a resolution on MAC's behalf to recognize the annual event, which started in 1991. The resolution was adopted by the House on April 17.



"It was Tocqueville who said that the strength of a free people resides in the local community," Frisbie said. "As a county commissioner for 14 years, I worked up close with fellow county governments to meet the needs of our residents. Whether it's administering justice through the courts, helping to care for children, or assisting in disaster relief, county governments play a crucial role in the delivery of key services and I am proud to introduce this resolution."

Genesee County is celebrating the month via its board's specialty website, <https://1836-place.com>.

"One particular piece that has received a lot of positive attention was our feature on our county's approach to Substance Use Disorder in Community Corrections (see <https://bit.ly/GeneseeSUD>)," said Jared Field, the county's communications director. ♦

### 3. Supporting emergency and municipal services:

Local governments rely on MISS DIG 811 to protect public infrastructure and maintain essential services. Water mains, sewer lines, and emergency communication cables are often buried underground, and damaging them can disrupt entire communities. By promoting safe digging practices, MISS DIG 811 helps municipalities avoid costly repairs and service outages that could impact hospitals, police departments, and fire stations.

### 4. Enhancing environmental protection:

Digging into underground pipelines can lead to hazardous material spills, contaminating soil and water sources. MISS DIG 811 helps prevent environmental damage by ensuring that projects do not interfere with critical infrastructure. Through proper coordination and planning, communities can safeguard natural resources and avoid long-term environmental harm.

### 5. Providing free and easy access to safety resources:

MISS DIG 811 makes it simple for individuals and businesses to access safe digging resources. By calling 811 or visiting [missdig811.com](http://missdig811.com), anyone planning a project can receive guidance on safe excavation procedures. Additionally, MISS DIG 811 offers training programs, public awareness campaigns, and educational materials to reinforce the importance of responsible digging.

While we are proud of the work we do reducing utility damages, and promoting excavation safety, we know that we can achieve more if we build relationships and work closely with our industry stakeholders. With that in mind, we fully encourage you to reach out if you have any questions or concerns that may impact your county. Please consider us at your service, and we look forward to the opportunity to work with you.

By working together to promote safe digging practices, we can prevent accidents, reduce costs and ensure that county services continue running smoothly. ♦



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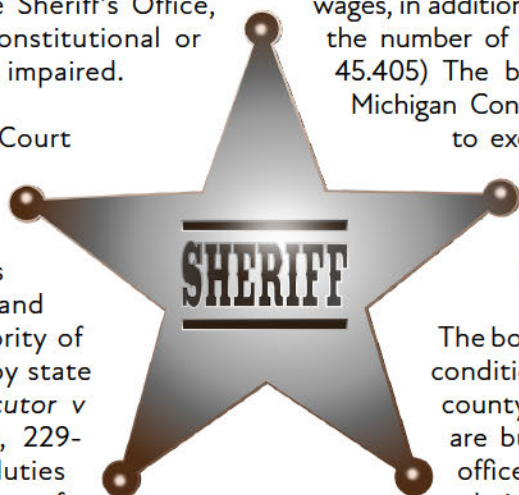
# Exploring the legal relationship between a county board and a sheriff

BY MATT NORDFJORD/MANAGING SHAREHOLDER, CST MUNICIPAL LAW

Questions arise regarding the legal relationship between the county board of commissioners and the county sheriff, specifically as to whether and to what extent a County Board may exercise control over the Sheriff's Office, and which powers are constitutional or statutory and may not be impaired.

The Michigan Supreme Court has acknowledged that the office of county sheriff in the state of Michigan is constitutionally created, and the duties and the authority of a sheriff are established by state law. See *St Clair Prosecutor v AFSCME*, 425 Mich 204, 229-30 (1986). A sheriff's duties include the management of the operation of a county jail, the service of court papers, the enforcement of court orders, and law enforcement along certain areas of primary roads and county local roads within a county outside of cities and villages, and on roads within the boundaries of a county park within that county. (MCL 51.75; MCL 51.76(2); MCL 51.84) Sheriffs may provide law enforcement duties in areas without local law enforcement. (MCL 51.76(3)) In addition, a sheriff has the authority to deputize individuals in the state of Michigan and to form a posse. (MCL 51.70)

The county board and the sheriff are co-employers of the sheriff's deputies and other employees. As the operational aspects of the sheriff's office are constitutionally vested in the county sheriff, determinations as to which employees should be assigned to any particular area at any given time would fall within the sheriff's discretion. (Const 1963, art. 7, §4; MCL 51.70) Accordingly, the sheriff has the power to control hours of work and determine hiring and firing and disciplinary decisions subject to the constraints of a collective bargaining agreement and the statutory requirement to appoint an undersheriff. (MCL 51.70; MCL 51.71)



The county board, however, retains legislative budgetary authority over all county departments including the sheriff's office, and is authorized to establish line-item budgets that expressly limit the amount of funds authorized for wages, in addition to the power to determine the number of paid sworn deputies. (MCL 45.405) The board is authorized by the Michigan Constitution and state statute to exercise legislative powers to appropriate money and to manage county affairs. (Const 1963, art. 7, §9; MCL 46.11)

The board may attach appropriate conditions governing the use of county funds if sufficient funds are budgeted to enable county officers and agencies to perform their constitutional statutory duties and obligations. See *Wayne County Prosecutor, et al v Wayne County Board of Commissioners*, 93 Mich App 114, 121-124; 286 NW2d 62 (1979). In the event the board determines that costs will exceed budgetary approved amounts, the board could impose economic cutbacks, such as layoffs and reduction of services.

Additionally, as is true with every elected official, the board can require the sheriff to prepare a written report under oath to the board regarding any subject connected to the duties of that office and potentially remove the sheriff from office for failure to make the report or file a bond. (MCL 46.11(k))

However, as a sheriff possesses certain constitutional powers, the board may not change the sheriff's duties in a way that changes the legal character of the office. See *Nat'l Union of Police Officers Local 502-M, AFL-CIO v Wayne County Bd of Comm'rs*, 93 Mich App 76, 83 (1979). The sheriff has broad discretion in how to exercise the powers and authority of the office and possesses the authority to agree to take on non-mandated duties such as oversight of animal control. ♦

*Matt Nordfjord is a shareholder and managing member with the law firm of Cohl, Stoker & Toskey, P.C.*

**"The Michigan Supreme Court has acknowledged that the office of county sheriff in the state of Michigan is constitutionally created, and the duties and the authority of a sheriff are established by state law."**



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# How counties can mitigate risks from flooding events

BY CINDY C. KING/MICHIGAN MUNICIPAL RISK MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY

**“Educating the public about the flood risks that exist within their communities can help residents be better prepared when a significant weather event occurs and can promote a sense of collective resilience in responding to these events.”**

**O**n April 3, 2025, a Detroit News headline read: “Detroit and Flint set one-day rain records; neighborhoods flood across the area.” According to the story, three inches of rain fell overnight and flooded streets, basements, and yards across the cities. Accompanying the story were several photos of flooded yards. The article noted that “flooding also washed out and closed roads around the region ... The National Weather Service reported that the rains set a new daily maximum record for April 2 in Detroit with 2.18 inches, greatly surpassing the previous daily record of 1.44 inches set on April 2, 1945.”

The Joint Economic Committee “estimates the cost of flooding in the U.S. is between \$179.8 and \$496 billion each year in 2023 dollars ...” FEMA, citing NOAA flood event data from 1996 to 2019, notes that in Wayne County alone, over 85 flooding events occurred over a 24-year period.

During the same period, there were 41 flooding events in Saginaw County and 41 in Marquette County. However, with the Great Lakes and numerous rivers, streams, and other lakes throughout the state, all 83 counties in Michigan face the potential for flooding, and for the potential to experience the negative impact of those significant events on residents, business owners and public entities.

MAC members can take steps to guard against flooding. Physical structures may include constructing floodwalls or stormwater storage systems to store excess water and control



**NO MICHIGAN COUNTY IS TRULY SAFE FROM FLOODING, WHOSE EFFECTS CAN BE CATASTROPHIC, AS SEEN IN THIS 2018 IMAGE FROM HOUGHTON COUNTY. (PHOTO: WKAR)**

downstream flooding. It may also include engineering channels to redirect water flow away from areas prone to flooding. Green infrastructure that includes wetlands and permeable surfaces to absorb water may be useful in controlling significant water events.

Nonstructural measures can also be used to mitigate risks. Effective land use planning and zoning can be helpful in restricting development in areas prone to flooding. Counties may want to review building codes and standards and implement regulations



that require flood-resistant construction techniques and materials.

Educating the public about the flood risks that exist within their communities can help residents be better prepared when a significant weather event occurs and can promote a sense of collective resilience in responding to these events. The public often expects counties, cities, and townships to use early warning systems to provide alerts for impending weather or flooding so that residents may then take measures to protect their own property, such as installing sandbags around the exterior of homes and businesses or by removing items from basements, especially in flood prone areas.

Another measure counties may wish to consider is an integrated flood management approach. The goal of such an approach is to collaborate with various stakeholders, including neighboring communities, businesses, and

residents, to adopt various strategies to address flooding and develop mitigation tools to reduce the potential for flooding and the impacts when it occurs.

Other resources available include those provided by the National Flood Insurance Program, which offers guidance on addressing flood risks, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, which provides information on utilizing green infrastructure for flood mitigation.

MAC members are encouraged to plan before flooding events occur when seeking to mitigate this risk. Some measures may take time to implement, and others may be expensive and require forecasting and budgeting of limited financial resources. Proper planning may prevent a heavy wet weather event from becoming catastrophic. ♦

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# Understanding Michigan's budget process

BY DEENA BOSWORTH/DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

**“In addition to reviewing funding amounts, lawmakers also scrutinize the ‘boilerplate language’ of the budget. Boilerplate language refers to provisions in the budget that provide instructions or conditions for how funds are to be used.”**

Michigan's budget process is a carefully structured and sometimes contentious procedure that eventually touches all sectors of Michigan society.

Going by the calendar, the first public event of the budget is the Revenue Estimating Conference in January, when experts convene to advise on the state's fiscal resources.

Next comes the governor's formal budget presentation, which comes in early February. Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's fiscal 2026 budget was presented on Feb. 5. While the proposal gives detail to the governor's policy vision, it often faces significant resistance from the Legislature. This could be especially the case this year, as the legislative chambers are divided: the House of Representatives under Republican control and the Senate under Democratic control.

As of late April, as you are reading this, the Legislature is holding committee hearings where they review the budget and hear testimony from state agencies, departments and external stakeholders such as MAC. These hearings typically last into May.

Both the House and Senate Appropriations Committees take a detailed look at each line item, reviewing how funds are allocated across different programs and services.

In addition to reviewing funding amounts, lawmakers also scrutinize the “boilerplate language” of the budget. Boilerplate language refers to provisions in the budget that provide instructions or conditions for how funds are to be used. These provisions often include performance measures, spending restrictions or other stipulations. Negotiations over boilerplate language are often heated, as

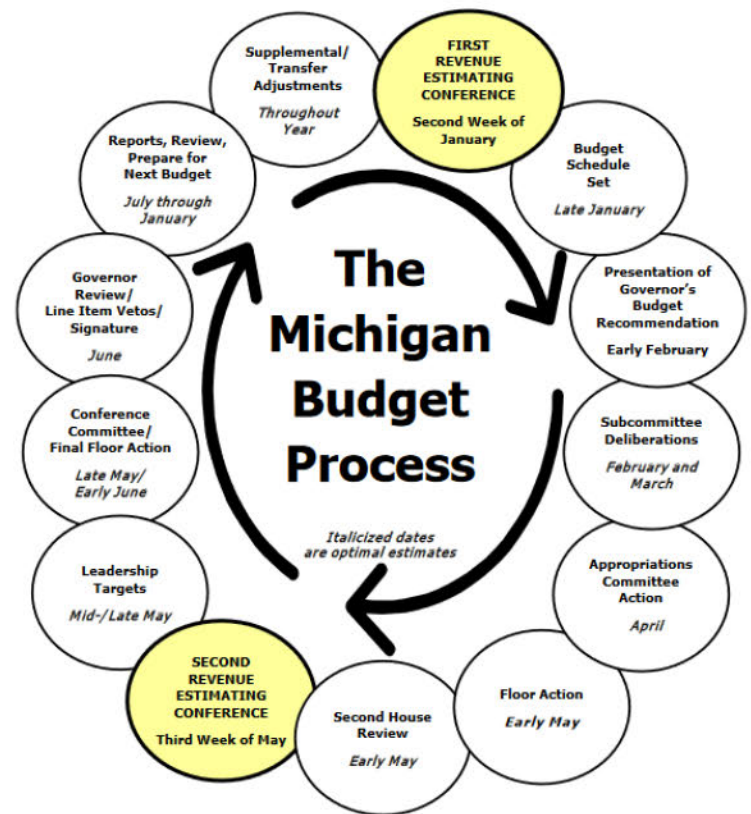
each party seeks to impose its priorities on various programs.

By mid-May, both the House and Senate should have completed their work. While each chamber will likely pass its own version of the budget, the priorities and amendments may differ significantly, given the political divide between the two chambers. Once both chambers have passed their versions, the real work of reconciliation begins.

In mid-May comes the second Revenue Estimating Conference, which locks down the figures to use. The updated revenue projections form the basis for setting revenue “targets” for the different areas of the budget.

These targets represent the maximum amount of money that can be allocated to each budget area.

After the revenue targets have been set, the House and Senate must reconcile their differences. This is where the most intense





negotiations take place, as lawmakers from both chambers work to find common ground on the proposed funding levels and priorities.

Once both chambers have agreed on a final version of the budget, a conference committee, staffed by legislators from both chambers, is formed to iron out any remaining differences.

Once the conference committee has reached an agreement, its report (the final budget) is presented to both the House and Senate for approval. If both chambers pass the budget, it is then sent to the governor for review.

The governor typically has 14 days to either sign the budget into law or veto parts of it. If the governor vetoes any provisions (i.e., a line-item veto), the Legislature can override the veto with a two-thirds majority vote in both chambers.

However, this fiscal/technical process can fall prey to political dynamics in any given year.

For example, in anticipation of a potential stalemate over the full budget, the Michigan House this year passed a “stripped-down” FY26 budget (House Bill 4161). It focuses on critical areas like corrections, K-12 education and local government revenue sharing. This was done in anticipation of a stalemate on funding priorities prior to the end of the state’s fiscal year on Sept. 30. The Senate, however, has shown no intention to take up HB 4161.

If an agreement on the budget cannot be reached by the end of a fiscal year, the state government faces a shutdown, as was the case in 2007 and 2009. What would be different for a shutdown this year is it would occur at a time when the state’s coffers are relatively full. ♦



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# Counties score well in latest fiscal update

BY STEPHANIE LEISER/CENTER FOR LOCAL, STATE AND URBAN POLICY



**“MPPS results suggest that compared to other types of jurisdictions, counties are more likely to be worried about cash flow — 15 percent say it is ‘somewhat of a problem’ or ‘a significant problem...’”**

The Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy (CLOSUP) at the University of Michigan recently released its second annual report (see <https://bit.ly/Counties2023>) examining fiscal conditions for Michigan counties and other general purpose local governments. Overall, the report suggests that, as of fiscal year 2023, most counties are in a good financial position, but there are some important warning signs on the horizon.

The report combines analyses of the FY23 Annual Local Unit Fiscal Report (F-65) data with insights from CLOSUP’s Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS) to assess trends in both short-term and long-term dimensions of local fiscal health and highlight potential areas of concern.

In the short-term, most Michigan counties score well on measures of liquidity and budget balance. For example, the median county has a fund balance ratio (unrestricted General Fund balance divided by revenue) of 31 percent in FY23, up from 28 percent in FY22. However, almost one-quarter of counties have a fund balance ratio lower than 15 percent, the Government Finance Officers Association’s recommended minimum.

Most counties also have adequate cash balances in FY23, with the median county having 193 days’ worth of cash on hand. However, MPPS results suggest that compared to other types of jurisdictions, counties are more likely to be worried about cash flow — 15 percent say it is “somewhat of a problem” or “a significant problem” — and that percentage has increased in recent years.

Another short-term measure of fiscal health is budget balance. In FY23, the median county’s general fund revenues exceeded expenditures by a comfortable 5 percent, and enterprise fund revenues exceeded expenditures by 15 percent. However, despite healthy fund balance growth in most counties, eighteen counties had a General Fund deficit in FY23.

When it comes to long-term financial obligations, counting debt, pension, and OPEB (e.g. retiree health care) obligations, the median county’s long-term liabilities were equal to about 41 percent of annual revenues in FY23, unchanged from FY22. Pension and OPEB obligations are the largest long-term burden for most counties. Pension funded ratios slipped across the board in FY23, with the median county’s funded ratio at 71 percent, compared to 75 percent in FY22.



These funded ratios are still fairly good, but with recent market turbulence and falling asset values, funded ratios may continue to fall even if counties consistently make the full actuarially determined contributions.

To evaluate a county's capacity to deliver services, one strategy is to measure expenditures per capita. In FY23, the median county spent \$874 per resident on governmental services, a 9 percent increase from FY22. However, it's important to note that counties range widely in their service capacity, with some spending as little as \$500 per resident and others spending more than \$1,000. With the recent high levels of inflation, it is encouraging to see strong growth in service delivery capacity.

Ultimately, counties' ability to deliver services and pay financial obligations rely largely on property tax revenues. The median county derives 56 percent of its General Fund revenue from property taxes in FY23, with most counties in the 40 percent to 70 percent range. While property taxes are relatively less volatile than other revenue sources, the restrictions of Proposal A and the Headlee Amendment make it difficult to expand revenue in response to cost inflation or service demand growth.

Overall, both short and long-term financial indicators show most Michigan county governments are in a strong financial position. However, going forward, counties' long-term liabilities and service capacity may be vulnerable to market turbulence, inflation and other economic forces. ♦

*The Center for Local, State and Urban Policy, a MAC affiliate, conducts, supports and fosters applied academic research to improve understanding of local, state and urban policy issues. Learn more at <https://closup.umich.edu/>.*

## Letter from the Executive Director

FROM PAGE 3

Our goal is to help you turn these dollars into long-term, sustainable solutions that include, expanded treatment options, community prevention programs, mental health services, and better tools for public safety officials. We're here to ensure counties don't have to navigate this opportunity alone.

In closing, this conference is your platform to dig into issues, connect with peers and share what's working and what isn't. These next few days are a chance to strengthen our collective voice — not just here in Lansing, but across every level of government.

Take full advantage of the conversations, the presentation pods and the time together. Ask questions, share your insights, forge new partnerships. The work you do matters, and the relationships you build here will only make counties stronger.

Thank you for your leadership, your resilience, and your service to your communities. Thank you for your trust in MAC. And most of all — thank you for being here. ♦



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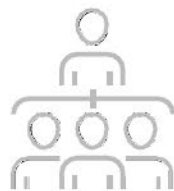
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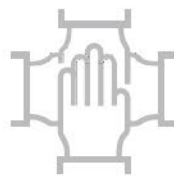
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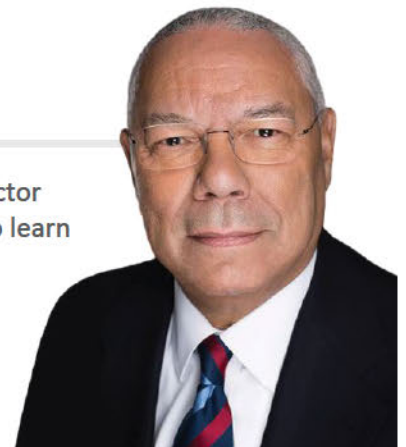
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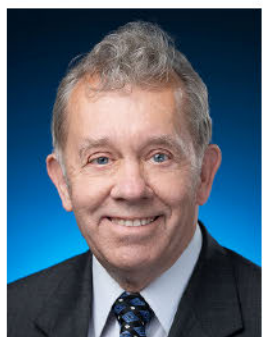
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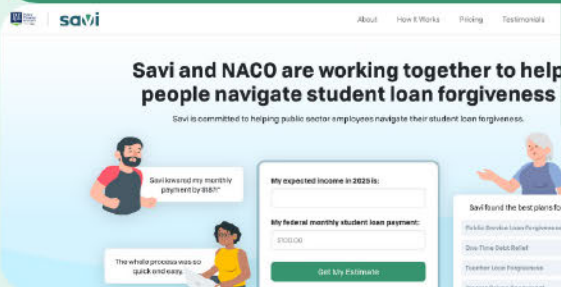
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## What is the most pressing issue facing Michigan?

The loss of population, precipitated by an unfavorable business environment and worsening education standing. With the repeal of right-to-work, other best practices need to be established: favorable tax code, improved infrastructure and focused workforce training.

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

Counties are usually the most central location for services. The best example is veteran services, other services like aging/senior agencies, transportation, road and drain commissions and, of course, courts and jail.

## How do you feel your experience as a county commissioner impacts your policy decisions in the Legislature?

I'm sympathetic to shared revenue and relationships in collecting taxes. Also, the issue of unfunded mandates when creating laws.

## As chair of the House Natural Resources and Tourism Committee, what are the main policy topics you would like the committee to focus on?

Making Michigan attractive. I have numerous firsthand experiences of someone who has visited Michigan and wants to return. Our forests and waterways are huge assets, attractive in all four seasons. We have world-class hunting and fishing opportunities. We need to protect outdoor activities to enjoy our scenic vistas and hidden gems. We need to ensure mining, drilling, forestry and road building can exist side-by-side with recreation for economic success and environmental care.

## Which programs will provide more renewable and sustainable energy for Michigan?

The completion of Line 5 below the Straits of Mackinac. Development of small modular reactors for nuclear power, providing a solid baseload of electricity and potential manufacturing of those reactors. Eliminating the fearmongering of climate change and the dangers of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. The use of our own sources of natural gas using clean technology. ♦



**Name:**

Rep. David Martin

**District/counties:**

68th / Genesee,  
Oakland

**Committees:**

Natural Resources  
and Tourism, Chair;  
Energy; Finance,  
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**Previous**

**public service:**

Genesee County  
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