

MICHIGAN COUNTIES



‘Lame duck’ legislative session limps to unremarkable conclusion



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Letter from the Executive Director



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Currie', written over a white background.

STEPHAN W. CURRIE
MAC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

“Implementing Association Sphere is part of MAC’s broader strategy to embrace innovation and position itself as a leader among state-level associations.”

MAC embraces technology with Association Sphere

MAC has long served as a vital resource for the state’s 83 counties, providing advocacy, education and support for local governments. As demands on counties grow and digital transformation becomes a priority, MAC has taken a bold step forward by implementing Association Sphere, a cutting-edge software platform designed to streamline operations and enhance member engagement. This initiative marks a significant milestone in MAC’s mission to better serve its members and foster collaboration among county officials.

Why Association Sphere?

For an organization like MAC, managing a diverse membership of county commissioners, administrators, and other officials requires a robust system that can handle everything from event planning to financial tracking. Association Sphere offers an all-in-one platform that integrates membership management, communication, event coordination and financial oversight, making it the ideal solution for MAC’s needs.

Key features of Association Sphere:

- **Centralized Membership Management:** Keep track of member data, dues, and activity in one secure location.
- **Event and Conference Tools:** Simplify the planning and execution of MAC’s annual conferences and training sessions within County Commissioner Academy.
- **Enhanced Communication Channels:** Deliver timely updates, newsletters and legislative alerts to members with ease.
- **Financial Oversight:** Streamline invoicing, payments and reporting to maintain transparency and accountability.

MAC’s decision to adopt Association Sphere reflects its commitment to addressing the evolving needs of its members. County governments face increasing pressure to deliver services efficiently, often with limited resources. By upgrading its internal systems, MAC ensures it can provide streamlined support and real-time information to county officials, enabling them to make more informed decisions for their constituents.

At the heart of MAC’s mission is its dedication to serving county officials. Association Sphere helps strengthen this relationship by improving how MAC communicates and interacts with its members. The platform’s email marketing tools, event registration systems, and member portals create a more personalized experience, allowing members to access the information they need when they need it.

Implementing Association Sphere is part of MAC’s broader strategy to embrace innovation and position itself as a leader among state-level associations. By investing in this technology, MAC demonstrates its commitment to staying ahead of operational challenges and delivering value to its members.

The software’s user-friendly design and comprehensive features will make an impact on the membership. Members will find it easier to stay informed, register for events, and engage with MAC’s resources. For county officials navigating the complexities of modern governance, this streamlined support is invaluable.

For the commissioners and officials who rely on MAC, this step signals a brighter, more connected future for local government. ♦

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Letter from the President



Melissa A. Daub

MELISSA DAUB
PRESIDENT, MAC BOARD OF
DIRECTORS

“As we move into 2025, we must remain focused on the critical work ahead. MAC’s role as a voice for local government is more important than ever, especially as we face ongoing budget constraints, increasing demands for services and new legislative challenges.”

In December 2018, I drove to Frankenmuth to attend the New Commissioners School co-hosted by the Michigan Association of Counties. As a new county commissioner with no prior experience in office, I was eager to learn.

Right away, I knew I wanted to get involved with MAC.

This year, I returned to the Frankenmuth school site as MAC Board President, welcoming a new group of commissioners ready to learn and serve their communities.

Reflecting on my journey — from sitting in their shoes to overcoming challenges and preparing for future opportunities — was incredibly meaningful. It was also inspiring to hear from people across the state who are deeply invested in their communities and eager to work together to make Michigan a better place for everyone.

As we move into 2025, we must remain focused on the critical work ahead. MAC’s role as a voice for local government is more important than ever, especially as we face ongoing budget constraints, increasing demands for services and new legislative challenges. We will continue to advocate for fair and adequate funding for counties and push back against unfunded mandates that stretch our resources thin. Simultaneously, we must prioritize essential issues such as infrastructure improvements, mental health services, and public safety — areas that directly impact the well-being of our residents.

Next year, I am committed to expanding MAC’s influence and ensuring that we remain a strong advocate for counties across Michigan. Strengthening our political action committee will be crucial to our success, and I encourage all of us to engage more deeply in the political and policy discussions that will shape the future of local governance.

Together, we’ve made significant strides this year, but the work is far from done. I hope everyone has a safe and happy holiday season, and I look forward to working together in the year ahead. ♦



MAC BOARD PRESIDENT MELISSA DAUB OF WAYNE COUNTY IS INTRODUCED BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR STEPHAN CURRIE AT THE NEW COMMISSIONER SCHOOL SITE IN FRANKENMUTH ON DEC. 2.



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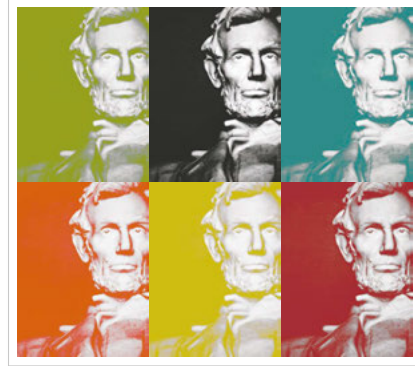
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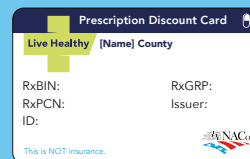
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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR STEPHAN CURRIE WAS ON HAND IN OTSEGO COUNTY ON DEC. 17 TO HONOR COMMISSIONER DOUG JOHNSON, WHO RETIRED IN DECEMBER AFTER 44 CONTINUOUS YEARS OF SERVICE TO HIS COUNTY AND COMMUNITY. (PHOTO COURTESY OF OTSEGO COUNTY)

Johnson retires in Otsego County, ending 44-year run in county office

In a ceremony on Dec. 17, Otsego Commissioner Douglas Johnson was honored by his colleagues, legislators and the Michigan Association of Counties for his upcoming retirement, which will end a remarkable 44-year run as a county commissioner.

Johnson began his Otsego service in 1981, the first year of the Ronald Reagan presidency. “Starting Over” by John Lennon was no. 1 on the pop charts that January. And the Detroit Lions had just finished 9-7 behind rookie sensation Billy Sims.

“People’s attitudes change towards you once you get into

office,” Johnson said in a Michigan Counties profile of him as the longest-serving commissioner in 2022. “They are not always going to agree with you. And it’s always a challenge to help them understand why you do what you’re doing, and you’re doing what you think is right for the majority of the people that you serve.”

In addition to serving many years as chair of the Otsego County Board, Johnson has long served as board president of the Michigan Counties Workers’ Compensation Fund.

For those interested in starting a public career, Johnson advised in 2022, “Stay focused on the work and be true to yourself, your beliefs and your values.

“It is important to be honest and dependable and follow through on your promises; also, accept the fact that not everybody is going to agree with you and to not beat yourself up over it.”

All at MAC wish a wonderful retirement for Johnson and his wife Sherry. ♦

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‘Lame duck’ legislative session limps to unremarkable conclusion

BY DEENA BOSWORTH/DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

“While the year-end chaos in Lansing derailed some contentious bills that could have harmed counties, many critical issues remain unresolved. The incoming Legislature in 2025 will have a major challenge in addressing lingering priorities and repairing the fractured relationships that defined this tumultuous session.”



The Michigan Legislature’s 102nd session came to a dramatic and chaotic end on Friday, Dec. 20 as partisan gridlock, intraparty disputes and legislative walkouts defined the final days of lawmaking. Amid a flurry of legislative priorities and unyielding demands, the House and Senate struggled to pass key bills, leaving critical issues unresolved and fueling criticism of legislative leadership.

House Republicans set the stage for the turmoil by walking out of the chamber in unison Dec. 13 and refusing to return to session unless Speaker Joe Tate (D-Wayne) agreed to address their priorities, specifically legislation to resolve issues surrounding the minimum wage for tipped workers and amendments to the Earned Sick Leave Act. Their absence left the slim Democratic majority scrambling to pass bills for the rest of the day, voting on bills with unanimous support until approximately 10 p.m.

Compounding the problem, cracks began to appear within the Democratic ranks. Rep. Karen Whitsett (D-Wayne) refused to continue voting and subsequently boycotted the session. Whitsett’s absence was fueled by frustration that her legislative priorities — including changes to the tip credit, earned sick leave, road funding, water affordability, and public safety measures — were excluded from the agenda. Her defection left the Democratic majority

without enough members in attendance to conduct any business.

The following week we saw further dysfunction in the House and on the Senate side, when Sen. Sylvia Santana (D-Wayne) joined the ranks of dissenters Dec. 17. Santana announced she would not participate in sessions, citing opposition to what she deemed “corporate welfare” and the Legislature’s failure to address her own policy goals. Her decision further stymied efforts to push through key bills and underscored the deep divisions within the Legislature. She did, however, attend Senate session on Dec. 18, but without the House able to obtain a quorum that day, activity was severely limited. If the Senate wanted to continue working to get bills to the governor’s desk, they could only vote on bills that had already passed the House because the House would not be in session to concur in any changes made by the Senate.

Adding to the political gridlock, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer delivered a stern message to legislators, warning she would veto any legislation presented to her unless her economic development package and road funding initiatives reached her desk. The governor’s ultimatum heightened tensions and left legislators with little room to maneuver as they faced competing priorities and dwindling time.

Despite the 29-hour Senate session that began at 10 a.m. Dec. 19 and ended at 3 p.m. Dec. 20, several key bills failed to make it to the governor's desk. Among them were the Revenue Sharing Trust Fund bills, House Bills 4274-75. These MAC-backed bills, championed by Rep. Amos O'Neal (D-Saginaw) and Rep. Mark Tisdell (R-Oakland), never received a vote in the Senate.

On the bright side for MAC, several bills we opposed also failed to advance, including Senate Bill 1167, which would have made minimum staffing levels a subject of collective bargaining for sheriff's deputies. The bill would have also allowed such issues to be elevated to binding arbitration, a provision that raised significant concerns among county officials.

Also falling at the finish line was statewide septic code that has long troubled counties. The last version of the bill was significantly scaled back to simply creating a technical advisory committee, a statewide database of septic systems and a one-time inspection for high-risk systems, such as

those near water bodies, installed without permits, or located in 100-year floodplains.

A bill that did advance in the final days, House Bill 6058, amends the Public Employer Healthcare Contribution Act. It increases the hard-cap limit on employer contributions to employee health insurance, but for those public employers choosing the 80/20 cost-share approach, it mandates that employers pay at least 80 percent, thereby removing the cap and making it a floor to work from. The bill, however, is fundamentally flawed in the way it ties the hard cap to an inflationary mechanism that is vague and potentially unworkable. It remains to be seen if the governor will sign the bill.

While the year-end chaos in Lansing derailed some contentious bills that could have harmed counties, many critical issues remain unresolved. The incoming Legislature in 2025 will have a major challenge in addressing lingering priorities and repairing the fractured relationships that defined this tumultuous session. ♦



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Lessons from Tomorrowland: Kent County's path to 2050

BY JESSIE HARRIS AND AL VANDERBERG/KENT COUNTY

Jessie Harris is a management analyst for Kent County. Al Vanderberg is Kent County administrator.

I'm sure many of you reading this have had moments where you thought "Wow, it would be really nice to have a crystal ball right now..." But even if we had a glimpse of what's coming, we would still face the question of what should happen, rather than just what could happen. Long-range future planning or "futuring" isn't about predicting exact outcomes or following a single path forward; it's about the vision and courage to ask, "What becomes possible if we aim higher?" and "How can we best organize to make that future vision a reality?" In a world defined by rapid change and emerging challenges, strategic foresight becomes both an opportunity and a necessity.



KENT COUNTY 2050

A Regional "North Star"

process used by many including NATO, the U.S. military, Disney, and other Fortune 500 companies to identify risk, mitigate disruption, drive

innovation, and shape the future. Strategic foresight is a competitive advantage yet less than 3 percent of senior leaders' time is spent thinking strategically about the future."

Strategic foresight is conducted in multiple phases, including Scanning, Sensing, Imagining and Defining.

Why 'Headwater'?

"In 2050, Kent County will be 214 years old. That's 11 generations. And long before Kent County's incorporation, the Grand River was shaping this region and its inhabitants. If you go to the headwaters of the Grand, all the way to the Fen Preserve, you see a narrow river of water flowing through rich wetland, a whisper of what the river becomes as it gains volume and strength and as it flows through our county. We see this plan as a "Headwater," a starting point for what's possible in 2050."

Developed with input from a steering committee, residents, and stakeholder groups, the Headwater Framework is organized around four focus areas: Live Well; Thrive Together; Cultivate Community; and Be Resilient.

Beginning in early 2025, the Kent County 2050 collaborative plans to continue discussions, set milestones, and create an online platform to track progress, share data, and compile resources for each focus area.

As we look to the future, it's increasingly clear that the answer lies in thoughtful, proactive, and intentional partnerships. Our journey to building thriving communities begins with a simple but powerful truth: we all have a part to play, and we all deserve a seat at the table. After all, isn't the most promising future the one that we help create? ♦

Enter the Kent County 2050 "Headwater" Framework — a bold and unifying vision designed to guide our region for the next 30 years. At its heart, this framework serves as a powerful "North Star," aligning and reorienting our efforts and aspirations toward a brighter, more favorable future for Kent County. Developed by the Kent County 2050 collaborative — a diverse partnership of cross-sector leaders and residents — Headwater is anchored by one guiding question: What MUST we get right today to become good ancestors tomorrow?

Through this plan, we've had the opportunity to explore and prepare for the "what ifs" that lie ahead —whether they come as demographic changes, economic challenges, cultural shifts, or strides in technology. The Headwater Framework goes beyond the scope of an explicit 3- to 5-year strategy; it is a blueprint designed for everyone who calls Kent County home and committed to making our future as prolific and promising as possible.

Kent County 2050 partners worked with Rebecca Ryan and Next Generation Consulting to utilize strategic foresight in development of the Headwater Plan. According to futurist Rebecca Ryan, "strategic foresight is a proven

HOW COUNTIES ARE TURNING CHALLENGES INTO OPPORTUNITIES

The challenges of service delivery for never end, making it imperative that counties always be looking for the next thing, the cutting edge. MAC wants to share and celebrate that work with our "Innovation Center" feature. Is your county on the cutting edge?

Tell us how by sending an email to melot@micounties.org and you may be the next highlight.

County board map gets redder

Voters chose 130 new faces for county boards of commissioners in Michigan during the 2024 General Election in November, a MAC review of county results found.

The election also resulted in further entrenching of Republican dominance on county boards, with GOP commissioners to fill 75 percent of board seats starting in January 2025.

“The turnover rate this election cycle was about 20 percent, which is right in line with historical results,” said MAC Executive Director Stephan Currie.

The newcomers and their veteran colleagues will be the historic first class of Michigan county commissioners directly elected to four-year terms.

On the partisan totals, MAC’s review found

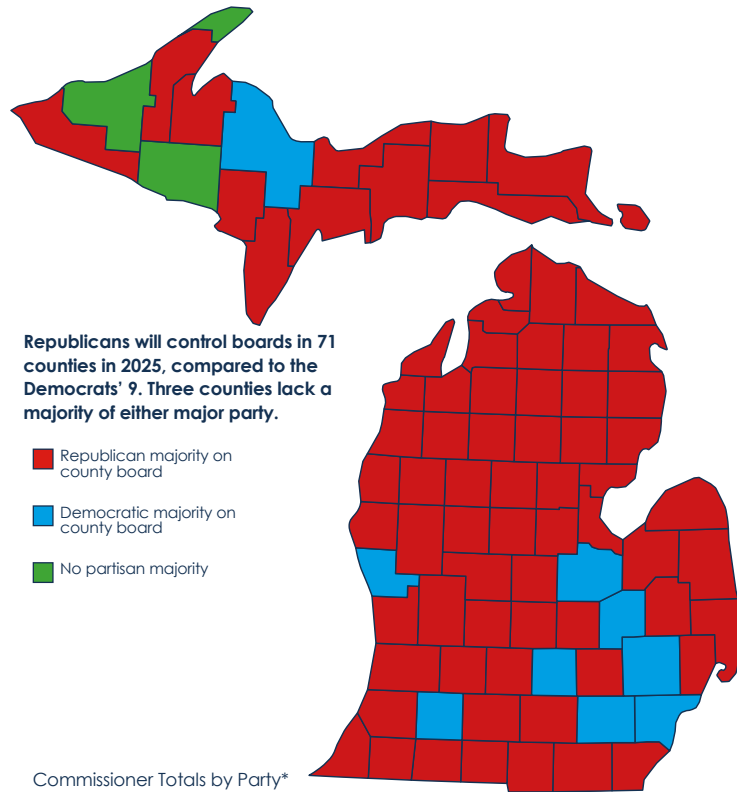
- 462 Republicans
- 139 Democrats
- 14 Independents

Four seats remain to be filled in January.

These totals put GOP majorities in control in 71 of Michigan’s 83 counties. Democratic majorities will exist in nine counties, while neither major party will have a majority in three.

After the 2014 elections, Democrats held the majority in 22 counties and held more than 200 seats.

“Kamala Harris only won nine Michigan counties in 2024 and only made gains (compared to Biden’s performance in 2020) in eight counties. That performance was reflected in races for county commissioners, which now are aligned with the presidential election,” explained Matt Grossman, director of the Institute for Public



“As politics and media coverage nationalize, it is more difficult for local candidates to stand out from their national party — especially because county commissioner candidates will now be on presidential ballots.”

Policy and Social Research (IPPSR) and a professor of political science at Michigan State University.

“Regions that once supported some Democrats at the local level, even as they voted for Trump nationally, are moving further to the Republicans,” Grossman added. “More than half of Michigan counties now have zero Democrats on their boards. Meanwhile, Democrats’ improvements in the northwest Lower Peninsula have not yet been reflected in county government. Leelanau and Grand Traverse, for example, will be majority Republican.”

“As politics and media coverage nationalize, it is more difficult for local candidates to stand out from their national party — especially because county commissioner candidates will now be on presidential ballots. Partisan change tends to come first on presidential votes, but eventually works its way down to local offices.” ♦

Indiana's website template is reminder of what Michigan *isn't* doing

BY ERIC LUPHER/CITIZENS RESEARCH COUNCIL OF MICHIGAN

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



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.



“As counties migrate their operations to the cloud, it begs the question whether each one should need technology specialists to manage the network.”

The Indiana Office of Technology is now offering free website hosting for local governments in a move to boost security and accessibility for all levels of government. This reminded me of recommendations I made in earlier work that would create economies for all counties and local governments (and school districts on another platform). I'll focus on the counties.

The concept is quite simple but seems so alien to us because of Michigan's balkanized approach to providing government services. With some minor variation, every county is doing the same things. And, while the needs of residents of Keweenaw County might vary a little from the needs of Wayne County, county staff work on similar platforms to perform their functions.

The offer from the Indiana Office of Technology employs the idea of a common role at its core. It marries the idea that people want the

same basic things from their governments with the fact that cloud technology enables easy collaboration. At its core, we expect a government website to have information about navigating government, access to public information, and forms for interacting with the government. The state can, at very little marginal cost, create a template for counties to populate the relevant information, adapt the color schemes and look that make it their own, and provide the backend security to keep hackers from corrupting the information.

While websites are outward facing, many of the tasks that county officials perform are inward facing but common in their needs and require the same cyber security. The state could maintain databases for treasurers, registers of deeds, sheriffs, clerks, equalization departments, and others that enable them to perform their tasks and easily funnel shared information to the state. This takes the concept of the existing Qualified Voter File used to track registered

voters and adapts it to the many other information pools that counties participate in.


Interacting with government usually involves filling out forms. Why do we have 83 versions (one for each county) of these forms? A uniform approach to creating uniform forms that each county can use would simplify these interactions. This is a common practice in the military and franchised businesses and it can be applied to government. The U.S. Army does not ask each regiment to create its own version of a form, so why should we ask each governmental entity? These concepts would facilitate and ease the migration from paper to online forms.

As counties migrate their operations to the cloud, it begs the question whether each one should need technology specialists to manage the network. If the state created a cloud for local governments, a staff of technology specialists would be able to respond to the needs of individual users regardless of the dotted lines on a map.

Counties often employ specialized software as part of their operations. Geographic information systems (GIS) is a good example of this. A shared approach driven by state government could lessen the unit price of obtaining software and capitalize on the skills of individuals adept at using the software.

The scarcity of tax dollars necessitates that our county governments operate as efficiently as possible. This will happen best when we think of counties not as 83 standalone entities, but as 83 branches of county government within the state. It asks the state to be more proactive, something that our state government has not always proven adept at doing. It would be better to do this in a bottom-up manner rather than legislating it to avoid issues related to Headlee mandating funding requirements.

We need government to change with the private sector and a do-it-the-way-we-have-always-done-it approach will not get us there. ♦



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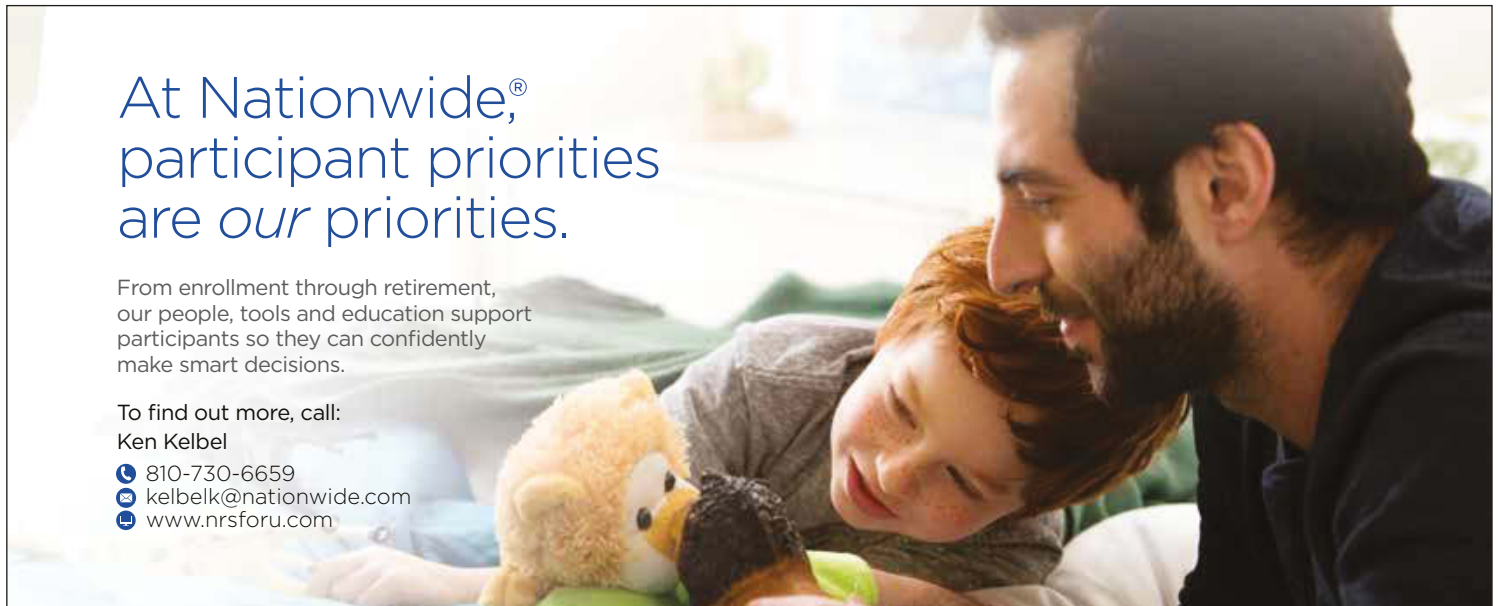
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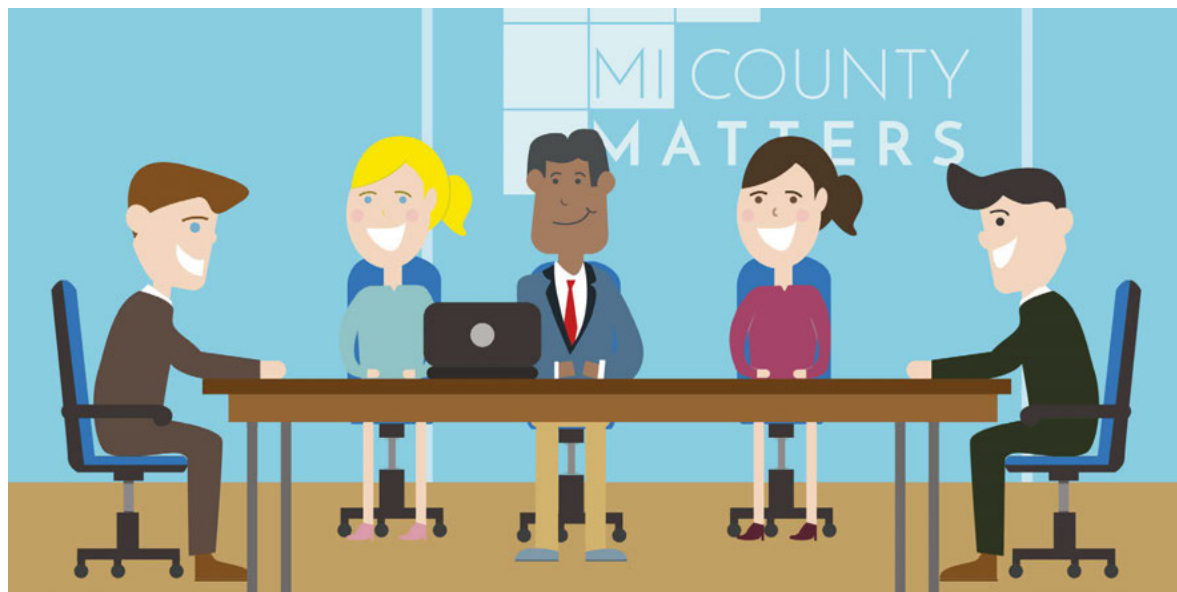


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NRM-12870M5 (01/15)

Quick reminder offered on legal requirements for electing a board chair and vice chair

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



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

With the commencement of a new term of office on Jan. 1, 2025, comes the responsibility for county boards to elect a chairperson and a vice chairperson. This process is governed by Michigan Compiled Laws (MCL) 46.3.

Notably, this process is unchanged following the amendment of MCL 46.410(1) and addition of MCL 46.410(2) by 2021 PA 122, which made the terms of County Commissioners 4 years commencing with the term of office following the November 2024 election. This change to a 4-year term had no effect on the provisions in MCL 46.3(4) regarding the timing of the elections and permissible length of term for a county board of commissioners' chairperson and vice chairperson.

The county board of commissioners is required to elect 1 of its members as chairperson and 1 of its members as vice chairperson, per MCL 46.3(4).

The chairperson shall be elected each odd-numbered year for a 2-year term, unless the board provides by resolution or board rule that the chairperson shall be elected annually, for a 1-year term. The vice chairperson is required to be elected annually for a 1-year term.

The election of a chairperson and vice-chairperson must occur at the first meeting of the county board of commissioners in a year in which a chair or vice chair is to be elected. The term of a chairperson and vice-chairperson begins upon their election.

The board does not have the option of electing a vice-chairperson for a 2-year term. Rather, the election of the vice chairperson must occur annually at the first meeting of the board, regardless of whether the election of the board chairperson occurs annually. The number of votes required for the election of a chairperson and vice-chairperson is determined by a majority vote of the county board members elected and serving, per MCL 46.3(2).

A unique aspect of an election for a board chairperson (but not the vice chairperson) is that state law allows for a secret ballot. (See MCL 46.3a.) The law does not mandate a secret ballot, but it allows for one in this specific circumstance. If the board of commissioners chooses to conduct the election of the board chairperson by secret ballot, a majority vote is required to authorize this mechanism. ♦

“This change to a 4-year term had no effect on the provisions in MCL 46.3(4) regarding the timing of the elections and permissible length of term for a county board of commissioners’ chairperson and vice chairperson.”

‘MI Choice’ program is win for seniors, state

BY DAVID LALUMIA/AREA AGENCIES ON AGING ASSOCIATION OF MICHIGAN

David LaLumia is the executive director of the Area Agencies on Aging Association of Michigan. The association is an Affiliate member of MAC.

“In addition to Medicaid funding, AAAs receive in-home services funding from the federal Older Americans Act and from the State of Michigan.”

“I’m caring for my mom, but she needs more help than I can provide”

“My aunt has been in and out of the hospital because she keeps falling”

“I want to stay in my own home, but it’s getting difficult to do so”

Older adults and people with disabilities prefer to live in their own homes and local communities. Recently, the National Poll on Healthy Aging confirmed what we all know to be true — that 88 percent of older adults want to age in place, in their own homes.

Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) help people to continue to live at home. The MI Choice program assists Medicaid beneficiaries who have been assessed and meet state established nursing facility level of care criteria. Level of care assessments are completed by AAA Registered Nurses and licensed social workers.

MI Choice supports individuals by providing an extensive array of person-centered, in-home services and supports including assistance with activities of daily living, nursing services, home-delivered meals, home modifications, respite care, transportation, adult day care and more. These services are arranged and monitored for satisfaction by a team, consisting of a registered nurse and licensed social worker.

In addition to Medicaid funding, AAAs receive in-home services funding from the federal Older Americans Act and from the State of Michigan. Successful “braiding” of these funding streams allows AAAs to provide in-home services broadly across their service area, and not limited to Medicaid beneficiaries. This unique flexibility has become known as the “Michigan Model.” It is the reason AAAs can provide flexible and seamless care to any older adult in their service areas at risk of out-of-home placement.

In addition to doing the right thing for older adults, MI Choice is a great bargain for the state of Michigan and the Medicaid program.



- Average per diem cost for MI Choice enrollee — \$89.53/day*
- Average per diem cost for skilled nursing facility (SNF) care:
- Class I SNF — \$234.56/day — Class III SNF — \$360.99/day*
- Estimated savings, MI Choice versus SNF costs in FY2023 — \$539 million*

In addition to preventing admissions to nursing facilities, MI Choice transitions individuals from skilled nursing facilities back home. In FY2023, MI Choice served 15,628 individuals. In-home services funded through OAA and state funds help avoid enrollment in Medicaid for some older adults.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the establishment of Area Agencies on Aging in Michigan. Authorized by the federal Older Americans Act, AAAs serve as advocates and focal points for older adults within the community by monitoring, evaluating, and commenting on all policies, programs, hearings, levies, and community actions which will affect older adults.

AAA services keep people at home and promote healthy aging, dignity and independence for older adults in all 83 Michigan counties. ♦

**MDHHS, Bureau of Aging and Community Living Supports, Home and Community-Based Services Section, MI Choice Waiver Data Update, Feb. 20, 2024*

Crisis control: Combatting chronic stress

BY BLUE CROSS BLUE SHIELD OF MICHIGAN

While everyone hates stress, it does serve a specific and necessary purpose. When there's a perceived threat, such as a terrifying animal, the body increases its levels of adrenaline and cortisol while restricting nonessential bodily functions.

This is all to prepare itself for “fight or flight” — the choice to either flee the scene or physically attack the danger. Once the threat passes, the system regulates itself and everything goes back to normal. Or at least, that's how it's supposed to work.

But these days, many people are a lot more likely to get stressed out about work deadlines, money issues and relationship problems than being attacked by a tiger. And those stressors aren't one-time-only events; they can occur day after day. In such cases, the response system might not shut off and the body might enter a state of chronic stress.

It turns out that can contribute to some pretty serious long-term health issues, including heart disease, digestive issues, anxiety, depression, poor sleep, weight gain and more.

While the causes vary from person to person, chronic stress can result from heavy workloads, finances, family responsibilities, previous abuse or trauma, major life changes (moving to a new city, divorce, the death of a loved one), our perceived state of the future and negative news and current events.

Fortunately, there are several strategies to help people cope with chronic stress and reduce the impact it can have on your health:

- **Meditation:** By taking a few moments to shut out the world, breathe and be still, a state of deep relaxation for the mind and body takes place. A John Hopkins University study shows that meditation can help identify the kinds of thoughts

that boost stress levels, so it's easier to avoid reacting to them. There are several types of meditation to choose from — guided meditation, mantra meditation and mindfulness meditation.

- **Yoga:** Practicing yoga combines the mental health benefits of meditation with the physical benefits of exercise. Physical activity actually reduces cortisol levels while boosting the production of mood-boosting endorphins. Yoga's emphasis on breath and focus helps establish a sense of calm while poses improve the body's circulation, strength, flexibility and balance. Over time, yoga has been shown to help manage chronic conditions — many of



which are associated with chronic stress—like anxiety, heart disease and pain.

- **Self-Care:** Making time for self-care is a crucial part of managing stress. Establish boundaries between work and home life, eat a balanced, nutritious diet, exercise regularly and participate in hobbies. Establishing a sense of balance between the stressful parts of life that cause stress and those that bring joy and peace-of-mind can greatly minimize the harmful physical and mental effects of chronic stress.
- **Seek Additional Support:** If the previously mentioned practices don't help reduce stress levels and there's a continued feeling of depression or being overwhelmed, seek help from a licensed mental health professional such as a psychologist. Consulting a professional can help uncover the underlying factors contributing to symptoms and help in the development of a customized treatment plan.

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan and Blue Care Network members can visit bcbsm.com/mentalhealth for support, resources, helpful articles and much more. ♦

“While the causes vary from person to person, chronic stress can result from heavy workloads, finances, family responsibilities, previous abuse or trauma, major life changes (moving to a new city, divorce, the death of a loved one), our perceived state of the future and negative news and current events.”

Bright future for state seen with Palisades plant revival

BY JOHN FAUL/VAN BUREN COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

“The Palisades Economic Recovery Initiative, in partnership with the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission, Market One and the University of Michigan’s Economic Growth Institute, is setting the stage for economic recovery and growth.”



THE PALISADES NUCLEAR POWER PLANT IN VAN BUREN COUNTY HAS A NEW FUTURE THANKS TO EFFORTS BY LOCAL, STATE AND FEDERAL OFFICIALS. (PHOTO COURTESY OF HOLTEC INTERNATIONAL)

Van Buren County and the state of Michigan are on the brink of an exciting opportunity: the historic reopening of the Palisades Nuclear Power Plant. With its return, Palisades will not only restore hundreds of high-paying local jobs but also play a significant role in Michigan’s clean energy ambitions.

This renewed interest in nuclear power represents a broader push towards sustainable, carbon-free energy — a positive development for our local economy and environment.

The 800-megawatt Palisades facility, located in Covert Township, has long been a cornerstone of Michigan’s energy landscape. When the plant closed in May 2022, it left behind a significant gap — not just in clean energy generation but also in the community’s economy. Van Buren

County felt the impact with the immediate loss of hundreds of highly skilled jobs, as well as a vital source of tax revenue. Now, new financing opportunities and a growing focus on energy independence are sparking hope for a revival that has captured the attention of similar plant communities across the nation.

Securing the funds to restart a nuclear power plant is no small feat, but the tide is turning. State and federal discussions have turned reality, particularly with support from the U.S. Department of Energy’s (DOE) Loan Programs Office, which is aimed at keeping essential clean energy facilities open while investing in future generation. In September, the DOE awarded a \$1.52 billion loan to plant owner Holtec International in support of the restart. With the bipartisan support of the Michigan Legislature, the state has invested \$300 million

in the restart, in addition to hundreds of millions of dollars invested by Holtec.

Unified approach at local level has been key

The local community, spearheaded by the Van Buren County Board of Commissioners, has been instrumental in pushing forward the conversation around reopening. The board passed a resolution that throws its full support behind Palisades’ return. Many others have followed suit, as the county has been joined in its support by a broad, grass-roots coalition including other local governments, the business and labor communities and local residents.

The Palisades Economic Recovery Initiative, in partnership with the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission, Market One and the University of Michigan’s Economic Growth Institute, is setting the stage for economic recovery and growth. Additionally, the Palisades Community Advisory Panel was established to keep communication open, transparent, and inclusive, ensuring that community voices were heard as the plant headed toward a 2022 shutdown.

Van Buren commissioners have not only focused on the economic benefits but also on the role that Palisades can play in achieving Michigan’s climate targets — offsetting millions of tons of carbon dioxide per year. The establishment of the advisory panel is a testament to this leadership, ensuring

that community members are actively involved and well-informed throughout the process. This commitment to transparency and collaboration has been crucial in garnering widespread support for the plant’s reopening.

For Van Buren County and the surrounding areas, the reopening of Palisades means more than just energy — it means economic vitality. The return of over 600 jobs, along with more than 1,000 supplemental employment opportunities during maintenance and refueling periods, would provide a much-needed boost to the local economy. The plant has hired more than 300 workers this year and is on track to full employment by this coming spring. Moreover, the plant has historically been one of the largest taxpayers in the area, supporting local schools, libraries, and public services.

Holtec has been vocal about its commitment to exploring all available options to restart operations. Their dedication, coupled with the proactive efforts of local and state government, suggests that Palisades may soon return as a key player in Michigan’s energy sector by the end of 2025.

Local officials and community members are optimistic, pointing to the potential benefits that Palisades will bring back to the region. While the initial closure was a setback, there is a strong sense of hope that the reopening will bring renewed prosperity and stability. ♦



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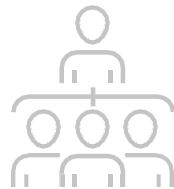
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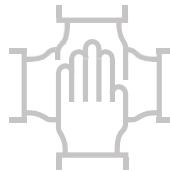
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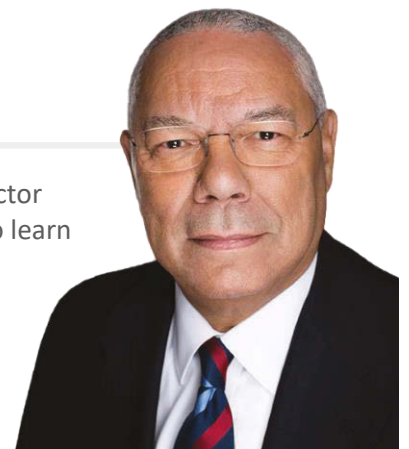
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Rep. Cam Cavitt



Name:
Rep. Cam Cavitt

District/counties:
106th / Alcona, Alpena, Cheboygan, Montmorency, Oscoda and Presque Isle

Committees:
Appropriations Subcommittee on Military and Veterans Affairs and State Police Subcommittee Minority Vice Chair; Appropriations Committee; Appropriations Subcommittee on EGLE Subcommittee; Appropriations Subcommittee on Judiciary

Term: 1st

Previous public service: Cheboygan County drain commissioner

What is the most pressing issue facing Michigan?

The most pressing issue facing Michigan today is the erosion of local control, specifically new energy development laws. With the passage of House Bill 5120, Lansing has stripped away the ability of local communities to determine what is best for their own land and residents. This is more than a bad policy decision — it’s a slippery slope. Once Lansing takes power from local governments, history has shown it rarely, if ever, gives it back.

This law empowers three unelected appointees on the Michigan Public Service Commission to make decisions for every community in the state, overriding carefully crafted zoning ordinances and disregarding local voices. Today, it’s wind and solar farms. What’s next? Giving up local control on energy projects sets a dangerous precedent for the state to seize authority on other critical issues that belong in the hands of local leaders and residents.

In rural counties, this means forests are being clear-cut, farmland has been lost and local landscapes are being reshaped without consent. Our communities are the heart of Michigan, and the decisions affecting them should be made locally—not by bureaucrats in Lansing. If we don’t stand firm and preserve local control now, we risk losing even more in the future.

How important are counties to the effective delivery of public services?

As a former Cheboygan County drain commissioner, I saw firsthand how county-level policies and decisions directly impacted the lives of residents.

Now, as a state representative, I’m one of 110 voices working on a much broader scale. While our work shapes statewide policy, it’s often the counties that implement and deliver these services effectively on the ground. Counties are closer to the people — they understand the unique challenges and priorities of their communities in a way that state government simply cannot.

Michigan works best when the state supports counties, rather than interfering with or overriding their authority. Counties are the backbone of public service delivery, and their effectiveness is a testament to the importance of local control and decision-making.

How does your experience in county government influence your policy decisions in the Legislature?

My experience in county government has had a significant impact on my policy decisions in the Legislature. Serving as Cheboygan County drain commissioner for 12 years gave me a deep understanding of the issues that matter most to my community.

As the Northern Michigan chairman for the drain commissioners’ association for 10 of those years, I expanded my reach to 22 counties, from Tawas to the Mackinac Bridge. That experience taught me the value of collaboration and the unique needs of rural communities across the region.

These relationships and insights keep me grounded as a legislator. Republicans will control the House of Representatives in 2025-2026. What legislation will you prioritize?

I’m most looking forward to having a stronger voice in shaping decisions, especially through Republicans’ role on the Appropriations Committee. Serving in the majority will give me the opportunity to bring much-needed revenue back to the local level and ensure our rural communities get the attention and resources they deserve. I plan to prioritize significant investments in infrastructure.

Additionally, I want to focus on restoring local control, particularly in the wake of recent legislation that centralized decision-making in Lansing.

Being in the majority means we can advance policies that strengthen our economy, protect our natural resources, and improve public safety—all while keeping Northern Michigan’s unique needs at the forefront. I’m

excited to roll up my sleeves and get to work for the people of my district.

While the House may have a Republican majority, the Senate will remain under Democratic control. What do you expect the budget process to look like with a divided Legislature?

With a divided Legislature, I expect the budget process to involve more negotiation, but it also presents an important opportunity for balance and accountability.

This dynamic requires us to work across the aisle, and I see that as a chance to prioritize smarter spending, invest in critical needs like infrastructure and public safety, and ensure taxpayer dollars are used wisely. I'm committed to making sure Northern Michigan's needs are not overlooked, and I'll work to secure a budget that benefits every corner of the state — not just the urban areas. ♦

“Counties are the backbone of public service delivery, and their effectiveness is a testament to the importance of local control and decision-making.”

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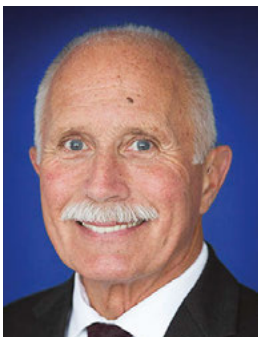
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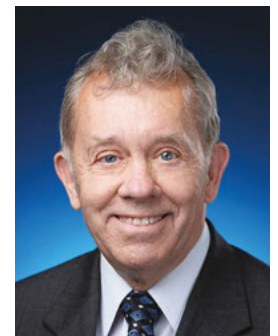
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