



**April 2021**

### **IS THE ICE BEGINNING TO CRACK?**

For the first time in over a year, Governor Gretchen Whitmer, Senate Majority Leader Mike Shirkey (R-Clarklake) and House Speaker Jason Wentworth (R-Farwell) met alone and in person last week for the first time – possibly their most genuine attempt to mend fences after many months of open acrimony.

None of the three are talking about what was on the agenda for discussion. Maybe the first item might have been introductions.

The good news, however, is that there was an in-person meeting without staff and that would appear to be progress.

### **GOVERNOR WHITMER VETOES BROADBAND BILL**

Governor Gretchen Whitmer put her veto pen to legislation (HB 4210) that would give property tax breaks to established internet providers who expand into “underserved” areas with no or low internet services on the grounds that mandated minimum speed of service laid out in the bill was too slow.

Governor Whitmer said the bill would cost schools millions of dollars in lost property tax revenue while giving communities at least 25 mbps per second which she said is a “mere fraction” for the speeds well in excess of the 100 mbps that the United States broadband users have come to expect.

Governor Whitmer said she is willing to work with lawmakers using American Rescue Plan money made available through President Biden’s COVID-19 stimulus bill to “strengthen Michigan’s broadband infrastructure.”

### **SHIRKEY TAKES LEAD IN RENEWING MENTAL HEALTH INTEGRATION TALKS**

Working behind the scenes, Senate Majority Leader Mike Shirkey and his team are leading efforts to craft legislation that wraps all physical and mental health services for Medicaid recipients under a single program.

The leader is meeting with stakeholders on crafting legislation that would have the health plans coordinating services for patients with severe mental health challenges and addictions, a move that has some advocates concerned about an arrangement in which those most in need will be stuck with substandard therapy because the health plans won’t pay for the type of innovative treatment that could benefit them the most.

As for Department of Health and Human Services Director Elizabeth Hertel, she said her focus on behavioral mental health is trying to expand access and focusing on places for people to go in a crisis and need help. “Right now we don’t have enough capacity for that and we need to think about that and invest in that.”

### **FORMER LAWMAKERS GO TO APPEALS COURT IN EFFORT TO OVERTURN TERM LIMITS**

After losing at the lower court level, ten former lawmakers who say term limits violate their constitutional rights are taking their case to the United States Court of Appeals.

United States District Court Judge Janet T. Neff dismissed the bipartisan group’s lawsuit in January saying they hadn’t established “as a matter of law” that the state Constitution’s term limits provision violates either the federal or state constitutions.

The former lawmakers asked the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals to consider their case in light of the United States Supreme Court precedent on candidates’ right to “meaningful ballot access.” They press their First and Fourteenth amendment rights as “candidates who have been permanently barred from the ballot,” according to their court filing.

### **HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE TAKING UP BILLS TO BAN CELL PHONES WHILE DRIVING**

Although no vote has yet been taken, the House Judiciary Committee is looking at legislation (HBs 4277 through 4279) that would ban using any electronic device, including a cell phone, while driving.

Currently, it is only illegal to send or read text messages while driving.

The three-bill package would add use of a cell phone, broadband, two-way messaging, pagers, a personal digital assistant, laptop, tablet, computer, and electronic games to the list.

Exceptions would be made for hands free devices and voice operated devices integrated into a motor vehicle itself. Exceptions would also be allowed for law enforcement, contacting 9-1-1, and use of GPS as long as information is not entered by hand.

### **HOUSE DEMOCRATS PUSH TO RESTORE PREVAILING WAGE**

Legislation (HB 4594) has been introduced by House Democrats aimed at restoring Michigan’s prevailing wage law that was repealed in 2018.

Specifically, the bill states that wages and benefits paid by state contractors and subcontractors “shall be not less than the wage and fringe benefit rates prevailing in the locality in which the work is to be performed.”

The prevailing wage law was repealed with the belief that it would save taxpayer money by allowing non-union shops to bid for projects with lower quotes than what union shops might be able to offer.

### **LEGISLATION WOULD ALLOW LOCALS TO BAN GUNS IN CITY HALL AND TOWNSHIP HALL**

Under legislation (SB 352) proposed by Senator Jeff Irwin (D-Ann Arbor) local governments could enact gun regulations on public property – like their own city and township halls.

Senator Irwin said the legislation would restore to municipalities the authority to enact firearm regulations for their facilities “in the interest of public safety.”

According to Senator Irwin, local governments had that authority for 150 years until the law was changed in 1991.

### **DHHS EXTENDS MASK, GATHERINGS ORDER; AND KIDS 2 TO 4 MUST NOW MASK UP**

Children ages 2 to 4 will need to mask up at childcare facilities or camps starting April 26 under an extended order issued by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).

The order comes amid an increase of COVID-19 cases among younger children and follows recommendations from the American Academy of Pediatrics and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Under the order, Michiganders will need to continue wearing a mask at social gatherings, on a bus, inside a building accessible to the public, a gym, or an outdoor organized sporting event. It also keeps in place the limitations on gatherings.

Restaurants need to keep their indoor occupancy at 50% with an 11 p.m. curfew. Indoor stadiums with fewer than 10,000 seats must keep patrons at no more than 375, while those stadiums with more than 10,000 seats must keep patrons at no more than 750.

### **SENATE DEMOCRATS PICK 2022 CAMPAIGN TEAM**

Senator Adam Hollier (D-Detroit) and Senator Jeremy Moss (D-Southfield) have been named co-chairs of the Senate Democrats’ 2022 campaign team.

Also, Senator Winnie Brinks (D-Grand Rapids) and Senator Sylvia Santana (D-Detroit) were announced as finance co-chairs.