



Capitol Update

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With the Flint Water Crisis and Detroit Public School potential bankruptcy looming large, the Michigan Legislature and Governor's office continued the traditional February through June emphasis on the state's budget. This is an election year for the Michigan House so measures appealing to various electorates were advanced. The AAUW of Michigan concentrated its efforts on bills concerning our public policy priorities of education, economic security for women, and individual rights/social justice.

Reported here are updates on Equal Pay Day 2016, education bills, a proposed state constitutional equality amendment, paid sick time ballot proposal, abortion coercion bills, fetal tissue transport bills, modifying the insurance abortion ban bills, and ways to stay informed. Read more . . .

Equal Pay Day 2016 – April 12 saw the Equal Pay Day Coalition led by AAUW of Michigan's Mickey Edell orchestrate a well-attended Issues Briefing, Rally on the Capitol Steps, and lobbying of House members about the [equal pay package of bills](#). Save the date and start planning now for next year's national Equal Pay Day, **April 4, 2017**.

Education - The AAUW of Michigan supported the bi-partisan Michigan Senate plan [SB 710](#) to address reform and funding of the **Detroit Public Schools** in letters to all legislators and the Governor. That plan includes returning the Detroit school system to an elected school board and establishing a central organization to approve opening and closing of all public schools in Detroit along with adequate financing to address the debt and operations. The House plan protected charter schools and did not have adequate funding.

The Michigan House and Senate have both passed differing versions of [HB 4822](#) to require **retention of third graders** who fail reading assessments. The AAUW of Michigan has opposed retention but feels more favorably to the Senate version of HB 4822 which involves parents and has some exceptions. A conference committee has been appointed by each house and negotiations continue.

AAUW of Michigan put in a card opposing [SB 826](#) sponsored by Sen. Patrick Colbeck (R-Canton Township) abolishing **Common Core** standards and replacing them with the standards Massachusetts used to benchmark their K-12 students a few years ago. The bill was reported out of the Senate Education Committee along party lines and awaits further action by the full Senate.

Constitutional Equality – The Michigan House Judiciary Committee held a hearing on March 17 about [HJR GG](#) to add “sex” to the equal protection clause of Michigan’s Constitution, Article I, Section 2. HJR GG is sponsored by State Rep. Marcia Hovey-Wright (D-Muskegon). A letter from AAUW of Michigan President [Beth Haynes](#) and South Haven AAUW’s [Elaine Stevens](#) supporting the measure was sent to all Committee members. I testified on our behalf from this [summary](#) of what HJR GG would do.

The only questions asked at the hearing were from Rep. Runestad (R-White Lake) who wanted to know if “sex” would include “gender identity.” He wanted to add the word “biological” before the word “sex.” Federal courts and the federal government’s executive branch are already moving to include protections for gender identity under federal laws and regulations about sex discrimination, but as yet there is apparently no Michigan court willing to interpret Michigan’s civil rights statute banning sex discrimination as including gender identity.

House Judiciary Chair Klint Kesto (R-Commerce Township) will not likely schedule HJR GG for a Committee vote until there are at least 4 of the 7 Republicans on the Committee in support. If it is reported out of committee, the next hurdle will be getting a House floor vote. Speaker of the House Keven Cotter (R-Mt. Pleasant) is interested in the measure and might schedule a vote. Two-thirds (73) of the 110 House members would be needed for passage. Then we need to get through the Michigan Senate Judiciary Committee and a 2/3 vote in the full Senate, all before September 9 when the Secretary of State needs the language to print on the ballots for the November 8 election. With the Legislature adjourning between June 9 and 16 for the summer, and with only a day in July and August scheduled for session, time is running out.

Paid Sick Time - Last fall the AAUW of Michigan Board endorsed the Time To Care Coalition’s petition drive to put an initiated law concerning earned paid sick time on the ballot. Similar to our pay equity bills, the legislative leadership has so far refused to consider bills ([SB 101](#), [HB 4167](#)) that would require employers of a certain size to provide earned paid sick time to employees. Over 40 percent of workers in Michigan do not have earned paid sick time and so they often go to work sick or send their children to school sick. The Coalition recently announced that it is suspending the signature gathering process, a great disappointment.

Abortion Coercion bills - Abortion coercion bills, HBs 4787 and 4830, have passed both houses of the Michigan Legislature and are headed for the Governor’s desk at this writing. He has 14 days after presentment to sign or veto the bills. Coercive abortion laws like HB 4787 and 4830 are the byproduct of a decades-long public and political campaign asserting that any woman who seeks an abortion does so because she is confused, misled or coerced, regardless of the fact that studies consistently find this to be untrue. Michigan’s existing informed consent law mandates that a woman’s consent to an abortion must be “given freely without coercion” with requirements that she sign a statement saying she has read a state-formatted acknowledgement of non-coercion.

These bills do not address at all coercion to get or stay pregnant. According to Michigan law, the appropriate maximum for comparable misdemeanors is \$500. The fines in these bills are ten to twenty times higher. Ask the governor to veto the bills using this [link](#).

Fetal Tissue Transport bills – The Michigan Senate on Michigan Right to Life’s Lobby Day has passed two bills to criminalize transport of fetal tissue, [SB 564](#) and [565](#) sponsored by Sen. Phil Pavlov (R-St. Clair) who is currently running for the U.S. Congress. The AAUW of Michigan testified against the bills in Committee and sent a letter of opposition to the full Senate. The bills have been referred to the House Health Policy Committee.

The bills would make it a 5-year felony for paying medical waste companies to transport donated fetal tissue to research labs. Donated fetal tissue research has led to life-saving vaccines and treatments for polio, measles, shingles, rabies, and Hepatitis A, among many other diseases and conditions. Recently, donated fetal tissue research findings on the Zika virus were published. If medical waste companies cannot receive payment for transporting fetal tissue, each clinic might have to buy their own medical incinerator at some cost, likely closing more clinics providing abortions.

In the Senate Oversight Committee hearing, the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, the University of Michigan, Dr. Steven Rapundalo of MichBio, the ACLU of Michigan, Planned Parenthood and others also opposed the bills.

Insurance Abortion Ban - Currently, women must purchase additional abortion coverage from their health insurance provider as a result of the Legislature's passage of a 2013 legislative initiative put forth by Right to Life of Michigan. Abortions performed to save a woman's life are the only exception to the abortion rider law. Only 7 of 42 Michigan health insurance providers offer an abortion insurance rider. One in three women will have an abortion in her lifetime according to the Guttmacher Institute so this is a common women’s health need.

Recently three bills were introduced to modify the ban on abortion insurance coverage in Michigan. Rep. Sarah Roberts (D-St. Clair Shores) is sponsoring [HB 5699](#), which would allow a woman to use health insurance to cover an abortion when medical tests reveal the fetus suffers from a genetic abnormality. Rep. Marcia Hovey-Wright (D-Muskegon) is sponsoring [HB 5698](#), which would do the same for women whose doctors recommend terminating a pregnancy in order to preserve her health, and Rep. Gretchen Driskell (D-Saline) is sponsoring [HB 5697](#), which would extend that exemption to women who become pregnant following rape or incest.

Get involved! – If you want to stay informed about the AAUW of Michigan’s legislative activities, “Friend” the [AAUW of Michigan’s Facebook page](#) where I post directly from hearings and information about our public policy issues. Join the AAUW of Michigan’s Virtual Lobby Corp by emailing mivotered@aauwmi.org, or get involved with your local branch’s Public Policy Committee. 5-31-16