

Government Relations Coordinator Report to the AAUW of Michigan Board

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By the close of the 2015 legislative session, 5,205 House bills and 658 Senate bills were introduced plus several dozen constitutional amendments and many other resolutions. I am following over 300 bills or resolutions related to AAUW's 2015 - 2017 Public Policy Program adopted at the June 2015 AAUW national conference. Briefly, the Biennial Action Priorities are:

- To support a strong system of **public education** that promotes gender fairness, equity, and diversity;
- To achieve **economic self-sufficiency** for all women;
- To guarantee **equality, individual rights, and social justice** for a diverse society.

New Public Acts

Governor Rick Snyder signed 269 bills in 2015, the last two of which were election "reform" bills. Likely the most famous bills signed during 2015 related to increasing the gas tax and vehicle license fees to fund transportation improvements over time.

Straight-ticket voting ban - Public 268 (with immediate effect) would repeal straight-ticket voting in Michigan. Michigan Democrats tend to see more of their voters use the straight ticket option in Michigan so ending it has been a longtime Republican goal. In 2001, the Republican-controlled Legislature passed, and then-Governor John Engler signed, a bill ending straight-ticket voting. But voters repealed the change in a 2002 referendum.

Because the bill Mr. Snyder signed contains a \$5 million appropriation for new voting equipment, it is immunized from the referendum process under a 2001 Michigan Supreme Court ruling. Both the Governor and the Secretary of State Ruth Johnson have urged legislators to support no-reason, in-person absentee voting as a way to reduce waiting times at the polls caused by abolition of straight-ticket voting.

Campaign finance changes – A 12-page bipartisan bill to let organizations collect membership dues and PAC contributions at the same time morphed into a partisan campaign finance behemoth when Senate Republicans substituted on the floor a 53-page bill at the very end of a 12-hour session on December 16. No public hearings were held on the additional changes in the bill because of the process used, similar to the way Right To Work legislation was passed. House Democrats and apparently many Republican legislators did not get a chance to read the bill in the 15 minutes before being required to vote on it.

Of particular concern are new provisions that would prohibit public bodies from using public resources for communications referencing local ballot questions by radio, television, mass mailing or prerecorded telephone message 60 days prior to an election.

Also in the new language is elimination of a February filing deadline for independent and political committees, doubling the amount of money Political Action Committees can donate to candidates, and prohibiting corporations from collecting contributions from its employees for a union's PAC. On the bright side, the bill requires robocalls to identify who is paying for the call with contact information.

In a signing statement to legislators about PA 269, the Governor encouraged them to pass follow-up legislation. On January 13, Sen. Dale Zorn (R-Ida) introduced SB 703 to repeal the offending section of the new law. The bill has been referred to Sen. Committee on Government Operations chaired by Senate Majority Leader Arlan Meekof (R-West Olive). Rep. Andy Schor (D-Lansing) has announced plans to introduce similar repeal legislation. House Elections Chair Lia Posthumus Lyons (R-Alto) has

introduced HB 5219 to clarify that local governments would be able to use taxpayer funds to distribute the official language of local ballot proposals, and officials could talk about proposals during meetings. She plans to take the bill up in committee next week.

Updating criminal code – The Governor has signed two bills, HB 4248 and 4501, that would amend the Michigan Penal Code to make it a felony to take away or entice any minor under 16, instead of a female under 16 years of age, for the purpose of prostitution, concubinage, sexual intercourse, or marriage. The offense is punishable by up to 10 years' imprisonment. The bills also repeal Section 337 of the Penal Code, which prohibits using indecent, immoral, obscene, vulgar, or insulting language in the presence or hearing of any woman or child. Since 1999, there have been approximately 12 convictions under this section.

Ballot Proposal News

Paid Sick Leave - The initiated law petition drive to pass a statute requiring employers to provide earned paid sick leave sponsored by the Time To Care Coalition is now collecting signatures. Forty percent of employees in this state do not have earned paid sick time available for their own or their family's illnesses. You can find out more at www.mitimetocare.org.

Constitutional Equality – On December 29, the Michigan Board of State Canvassers approved the form and language of a ballot initiative to amend the Michigan Constitution to add gender, gender identity, sex, and sexual orientation to the civil rights protections in Article 1, Section 2 of the Michigan Constitution. Fair Michigan announced it would begin circulating petitions to collect the 315,654 valid signatures of registered Michigan voters and turn them in by July 11 to qualify for the November 2016 general election. Find out more at www.fairmichigan.org.

Other News

Detroit Public Schools – Governor Snyder has warned that if the state is unable to restructure the Detroit Public Schools and its debt in the early part of 2016, creditors could bring legal action on unpaid bills. The Governor wants to split the district in two, with an old district carrying the debt and a new one to run educational operations. Under his plan, the 18-mill property tax applied to non-principal residences in the city would become dedicated to paying down DPS's \$715 million debt rather than going to the School Aid Fund for all school districts. Neither Republicans nor Democrats are enthusiastic about the plan and no legislation has been introduced. Republican House Speaker Kevin Cotter wants to see major education reforms and the Dems want the DPS returned to board control in any proposal. Neither wants to see money taken from other school districts to finance the DPS debt.

On January 14, initial versions of DPS reform bills were introduced to separate the district into old and new while creating a framework for an elected school board on the November 2016 ballot. SB 0710 and SB 0711 are sponsored by Senate K-12 Appropriations Subcommittee Chair Goeff **HANSEN** (R-Hart) and referred to the Senate Government Operations committee.

Auto Insurance Reform - The Senate passed SB 248 in April 2015 and the House Insurance Committee reported them shortly thereafter, but there has been no House floor action on the bills since the end of April. House leadership has expressed an interest in passing auto insurance reform in 2016.

Pending Bill Updates

Women's health bills - The bills to outlaw coercion to abort but not reproductive coercion in general (HB 4787 and 4830) and the bills to ban the most common second-trimester abortion method (HB 4833 and 4834) were reported out of the House Criminal Justice Committee in September and November, respectively, but have not been taken up by the full House. A bill to create a Choose Life license plate, SB 84, would divert \$25 from the proceeds of buying the plate to a Right To Life controlled fund is still

in the House Transportation Committee though it has reported out several other special license plate bills.

HB 4598 to license midwives has passed the House and is now in Senate Health Policy Committee.

The Senate has recently created a Senate Oversight Committee and announced that hearings about the allegations that Planned Parenthood sells fetal tissue for profit and receives state funding despite appropriation bill language to the contrary would be conducted. It is chaired by Sen. Peter MacGregor (R-Rockford). Notices for 3 hearings have been issued and cancelled.

Dower rights – The Senate passed SB 558, 559 and 560 that would abolish statutory dower rights in Michigan. Michigan's Estates and Protected Individuals Code generally establishes inheritance rights for married persons of any sex who die intestate (without a will). Dower rights are protected in Michigan Constitution (Article X, Sec. 1). The bills have been referred to the House Judiciary Committee.

DV and SA bills - Because domestic violence and sexual assault are public policy areas in which Republicans and Democrats usually agree and want to be active, there are over 50 bills proposed addressing these issues. To find out more and check on the status of these bills, go to the Michigan Coalition to End Domestic and Sexual Violence Website at <http://tinyurl.com/zjm7pph> .

The House has passed a six-bill package of domestic violence bills, HB 4476 – 81. On December 8, the Senate Judiciary Committee held a hearing on the bills. Notable is HB 4479 that would increase penalties for assault of a pregnant woman and HB 4478 that would establish penalties for harming an animal belonging to the person seeking protection from domestic violence.

Education bills - SB 169 and 170 to establish a STEM endorsement for a high school diploma have passed the Senate. Similar bills in the House, HB 4284 and 4285, have had hearings in the House Education Committee but then were re-referred along with the two Senate bills to the House Workforce and Talent Development Committee where there has been no action. If passed, we would be the first state to have such a designation on a high school diploma.

The Governor has signed two bills, HB 4594 and HB 4790, to expand shared time participation and reimbursement to private school kindergarten programs. They are now Public Acts 222 and 223, both with immediate effect.

The third grade reading bill, HB 4822, passed the House 57-48 and is now in the Senate Education Committee. Beginning in the 2017-2018 school year, the bill requires that a third grade student's promotion to grade four be based on reading proficiency (with retention a one-time event). The bill describes the reading assistance programs public schools must implement to ensure student success, including ongoing professional development for early elementary school teachers provided by skilled school-based early literacy coaches. National test results indicate that more than two-thirds of Michigan students fail to demonstrate third grade proficiency on standardized reading tests.

Save The Date: April 12, 2016 is Equal Pay Day

The Equal Pay Day Coalition led by the AAUW of Michigan has again reserved the Capitol Rotunda for national Equal Pay Day on Tuesday, April 12 to rally supporters of proposed pay equity legislation. An Issues Briefing will again be held in the morning at a nearby location.

The Coalition had Rep. Marcia Hovey-Wright, Chair of the Progressive Women's Caucus Pay Equity Task Force, tells us about her efforts to get Republican support for the bills some of which were passed in other states with bi-partisan support. Rep. Hovey-Wright recently sent a letter to the chairs of the Committees where the bills have been referred, again asking for a hearing since there has been no movement on any of the pay equity bills in the eight months since their introduction. The Governor's office has not yet shown interest in advancing the bills. Republicans generally oppose employer mandates, a major barrier to advancing bills using that approach.