

GOVERNMENT RELATIONS COORDINATOR REPORT

By Mary Pollock, Government Relations Coordinator

March 15, 2016

In August 2015, the AAUW of Michigan Board of Directors authorized a contractual relationship with me to provide state government relations services and represent you in Lansing's capital.

My main goal is to advance the AAUW's public policy program with Michigan's lawmakers. I am following over 300 Michigan 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.

OVERVIEW

During 2015, state lawmakers were consumed with responding to the need to find \$1.2 billion to fix Michigan's crumbling roads and bridges. After voters soundly rejected in May a complicated ballot proposal to raise the sales tax, a bi-partisan deal was crafted to raise the money from increased fuel taxes and vehicle registration fees as well as cutting state programs. At about the same time the Flint water contamination crisis was emerging. Additionally, the Detroit Public Schools, which has been under state Emergency Managers for 15 of the last 17 years, faces bankruptcy if the state doesn't come up with a solution.

PAY EQUITY INITIATIVES

The Michigan Equal Pay Day Coalition of 20 Michigan organizations and led by the AAUW of Michigan will draw attention to the wage gap between men and women on national Equal Pay Day, Tuesday April 12. An Issues Briefing will be held at 9:30 a.m. across the street from the Capitol at the Episcopal Church (registration required) with a 12:30 p.m. rally and subsequent lobbying of House members. There will also be social media events on campuses throughout the state on Equal Pay Day.

More than a dozen pay equity bills have been introduced in the Michigan House and Senate but the Chairs of the relevant Committees have refused to schedule them for a hearing. The legislative Progressive Women's Caucus has therefore decided to have an unofficial hearing at 10:30 a.m., Thursday, April 21 in 402 Capitol Building where expert witnesses and others including the AAUW of Michigan will testify about the wage gap and what the proposed legislation would do.

PAID SICK LEAVE BALLOT PROPOSAL

The AAUW of Michigan Board of Directors voted to endorse the initiated law petition drive to enact a statute requiring employers to provide earned paid sick leave. Over forty percent of employees in Michigan do not have earned paid sick time available for their own or their family's illnesses, thus presenting a public health problem. More information is available at www.mitimetocare.org.

WOMEN'S HEALTH BILLS

The Michigan Senate Oversight Committee recently held a hearing and reported out along party lines SB 564 and 565 that would have the effect of criminalizing distribution or transport of fetal tissue for pay. Voluntarily donated fetal tissue from abortions are already heavily regulated and have been used in biomedical research since the 1930s for developing vaccines for polio, hepatitis, measles, mumps, rubella, chickenpox, and rabies. Vaccines and cures for Parkinson's Disease, HIV, and Ebola are in process using fetal tissue. Right To Life testified in favor of the bills. The AAUW of Michigan submitted written testimony opposing the bills.

The House Criminal Justice Committee has held hearings and reported out bills to outlaw coercion to abort (but not reproductive coercion in general), HB 4787 and 4830, and bills to ban the most common second-trimester abortion method (HB 4833 and 4834) in September and November, respectively. The bills have not been taken up by the full House.

EDUCATION BILLS

The AAUW of Michigan Board of Directors voted, upon recommendation of the South Haven chapter, to oppose HB 4822, a bill that would require students to pass proficiency tests before being promoted to fourth grade. National test results indicate that more than two-thirds of Michigan students fail to demonstrate third grade proficiency on standardized reading tests. Although we opposed the House version of the bill, subsequent amendments were made in the Senate Education Committee and we became neutral on the bill. At this writing, the bill is still in committee.

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 recently 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.

OTHER BILLS

Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault bills - The House has passed and the Senate Judiciary Committee has reported a six-bill package of domestic violence bills, HB 4476 – 81. 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.

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 who die intestate (without a will). Dower rights are protected in the Michigan Constitution (Article X, Sec. 1). The bills have been referred to the House Judiciary Committee.