

# Government Relations Coordinator Report AAUW of Michigan Board

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By Mary Pollock, AAUW of Michigan Government Relations Coordinator

*The 2015-17 AAUW 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.*

## 99<sup>th</sup> Legislature Sworn In

Michigan's 99<sup>th</sup> Legislature was sworn in on January 11, 2017. There are 42 new State House members among the 110-member chamber and 1 new State Senator (Ian Conyers D-4 replacing Virgil Smith, who resigned).

The November 2016 election kept the partisan split in the House exactly the same as the 98<sup>th</sup> Legislature although the Dems lost one incumbent and gained a new flipped seat. Republican women's representation increased and the Dems lost one woman. The representations now is:

	Men		Women		Total
	#	%	#	%	
Republican	47	75	16	25	63
Democrat	32	68	15	32	47

The Senate remains 27 Republicans and 11 Democrats with 3 female Republicans and 1 female Democrat.

## New Session

The first few months of the new House session have been taken up with electing each party's caucus leadership, setting legislative goals, appointing committee chairs, vice-chairs and assigning House members to Committees. House Republicans have issued their [2017-2018 Action Plan, The Best Way Forward: Common-Sense Leadership for the People of Michigan](#). It puts a high priority on reducing taxes, addressing public employee retiree legacy costs, reducing auto insurance rates, and supports education vouchers and education savings accounts among other goals. There is nothing in the Action Plan addressing women's economic issues such as pay equity, STEM training, or paid leave. Nor is there mention of campus sexual assault problems or domestic violence issues. The Plan reiterates its support of life from the moment of conception.

**Revenue and Budget** - The January 12 Consensus Revenue Estimating Conference predicted limited near-term revenue growth, continuing a seven-year trend. The Governor's proposed 2017-18 budget issued February 8 saw small but steady increases in spending in a variety of programs and spared most programs of any major reductions. He proposed putting aside more money to shore up state-controlled pension systems and the state's Budget Stabilization Fund, while dedicating another \$48.8 million in spending on the Flint water crisis. Higher education institutions saw a boost, while cyber schools were scheduled for a cut. The appropriations process will see negotiations and adjustments before final passage in late May/early June.

**Income Tax** - The first bill House Republicans introduced, [HB 4001](#), was a reduction in the income tax. The Governor opposed the measure because of budget pressures and tax cuts already enacted. Twelve Republicans joined almost all Democrats in defeating the bill. Subsequently a Republican Committee chair was removed and other repercussions ensued. Other bills desired by the 12 Republican hold-outs will likely be affected.

**Education Reform** – The House Committee on Michigan Competitiveness and Senate Education Committees have held many hearings on education reform issues in the first few months of this legislative session.

***Common Core*** - Repeal of Common Core State Education Standards, [HB 4192](#), was assigned to the House Committee on Michigan Competitiveness, not to the Committee on Education Reform, because the Chair of Education Reform did not oppose Common Core last session. Under the bill, the Common Core State Standards and any assessments, data collection and instructions based on the standards are prohibited. The State Board of Education would be prohibited from adopting, aligning to or implementing any other national consortium of standards either. Instead, beginning in the 2017-18 school year, the state would implement the academic content standards that were in place in Massachusetts during the 2008-09 school year. Massachusetts had the top state rating that year. The Department of Education would be required to develop a new assessment based on the one used in Massachusetts, which would have to be approved by the Legislature before implementation.

Hearings were held February 15 and March 15. Business and education groups opposed the bill along with some parents, saying that it's taken four years to get curriculum and performance testing aligned and really good data is just starting to emerge. It would be expensive and time-consuming to change what are basically good standards. Massachusetts has changed its standards since 2008 also.

AAUW of Michigan sent a message to Committee members reiterating our national AAUW's statement on Common Core:

We believe that quality public education is the foundation of a democratic society. AAUW is committed to ensuring strong academic principles and bias-free public education that closes the achievement gap for all children.

AAUW supports states' voluntary adoption of Common Core standards. If states choose not to adopt these official standards, AAUW urges them to adopt similarly robust and comprehensive standards. All students deserve a world-class education, no matter where they live.

More hearings are expected on the bill.

***State School Reform/Redesign Office*** – [SB 27](#) repeals the section of the School Code creating and prescribing duties of the State School Reform/Redesign Office.

Currently the School Code requires the Superintendent of Public Instruction annually to publish a list of public schools identified by the Department of Education as the lowest-achieving 5% of public schools in the State. A school on the list must be placed under the supervision of the State School Reform/Redesign Officer (SRRO), and must develop and submit a redesign plan. The redesign plan must require the implementation of one of four intervention models: the turnaround model, the restart model, the transformation model, or school closure. The plan is subject to approval, disapproval, or modification by the SRRO.

If the SRRO does not approve a school's redesign plan, or determines that a plan is not achieving satisfactory results, the SRRO must place the school in a SRR School District, and impose implementation of one of the four intervention models beginning the following school year.

Earlier this year the SRRO sent 38 schools notice that they were facing closure under the law. The Senate Education Committee's weekly hearings on SB 27 have served to organize the opposition to school closure as a solution for these low-performing schools. Several superintendents from districts that either were in the state's bottom 5 percent or are in it now testified critically about the SRO's operations, saying it is not only confusing what they have to comply with but that the whole process involves little communication and arbitrary deadlines.

SRRO Director Natasha Baker defended her operations at a hearing, saying she is doing what the law requires her to do and this is the first time in the history of Michigan it is able to hold chronically failing schools accountable.

Meanwhile Moody's Investor Service said the 10 school districts with buildings on the School Reform Office's potential closure list face a negative credit outlook. Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan called on the Governor to halt any school closures in the city, calling the proposal to close certain low-performing schools in the Detroit Public Schools Community District and the Education Achievement Authority "irrational." He said the state had not done enough yet to work with the schools to help them improve.

The State Board of Education approved a resolution in early February urging the SRRO Director not to close any schools this fall. Due to the general uproar over the projected closure of the schools, combined with the Senate hearings critical of the SRRO, the Governor in late February ordered a pause in the school closures. He backed a plan initiated by the Superintendent of Public Instruction Brian Whiston. In a letter to all but one of the districts, he spelled out for the first time a process where those districts could avoid closure of their schools for 18 months while working with a series of partners to improve the school or schools in the district that have spent at least three consecutive years in the bottom 5 percent.

Chair of the Senate Education Committee and sponsor of the bill, Sen. Phil Pavlov (R-Saint Clair) has said that while he believes he has the votes to move his bill, he will continue work with the administration and the department to find a solution that works for all and to get a school accountability system that works, is predictable and reliable.

The six hearings in the Senate Education Committee have seen lively testimony from educators, associations, parents, and other stakeholders. The hearings, which are televised on Senate TV, will continue the Chair promises.

***Accreditation Systems for Schools*** – [SB 174](#) revises the state accreditation system for public schools. The bill would

- Require the board of a school district to include the district and high school graduate report in its annual education report.
- Require an annual education report for a high school to include the number and percentage of pupils in postsecondary courses under the Postsecondary Enrollment Options Act, the Career and Technical Preparation Act, or a concurrent enrollment program.
- Eliminate a requirement that the board of a school district or intermediate school district (ISD), or board of directors of a public school academy (PSA), post on its website a notice of the adequate yearly progress status of each school it operates.

The bill also would repeal the section of the School Code that requires each public school within a school district to be accredited, prescribes the process for developing accreditation standards, specifies criteria for accreditation, and describes the consequences for failing to achieve accreditation.

Hearings in the Senate Education Committee were held February 28, March 7 and 14 and will continue.

**Sexual Assault Exams** – The Senate has passed unanimously two bills to address financing of sexual assault evidence exams and services. [SB 152](#) would modify reimbursement to health care providers for costs related to performing sexual assault medical forensic exams. [SB 153](#) modifies use of expenditures for sexual assault victims available in the medical forensic intervention and treatment fund. The bills are now in the House Committee on Law and Justice awaiting a hearing.

**Reproductive Rights** – Bills to prohibit the state from contracting with organizations that provide abortions have been introduced ([HB 4221](#), [SB 162](#)) as well as a bill to create a Choose Life license plate to raise money for Right To Life of Michigan projects ([HB 4222](#)). A bill to revise rules and standards for performing surgical abortions to require that surgical abortions be performed in a freestanding surgical outpatient facility and establishing a fund to finance inspections was introduced ([SB 164](#)).

On the proactive side, bills to require reimbursement for dispensing a 365-day supply of covered prescription contraception ([HB 4019](#)) and bills to exempt feminine hygiene products from sales and use taxes ([HB 4128](#), [HB 4129](#), [SB 91](#), [SB 92](#)) have been introduced. The Senate Finance Committee held a hearing on SB 91 and 92 on March 14. AAUW of Michigan supported the bills. [HR 16](#), a resolution to recognize the 44th anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court *Roe v. Wade* ruling on January 22, 2017, was introduced and sent to House Government Operations Committee, likely to see no action.

**Pay Equity** – There was no movement on the 11 bills in the House and 4 in the Senate related to pay equity during the last legislative session. The Michigan House and Senate will be on spring vacation on national Equal Pay Day, April 4, 2017. **Michigan Equal Pay Legislative Day will be held on Tuesday, April 25 with a 9:30 a.m. Issues Briefing at the Central United Methodist Church across from the Capitol (registration required), a 12:30 p.m. Rally on the Capitol Steps, and interaction with individual legislators at 1:30 p.m.** See the AAUW of Michigan Web site or Facebook page for more information.

**Progressive Women's Caucus** - The Progressive Women's Caucus, a group of female and male Democrat legislators supportive of women's rights, has elected Rep. Stephanie Chang (D-Detroit) as its new Chair. Rep. Erika Geiss (D-Taylor) is the new PWC Pay Equity Task Force Chair. A meeting to get the pay equity bills ready for introduction has already been held with legislators, staff and the AAUW. The Michigan Equal Pay Coalition welcomed the participation of Rep. Geiss and new Rep. Donna Lasinski (D-Scio Twp.) from the PWC Pay Equity Task Force at recent conference call meetings to plan Michigan Equal Pay Legislative Day.

**Voting Rights/Open Government** – It appears activity to put a measure on the ballot to reform legislative redistricting will be active this year. Currently whatever party is in power has total control of drawing legislative district lines and usually draws the lines to favor their own party. The effort will be to design a citizen-led commission to remove the partisan bias as much as possible and gather the 300,000+ signatures to put the measure on the ballot for voter approval.

Bills to allow no-reason absentee voting, automatic voter registration when acquiring or changing a driver's license, and pre-registration at age 16 have been introduced. Another bi-partisan effort to make the legislature and the governor's office subject to an open records law have also been introduced and passed unanimously in the House. Senate Majority Arlan Meekof has expressed disinterest in the bills but awaits a Republican Caucus decision on whether to allow them to move in the Senate.

**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 articles related to our public policy program issues. Join the AAUW of Michigan's Virtual Lobby Corp by emailing [mivotered@aauwmi.org](mailto:mivotered@aauwmi.org), or get involved with your local branch's Public Policy Committee.