



LEGISLATIVE UPDATES

1. Composition of the MI Senate and MI House: The House is 54 D - 54 R until special elections are held for the two vacancies. Democrats keep control in the House. The Senate is still 20 D–18R.

2.Special Elections: The Governor called special elections for a primary and general election to replace the two House members who resigned, State Representative Lori Stone, who previously represented the 13th House District, to mayor of Warren and State Representative Kevin Coleman, who previously represented the 25th House District, to mayor of Westland. The Governor called for a special primary election to be held on Tuesday, January 30, 2024, and the general election to be held on Tuesday, April 16, 2024.

3. Sine Die Early: The Legislature adjourned on Tuesday, November 14, for sine die. The legislature will return on the second Wednesday in January 2024, January 10, at noon. The Governor can call a special session at any time but only for consideration of special subjects. Laws that have been enacted that do not have a specific date in the law or were not given immediate effect will take effect on February 13, 2024. Only nine states have full time legislatures.

Note sine die in 2023 only marks the end of the first year of the 2-year legislative session—all the bills that have been introduced in 2023, committee assignments, leadership, etc. continue. All bills die at the end of 2024 as well as the terms for people currently serving in the Michigan House of Representatives. All members of the MI House of Representatives (110) will be up for election in November 2024. Senators have two more years in their 4-year terms. Senators will be up for election in November 2026. The Governor's election also will be in November 2026. (MI Constitution Article IV, Section 13, Section 28)

4. Redistricting: *Agee v. Benson* (USWDM Docket No. 22-00272) November 1-4 plus Nov 6 -8, 2023 were the trial dates in the case before a three-judge panel in U.S. District Court, Western Region for House Districts 1, 7, 10, 12 and 14, as well as Senate Districts 1, 3, 6 and 8. On March 23, 2022, a group of Michigan voters filed a federal lawsuit against Michigan's Secretary of State and the Michigan Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission (MICRC). *Agee v. Benson* is a federal redistricting litigation case challenging Michigan's state legislative maps for violating Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act (VRA) and the Equal Protection Clause of the Constitution. This challenge concerns the ability of Black voters to elect candidates of their choice. The plaintiffs request a court order requiring the MICRC to either redraw the districts not in compliance with the VRA and 14th Amendment or to adopt a proposed remedy map. Sue Smith will write up information about the trial.

5. New Department of Lifelong Education, Achievement and Potential: On July 11, 2023, Governor Whitmer issued an Executive Order 2023-6 effective December 1, 2023, creating the MI Department of Lifelong Education, Achievement and Potential (MiLEAP) that governs childhood education, higher education, and education partnerships. August 8, 2023, the State Board of Education asked the Attorney General for a formal opinion if this violates the separation of powers in the MI Constitution.

6. Presidential Primary: Dems voted to move the presidential primary to Feb 27, 2024. The candidates for the Democratic primary are: Joe Biden, Dean Phillips, and Marianne Williamson. The candidates for the Republican primary are: Doug Burgum, Chris Christie, Ron DeSantis, Nikki Haley, Asa Hutchinson,

600 W. St. Joseph St., Ste. 3G, Lansing, MI 48933-2288

(517) 484-5383

office@lwvmi.org

lwvmi.org

Vivek Ramaswamy and Donald Trump. Republicans are holding a hybrid caucus system. On Feb 27 Republican presidential primary will allocate 16 delegates, and March 2 closed congressional district caucuses will allocate 39 for a total of 55 delegates.

7. Lawsuit on Promote the Vote 2018 and 2022 (Proposal 2018-3, Proposal 2022-2) – On September 28, 2023, 11 Republicans filed a federal lawsuit in U.S. District Court for the Western District of Michigan to overturn PTV 2018 and 2022. The lawsuit appears to only target state regulation of federal elections, meaning the proposals' effect on state elections would be untouched. The suit was filed by: Senators Jonathan Lindsey (R-Coldwater) and James Runestad (R-White Lake); and Representatives James DeSana (R-Carleton), Rachele Smit (R-Martin), Steve Carra (R-Three Rivers), Joseph Fox (R-Fremont), Matt Maddock (R-Milford), Angela Rigas (R-Caledonia), Josh Schriver (R-Oxford), Neil Friske (R-Petoskey) and Brad Paquette (R-Niles) against SOS Benson and Election Director Brater.

8. Line 5 – In the case *Bad River Band v Enbridge* filed in U.S. District Court, on June 16, 2023, the Judge ruled Enbridge had to shut down. On July 6, 2023, Enbridge filed an appeal with U.S. Court of Appeals for 6th Circuit and it is reviewing the previous court decision. The Army Corps of Engineers is reviewing a request for a permit to begin the tunnel project. Federal advocacy efforts are focused on securing revocation by President Biden of the presidential permit required for Enbridge to operate the Line 5 pipeline.

9. Income Tax Lawsuit: The Mackinac Center and others have filed a lawsuit contending that the income tax rollback from 4.25% to 4.05% is permanent and not for one year. *Associated Builders and Contractors et al. v Eubanks*

10. Right to Life Lawsuit – *Right to Life v Whitmer* is a federal lawsuit filed 11/8/23 against Governor Gretchen Whitmer and other state officials. It seeks to invalidate Proposal 3 arguing the 2022 ballot proposal created an illegitimate "super-right" to abortion that violates the U.S. Constitution. In federal Western District Court.

11. Ballot Proposals: There are two petitions listed as circulating on the SOS website and one probably going to court—two others were withdrawn on farmland and taxes:

1. Legislative Initiative to expand the Freedom of Information Act to include the executive and legislative branch.
2. Legislative initiative to allow good time credits for prisoners
3. Legislative initiative to increase the minimum wage – turned in signatures, Board of State Canvassers deadlocked on the decision of whether there were enough valid signatures submitted.

12. Ranked Choice Voting: Three cities, East Lansing, Kalamazoo, and Royal Oak, approved ranked choice voting for their local elections on Tuesday, November 7. However, ranked choice voting is banned in Michigan under state law, Home Rule City Act (Act 279 of 1909). The Michigan Legislature would have to amend the Home Rule City Act for ranked choice voting to happen in these cities. Eastpointe implemented ranked-choice voting to fill city council seats in 2019 as part of a settlement in a federal civil rights lawsuit. LWV has no position on ranked choice voting.

13. Freedom of Information: Two bills, SB 669 & 670, were introduced on November 9, 2023 that would expand FOIA for the MI Legislature and the Governor's office. The LWVMI Advocacy Committee will review and recommend any action to the state board.

14. Court Cases about former President Trump: *LaBrant v. Benson*, *Trump v Benson*, *Davis v Benson* are cases deciding whether former President Trump will be on the ballot. On November 14, 2023, Court of Claims Judge James Redford held for all three cases that the Secretary of State has no authority to

decide whether he should remain on the ballot. On November 16, 2023, the *LaBrant v Benson* case was appealed to the Michigan Supreme Court.

15. Financial Disclosure by Elected Officials: The Michigan House of Representatives and the Michigan Senate passed bills at the beginning of November, as required by passage of Proposal 1 in 2022. SBs 613-616 and SB 374 specify what information has to be disclosed for public information and when. The first filing will be on April 15, 2024 for the previous calendar year. The Governor is expected to sign the bills.

16. SOS Benson Court Case on Voting Rules: The Secretary of State issued rules in May 2022 that required poll challengers and poll watchers appointed by political parties to obtain credential and be barred from carrying phones or speaking with election inspectors. The rules were challenged in court, *Halloran v. Benson*. On October 17, 2023, the Michigan Court of Appeals ruled the SOS had exceeded her power and not followed proper procedure to implement the rules. The SOS will appeal to the MI Supreme Court.

17. On November 16, 2023, the Michigan Court of Claims dismissed the case, *MI Open Carry, et al v MI House of Representatives*. The plaintiffs, Michigan Open Carry and Great Lake Gun Rights, alleged that the Open Meetings Act (OMA) had been violated by both state legislative chambers and subdivisions of each, but the Court dismissed every claim. However, Court of Claims Judge James Robert Redford found that the MI House violated the Open Meetings Act by failing to have a clear set of rules that were enforced for outlining who gets to testify in-person and for how long.

18. Arguments in *Mothering Justice v. Attorney General* (MSC Docket No. 165325), known as the "adopt and amend" case, will be heard in early December. The case also will decide whether two controversial 2018 initiative petitions can take effect: one that called for raising Michigan's minimum wage to \$12 per hour by 2022 and bringing the tipped minimum wage up to the regular minimum wage and another that mandated paid sick time for workers.

19. LWVMI Legislative Interviews conducted by local Leagues: MI House of Representatives Districts completed - 5, 8, 23, 32, 33, 38, 40, 41, 47, 48, 85, 86, 108, 109. MI Senate Districts completed – 13, 14, 15, 19, 31, 38.

11/26/23 JAK