For the People By the People

How State and Local Governments Operate



Citizen participation is an essential component of any democratic government. Leaders require input and feedback from the public to enact policies consistent with the will of the people, but information about the public's wishes does not always make it to the people in power.

In many cases, communication between the public and their elected leaders is limited by citizens' uncertainty about the way government operates or the most effective means of sharing information with their representatives. Knowing who is responsible for particular aspects of public policy and how to contact them is important for anyone who wants to impact the process.

This booklet provides an overview of state and local governments. There is a brief description of each branch of our state government (legislative, executive, and judicial) and a brief explanation of how each branch operates. There is also an explanation of how ideas turn into bills and become laws, in addition to a glossary of common legislative terms.

Another section of this booklet offers advice about how to contact your state legislator and other government officials and set your comments apart from the rest.

The section on local government gives a description of local financing and explains the functions of county, city, township, and village government. It also discusses special districts and authorities and school districts in order to provide an explanation of these operations. There is also a section in the back of the booklet for you to record names, addresses, phone numbers, and email addresses of your own U.S., state, and local government officials.

Hopefully, this booklet provides information that will allow you to communicate more effectively with your elected representatives.

For the **People** By the **People**

How State and Local Governments Operate



Prepared by the Michigan Legislature

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STATE GOVERNMENT

State government is a complex network of agencies and offices. Understanding how the branches of government and their internal agencies fit together is important for anyone who wishes to utilize government services or contribute to the policy making process.

To assist in grasping the overall organization of Michigan state government, we have assembled this description of the principal units of each of the three branches of government. This division of government into executive, judicial, and legislative branches mirrors the federal government's organization. The concept of three distinct co-equal elements of government, adopted in Article III, Section 2 of the *Constitution of the State of Michigan of 1963*, is designed to provide for the separation of powers which is so vital to our system of self-rule. By dividing the vast power of government into three co-equal and independent responsibilities, each branch of government can serve as a check on the other two, preventing any one branch from undermining the freedoms of the public. In looking at the functions and responsibilities of the units of the three branches, one can appreciate, in a broad sense, how this system of checks and balances is put into effect.

We hope this information will assist you in your dealings with and understanding of state government. Although this section is not intended to present a comprehensive account of all of the functions of state government, it can help you to better understand the offices and agencies through which the people of Michigan govern themselves.



The legislative (law-making) power of the State of Michigan is vested in the Legislature, a bicameral (two-chamber) body comprised of a Senate and a House of Representatives. The Senate is made up of 38 members elected by the voters in each senatorial district. Senators are elected at the same time as the Governor and serve four-year terms. A person cannot be elected to serve as a Senator for more that two full terms. The House of Representatives consists of 110 members elected by the voters in each representative district. Representatives are elected in even-numbered years to serve two-year terms. A person cannot be elected to serve as a Representative for more than three full terms. Terms

for Senators and Representatives begin on the first day of January following the November general election. Legislative districts are drawn on the basis of population figures obtained through the federal ten-year census. This is to insure that each person's vote is weighed as much as anyone else's.

The Legislature enacts the laws of Michigan; levies taxes and appropriates funds from money collected for the support of public institutions and the administration of the affairs of state government; proposes amendments to the State Constitution, which must be approved by a majority vote of the voters; and can exercise a number of options when presented with legislation proposed by initiatory petitions, including adopting it or offering the voters an alternative. The Legislature exercises legislative oversight over the executive branch of government through work on the administrative rules and audit processes, committees, and the budget; advises and consents, through the Senate, on certain gubernatorial appointments; and considers proposed amendments to the Constitution of the United States. The majority of the Legislature's work, however, involves lawmaking. The Legislature considers thousands of bills (proposed laws) each two-year term through a process defined by the State Constitution, as well as by statutes and legislative rules.

THE LEGISLATOR'S RESPONSIBILITIES

Once elected, what are the responsibilities, official functions, and powers of state legislators? In 1966, Senate Resolution 135 authorized, with the Governor's participation, the appointment of a Special Commission on Legislative Compensation. This commission analyzed the responsibilities of a legislator. The following is a summary of many of those responsibilities:

- Prepares and legislates for a program derived from a variety of sources, including the district, the committees on which he or she serves, his or her political party, friends, and interest groups.
- Conceives the need for new legislation through study of the problems of the district and the state. Initiates research through the staff and committees and requests preparation of bills and amendments.
- Develops support for proposals and lends support or opposes programs of other legislators following a thorough personal review.
- Studies the daily calendar, journals, and bill status to keep informed on bills scheduled for hearings and floor action.
- Exercises legislative oversight over the administrative branch of government and the annual state budget through committee hearings, personal contacts, review of reports, and investigation of complaints.
- Replies to correspondence and telephone calls from constituents and supervises the work of a secretary and other staff.
- Attends sessions, takes part in debates, and votes on business before the chamber.

- Attends committee meetings and hearings throughout the state to become informed on the details of proposals, the arguments for and against them, and to vote on their submission to the entire Legislature.



- Keeps constituents informed on the progress of legislation and his or her position on specific bills and, in turn, keeps informed on the opinions of constituents, political parties, and interest groups.
- Acts as liaison between the district and state and federal agencies, providing personal assistance to constituents in handling their problems.
- Assumes an active role in the district by serving on local committees and attending and speaking to civic organizations which are interested in legislation.
- Plays an active role in his or her political party by attending and participating in party caucuses, meetings of a specialized nature, and in general conventions.
- Takes part in ceremonial local and state functions.
- May maintain an office within the district.

OFFICERS OF
THE MICHIGAN SENATE

LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR: President of the Senate, presiding officer, votes only when senators are equally divided in vote. Not elected to the Senate.

PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE: Presiding officer in absence of the Lieutenant Governor. Assistant and associate president pro tempore positions have also been created.

SECRETARY OF THE SENATE: The parliamentarian keeps records and supervises support staff. Not a member of the Senate. There is also an assistant secretary of the Senate.

MAJORITY LEADER: Elected by the majority caucus, appoints committees, assigns duties to Senate employees, and establishes guidelines for the financial management of Senate offices. The assistant majority leader helps with these duties.

MINORITY LEADER: Elected by the minority caucus; serves as minority party leader. The assistant minority leader works with this officer.

MAJORITY FLOOR LEADER: Directs activities on the floor. There is one assistant majority floor leader.

MINORITY FLOOR LEADER: Directs activities of minority party on the floor. There is also one assistant minority floor leader.

CAUCUS CHAIRS: Direct the party caucus meetings. There are also assistant caucus chairs.

CAUCUS WHIPS: Assist party leaders with caucus functions. There are also assistant caucus whips.

OFFICERS OF
THE MICHIGAN HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE: The presiding officer, appoints committees, selects employees, presides during session, and handles administrative functions.

SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE: Performs duties of the speaker in the speaker's absence. Associate speakers pro tempore assist with the responsibilities.

CLERK OF THE HOUSE: Not a member of the House of Representatives; assists in conducting session; records votes; serves as parliamentarian. There is also an assistant clerk of the House.

MINORITY LEADER: Elected by the minority caucus; serves as minority party leader. There is also an assistant minority leader.

MAJORITY FLOOR LEADER: Directs activities on the floor. The assistant floor leader assists with these responsibilities.

MINORITY FLOOR LEADER: Directs activities of minority party on the floor. There are also two assistant minority floor leaders.

CAUCUS CHAIRS: Direct the party caucus meetings. There are also caucus deputy/vice chairs.

CAUCUS WHIPS: Assist party leaders with caucus functions. There are also deputy/assistant whips.

THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

About the Michigan Legislature

Constitutionally, regular sessions of the Legislature begin at 12:00 noon on the second Wednesday in January of each year. Legislative sessions are held year-round except for recesses that are scheduled during certain holiday and election periods and for a portion of the summer. Recesses allow the necessary time for many legislative hearings, meetings, research, and catching up on district business.

Extra sessions of the Legislature may be called by the Governor. Only subjects specified by the Governor may be considered at an extra session.

Except for a person with certain criminal convictions, anyone 21 years of age or older who is a registered voter in the district to be represented can serve in either chamber of the Legislature. The State Constitution prohibits persons from election to the Michigan House more than three times and to the Michigan Senate more than two times. Those filling a vacancy for a period greater than one-half of the term for such office are considered to have been elected for the entire term.

The Michigan Legislature develops and considers legislation for the state on any subject not prohibited by the state or federal constitutions. There are various steps that every piece of legislation follows in the course of being considered. These steps constitute the legislative process.

Proposed laws are known as bills. Many bills introduced during a two-year term of a Legislature are introduced in an effort to modify or eliminate existing laws that are no longer adequate and to bring the laws of the state into harmony with modern conditions. Some of this legislation is not controversial and is technical in nature, but many other bills represent significant policy disagreements among political parties and other interested groups.

During its two-year term, the Legislature may consider from 3,000 to 4,000 bills. Proper consideration of the bills requires organization, time, and hard work. Legislators and legislative committees spend many hours of work on each bill before the bill is submitted for consideration on the floor of either chamber of the Legislature. The floor debate on a bill, as seen by a visitor, is the final stage of legislative consideration of the bill prior to passage or defeat in each chamber.

Introduction of Bills

Ideas for legislation come from a variety of places, including legislators themselves, constituents, the executive branch, local governments, and interest groups. Once a legislator has an idea for a new law or changes to an old one, they work with legislative staff to convert their idea into a formal bill which they may introduce in their legislative chamber. Any bill that would provide for a change in the laws of Michigan, regardless of the subject matter, may be introduced in either the Senate or House of Representatives. Identical bills may be introduced into both chambers.

When a bill is introduced in either the House of Representatives or the Senate, it is sent to one of the committees in its own chamber which deals with that particular type of issue. At this point, the bill will be given a number and made available on the Internet, at **www.legislature.mi.gov**.

The Committee System

Much of the work of reviewing and amending a bill takes place in the standing committees of the House and of the Senate. These committees generally contain from five to seventeen members, although the House Appropriations Committee is comprised of 29 members. The standing committees may be further divided into subcommittees where bills that address specific problems are assigned for discussion, analysis, and revision before being presented to the full committee for action. In addition, there are a number of statutory standing committees established and required by law. A quorum (a majority) is necessary to hold a meeting of a committee.

The Senate Majority Leader appoints members of Senate committees and the Speaker appoints members of House committees.

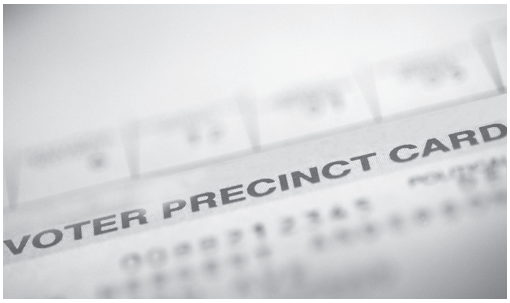
The Open Meetings Act, 1976 PA 267, requires, with few exceptions, that all committees and subcommittees hold open meetings. Public bodies may hold closed sessions to discuss certain employee matters, to consider the lease or purchase of buildings, and for collective bargaining purposes. This law also allows closed sessions for partisan caucuses of the Legislature.

Voting on Bills and Final Approval

All roll call votes in the House and Senate are required by the Constitution to be public information. A computerized voting system is used to tally the votes. The vote of each Senator or Representative is flashed on electronic roll call boards located on each side of the rostrum. In order to become law, bills, with certain exceptions, must be passed in each chamber by a majority of Senators or Representatives elected and serving. Some bills require "super majority" votes in both chambers to become law.

The State Constitution requires that a bill be printed and in the possession of each chamber for at least five days prior to passage. This provision serves to prevent hasty or ill-considered legislation and to allow interested persons outside the Legislature to become familiar with proposed legislation. When each chamber passes differing versions of the same bill, a conference committee, comprised of three members of each chamber, is appointed to work out a compromise bill to be submitted to each chamber or the chambers can send the bill back and forth until they pass identical versions.

After enactment by the Legislature, a bill is enrolled and is ready for the Governor's consideration. The Office of the Secretary of the Senate and Office of the Clerk of the House perform the enrollment function for each respective house. If the Governor approves the bill, it becomes a public act in the year in which the Legislature adopted it. If the Governor vetoes the bill, the Legislature may exercise a number of options, including overriding the veto.



GLOSSARY OF LEGISLATIVE TERMS



Amendment: A proposed change, addition, or deletion to a bill. Amendments may be offered by individual legislators or by a committee.

Appropriation: The authorization to spend state and federal funds. One of the most important functions of the Legislature, appropriating money is carried out by passing bills to let the government spend money for specific purposes.

Bill: A proposed law introduced in the Legislature for consideration. A bill can be a new law, a change in a law, or a repeal of a law.

Calendar Book: Also known as the Blue Book or the E-Blue Book. The book contains all bills on the Senate or House calendar for any particular legislative session day, and includes master bills with sheets of new amendments, proposed amendments, and substitute bills. Most legislative offices maintain a calendar book, often electronically, to follow each daily session of the Legislature.

Caucus: A group of legislators with a common interest. Although most commonly used to refer to the Democratic Caucus or the Republican Caucus, the term is also used to describe many groups of legislators, such as the Detroit Caucus, the Women's Caucus, etc. As a verb, the term "to caucus" means to have a closed meeting of a group of lawmakers belonging to the same party or faction.

Conference Committee: A committee of legislators assigned the responsibility to negotiate the differences between versions of bills passed by the Senate and House. A conference committee is comprised of three members from the Senate and three from the House. The committee attempts to work out a compromise that is then submitted to each house for approval.

Daily Calendar: The listing of bills and other business items to be considered by the Senate or House. The calendars are published for each session day, and items are considered in the order listed unless changes are made during a session. The calendar also contains a list of future committee meetings and public hearings.

Enrollment: The process of preparing a bill in the form as finally adopted by the Legislature for presentation to the Governor. Enrollment involves incorporating amendments into bills, checking for technical errors, and rechecking amended bills with existing laws.

Joint Committee: A committee of the Legislature composed of both Senate and House members.

Journal: A record of actions and events occurring during a legislative session. Separate journals are published each session day by the Senate and the House. They contain attendance and voting records, reports, messages, amendments, and statements in support of or opposition to proposed legislation. However, the journals do not include all of the debate occurring during a session.

Record Roll Call Vote: A vote in which each member's "yea" or "nay" ("yes" or "no") vote is recorded. Roll call votes are taken using buttons at the desk of each of the members, with the display boards on the floor indicating a "yes" vote with green and a "no" vote with red.

Regular Session: The one-year period during which a Legislature carries on business. The State Constitution requires that each regular session start on the second Wednesday in January at 12:00 noon.

Resolution: A document expressing the opinion or will of the House or the Senate (or both, in the case of concurrent resolutions). Resolutions are used to conduct certain legislative business or formally communicate positions on an issue.

Rules: Both the House and the Senate operate under their own set of rules, which specify the procedures of session, including the actions involved in each stage of the lawmaking process. For matters involving both chambers (such as conference committees), there are Joint Rules of the Senate and House of Representatives.

Sine Die: A Latin phrase that means "without day" or "without a day" set to reconvene. The State Constitution requires that the Legislature adjourn *sine die* as the final adjournment each year of a regular session. Adjournment must be at 12:00 noon on a day set by concurrent resolution.

Standing Committee: A permanent committee comprised of Senate or House members to handle specific areas of legislation, such as education, environmental affairs, transportation, social services, or health policy. A few of the major functions of a standing committee are to review and modify legislation and to determine which bills should receive consideration by the full Senate or House.



Subcommittee: A part of a larger committee that is given responsibilities by the full committee.

Suspend the Rules: A timesaving device to bypass some of the steps of routine legislative actions.

Table a Motion: To remove something from consideration for the time being.

Voice Vote: a vote taken by members responding "yea" or "nay" in unison, with no recording of individual votes. These are generally used on routine business.

HOW A BILL BECOMES A LAW



1 A legislator develops an idea for a new law or changes to an old one. They work with legislative staff to convert their idea into a bill.

2 A bill is introduced in either chamber of the Legislature. Senate bills are filed with the Secretary of the Senate and House bills are filed with the Clerk of the House.

3 The bill receives First and Second Reading in the Senate and First Reading in the House. (Procedure at this step consists of reading the title of the bill only.) The bill is ordered to be printed.

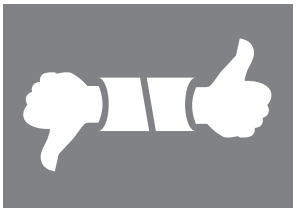


4 In the Senate, the bill is referred to the proper committee by the Majority Leader and in the House by the Speaker of the House. All bills involving an appropriation must be referred either directly to the Appropriations Committee of the respective chamber or to an appropriate standing committee and then to the Appropriations Committee.

5 Committee members consider legislation and the chairperson decides whether there will be a public hearing on the bill. If there is a public hearing, the bill sponsor, interested parties, and the public will have a chance to testify before the committee about the bill to urge passage, rejection, or to suggest changes. There may be multiple days of testimony if there is significant interest in the bill or if the subject is particularly complicated.

After considering a bill and hearing testimony, the committee can choose to take a variety of actions. Typically, the committee will do one of the following:

a) Take no action on the bill;
b) Report the bill with a favorable recommendation;
c) Report the substituted or amended version of the bill with a favorable recommendation; or
d) Report the bill with the recommendation that it be referred to another committee.

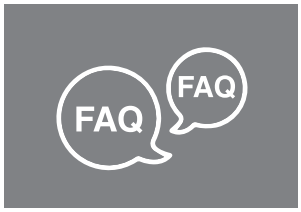


The House Rules require most bills be referred to a second committee before being sent to the floor. Taking no official action on the bill usually means that there is not enough support on the committee to move the legislation or that the members want to take more time to consider the issue or ponder further changes.

In both chambers, a majority vote of the members serving on a committee is necessary to report a bill. If a committee does not report a bill, the bill can be forced out of committee by a motion to discharge from the chamber floor. A majority vote of the full chamber is required to move a bill from committee to the floor without the recommendation of the committee.

6 If the bill is reported from committee favorably with or without amendment or in the form of a substitute bill, the committee report is printed in the Journal under the order of business "Reports of Standing Committees." On being reported favorably from committee, the bill and committee amendments (if any) are placed on General Orders in the Senate. In the House, the bill and amendments are referred to the order of Second Reading.

7 The Senate resolves itself into the Committee of the Whole and the House assumes the order of Second Reading, where the standing committee recommendations on a bill are considered. Amendments to the bill may be offered by any member when the bill is being considered by the Committee of the Whole or on Second Reading. In the Senate, a simple majority of members present and voting may recommend adoption of amendments to the bill and recommend that a bill be advanced to Third Reading. In the House, amendments may be adopted by a majority serving, and a majority voting may advance the bill to Third Reading.



8 Upon Third Reading in the Senate, an entire bill is read unless unanimous consent is given to consider the bill read. In the House, the bill is read in its entirety on Third Reading unless four-fifths of the members consent to consider the bill read. In practice, few bills are read in full in either chamber. In both chambers, amendments on Third Reading must be approved by a majority vote of members serving. In both the Senate and the House, debate may be cut off by a vote of a majority of the members present and voting. At the conclusion of Third Reading, the bill is either passed or defeated by a record roll call vote of the majority of the members elected and serving (pursuant to the State Constitution, approval of certain measures requires a two-thirds vote or, in some instances, a three-fourths vote).

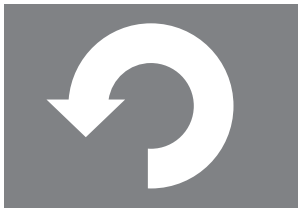
Following either passage or defeat of a bill, a legislator may move for reconsideration of the bill. In the Senate, the motion for reconsideration must be made within the following two session days; in the House, the motion must be made within the next succeeding session day.

9 If the bill passes, it is sent to the other legislative chamber where the bill follows the procedure outlined in Steps 2-8, resulting in defeat or passage.

If the bill is passed by both chambers in identical form, the bill is ordered enrolled by the house in which the bill originated. Upon enrollment, the bill is sent to the Governor.

However, if the bill is passed in a different form by the second chamber, the bill must be returned to the chamber of origin:

a) If amendments or a substitute bill of the second chamber are accepted in the chamber of origin, the bill is enrolled and sent to the Governor.



b) If amendments or a substitute proposal of the second chamber are rejected in the chamber of origin, the bill can be sent to a conference committee (special committee composed of legislators from both chambers), which attempts to compromise differences between the two versions of the bill adopted by the chambers, or the chamber of origin can amend it and send it back to the other chamber. In a conference committee, the conference committee can consider only issues in the bill upon which there is disagreement between the two chambers. The conference committee may reach a compromise and submit a report to both chambers of the Legislature. Such a report is not subject to amendment. If the conference committee report is approved by both chambers, the bill is enrolled and sent to the Governor. If the conference committee does not reach a compromise, or if the Legislature does not accept the conference committee report, a second conference committee may be appointed.

10 Upon receipt of an enrolled bill, the Governor has 14 days to consider the bill. The Governor may:



a) Sign the bill, which then either becomes law at the expiration of 90 days after the Legislature adjourns sine die, or a date beyond the ninetieth day specified in the bill. If the bill has been given immediate effect by a two-thirds vote of the members elected to and serving in each chamber, the bill will become law at the time of the Governor's signature or on a day specified in the bill.
b) Veto the bill and return it to the chamber of origin with a message stating the Governor's objections.
c) Choose not to sign or veto the bill. If the bill is neither signed nor vetoed, the bill becomes law 14 days after having reached the Governor's desk if the Legislature is in session or in recess. If the Legislature has adjourned sine die before the end of the 14 days, the unsigned bill does not become law. If the Legislature has adjourned by the time the bill reaches the Governor, he or she has 14 days to consider the bill. If the Governor fails to approve the bill, it does not become law.

11 If the Governor vetoes a bill while the Legislature is in session or recess, one of the following actions may occur:



a) The Legislature may override the veto by two-thirds vote of members elected and serving in each chamber, and the bill becomes law.
b) The bill does not receive the necessary two-thirds vote and thus the attempt to override the veto will fail.

HELPFUL HINTS FOR CONTACTING YOUR STATE LEGISLATOR

An estimated 90 percent of the public will never express even a single opinion to their legislator. It is surprising that more people do not contact public officials since government decides so much of what affects our lives. The government defends our civil rights, regulates commerce, protects consumers from unfair trade practices, and establishes policies to maintain the public's continued good health. The government builds and repairs public roads, provides education for our children, and assures quality services for our senior population. These are only a few examples of how government touches our lives. The list goes on and on.



People often think that contacting their state legislators will not have any effect. On the contrary, legislators are very interested in what the public has to say. They are glad to hear from individuals in their district and see dialogue with the public as one of their primary objectives while in office. This section outlines how to effectively communicate with your state lawmakers.

Communications Make Good Government

Communications with the people of their districts are more important than ever to modern-day legislators. The job of state legislator requires long hours of study on complicated issues before the Legislature, as well as numerous committee meetings and lengthy sessions. Because of busy schedules and the need to travel between Lansing and their district, most members of the Legislature often are unable to talk one-on-one with all of their constituents. However, there are other effective ways to contact public officials. Traditional letters, e-mails, and even social media can be highly effective tools to let public officials know what you think.



A thoughtful, factual, and timely letter or e-mail written to a legislator can solidify or cause a serious review of a previous judgment on an issue. Social media, like Facebook or Twitter, provides an easy way to engage public officials. Hearing from their constituents gives legislators a better understanding of issues and of public opinion.

To Find Your Legislator

To find the postal, e-mail address or phone number of your lawmakers, go to the home pages for the Senate and the House.

Senate: **www.senate.michigan.gov**
House: **www.house.mi.gov**

You may also call the Clerk of the House at (517) 373-0135 or the Secretary of the Senate at (517) 373-2400 to identify your legislators. Your public library can also help you identify your Representative or Senator.

Before You Write

If you would like to present your views on an issue to your legislator, please consider the following points:

1) Is the issue you're writing about a federal, state, county, or municipal issue? If your issue is in the newspaper, check to see if it mentions which level of government is considering the matter.

2) In Lansing, you have one State Representative and one State Senator serving your area. In Washington D.C., you have one U.S. Representative serving your area and two U.S. Senators serving your state. Usually, a federal lawmaker is referred to as a member of Congress. State lawmakers are typically designated as working in the state legislature.

3) Make certain you have the correct address. The traditional way to address your legislator in Lansing is:

   The Honorable (*Full Name*)
   State Representative
   State Capitol
   P.O. Box 30014
   Lansing, MI 48909-7514

   Dear Representative (*Last Name*):

   AND/OR

   The Honorable (*Full Name*)
   State Senator
   State Capitol
   P.O. Box 30036
   Lansing, MI 48909-7536

   Dear Senator (*Last Name*):

4) Be sure you include your name and address. Messages without a name and address have little impact, and the legislator has no idea if the note is from someone in his or her district. A phone number and email address is also helpful. If you're expecting a reply, the legislator will need to know how to contact you.

As You Write

After you have determined which official to contact, here are some other considerations to think about as you write:

1) Time the arrival of your letter or e-mail. If the issue you wish to write about is a bill, it is important to make sure your comments arrive before the bill comes up for a vote. Ideally, you should communicate your concerns while the bill is in committee so that

your legislator knows your view early in the legislative process.

2) Focus on the issue at hand. Many issues are complex and related to a host of other matters. Your views will be clearer if your letter is kept centered on the issue.

3) Be concise. Though some issues may be detailed and complex, try to keep letters to no more than one page and emails to no more than a few paragraphs. It also helps a legislator's office if you write a single letter for a single issue.

4) Identify the issue. There are thousands of bills introduced each session and sometimes there are different bills on the same subject. Identify your issue as specifically as you can. List the bill number if you have it. If you write about a proposed bill on transportation, but don't know the bill number, you might refer to it by the bill's sponsor, "State Representative Smith's" bill or the bill's nickname, "the highway logo signs" bill.

5) Make your note personal. Signing a petition, sending a form letter, or forwarding materials may have some impact, but nothing beats the "personal touch." Writing in your own words emphasizes that you cared enough about the issue to take the time to convey your thoughts. Lobbying groups sometimes urge citizens to send form letters or emails to their legislators, which don't have the same impact as personal letters and e-mails. After a legislator has read one, she/he knows what they all say. Personal notes also sometimes provide new views or insights on a bill that a legislator may not have heard before.

6) Use a positive tone. Everyone is more open to suggestion when approached in an upbeat and optimistic manner. Lawmakers are no exception. Angry communications are rarely useful and may even damage a cause.

   Keep in mind, your State Representative has to take into account the well-being of approximately 90,000 people in his or her district and each State Senator must take into account about 260,000 people. Each of those people has an individual viewpoint. This means that at times tough choices have to be made. Just because you and your legislator disagree on one subject does not mean that you will not agree on many more further down the road. Try to keep the dialogue open between you and your legislators.

7) Present your position and give sound reasons to support it. A note that states "Vote for House Bill 4001; it's a good bill" does make a statement. However, if you back up your position with reasons, it makes an even better point. "Please vote for House Bill 4001. I'm a senior citizen on a fixed income, and the bill will help me in the following ways…" It helps to mention how the issue affects you, your family, your business or profession—or the effect on your community or the state as a whole. This information will make a legislator more aware of the bill's potential effect.

8) Try to be constructive. If you believe a bill presents the wrong approach to an existing problem, let your legislator know what you think would be a better solution.

9) Share your knowledge. There is always a shortage of specialists on issues. If you have particular expertise on an issue, let your legislator know. Your legislator votes on

everything from farming and transportation bills to education and veterans bills. A professional or expert on an issue can prove to be extremely helpful.

10) Letters of appreciation are certainly welcome. If you think your legislator is doing a good job, tell him or her so. Even if your legislator votes on an issue differently than you would like, a letter explaining that you disagree but are still willing to work together in the future could help you both on other issues.

11) A special note to teachers—Some of the most interesting letters of all come from students. Young people are affected by the laws the Legislature passes and they have a vested interest in our state's future. Their views are always welcome by a legislator.

    Unfortunately, legislators have small staffs. When writing to a legislator as a class project, it is helpful to send composite letters or the letters of selected students so that your efforts may receive better attention.

Before You Make Contact

When contacting our lawmakers, it is important to consider a few reasons that determine how they may vote on a bill.

We rightly expect our leaders to make studied, informed decisions before they vote on an issue. It's crucial that we allow our officials to look at as many sides of an argument as possible before they reach a final decision. For this reason, it is important to let them know when we write to them that we are not asking for an immediate commitment to our point of view. A legislator is not likely to take a firm and unyielding position until he or she has studied the bill, witnesses have been heard during the committee process, and the rest of the public has had a chance to have input.

News Reports

Broadcasts may report on particular sections of a bill. However, it's common for legislation to contain multiple provisions. A bill can be 100 pages long with many more provisions besides the one that interests the news. A legislator may be forced to vote on the bill as a whole, weighing the good against the bad.



There are a number of times after introduction that a bill can be changed. A bill often becomes law in a different form than it was introduced. This means it is possible that the content of a bill you supported will be amended in such a way that you strongly oppose it by the time it reaches the floor for a final vote. After telling you he or she is against House Bill 4001 because it would have bad consequences for small business, your State Representative and Senator may vote for the final version if the unfavorable content has been removed and the rest of the bill remains positive.

Phone Calls to Your State Representative and State Senator

Generally speaking, writing a letter or sending an e-mail to your State Representative or State Senator is more effective than phoning. A written statement on an issue allows time for careful investigation by a legislative office. With so many issues, it is difficult for any member to have all answers ready for all occasions.



Sometimes an issue must be addressed quickly so a phone call is the only practical method of contact. Phone calls to your legislator are certainly welcome.

Catching a legislator personally between sessions and committee meetings is often difficult. However, his or her staff will be glad to relay your concerns. Often, the staff can supply basic answers to your questions.

Dropping By a Legislative Office

People visiting the State Capitol often like to stop by and see where their lawmaker works. It's always best to make an appointment if you have a concern to discuss directly with a legislator, but he or she will gladly greet you personally any time a schedule permits. Representatives and Senators agree that meeting people from the district is one of the major highlights of the job.

Since time may be limited, legislators appreciate a direct and forward presentation when you drop by to discuss an issue. A clear idea of your issue, with well-prepared facts that back up your position will facilitate your cause and create discussion.



THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH

Organization Chart

EXECUTIVE OFFICE
Governor and Lieutenant Governor

Department of AGRICULTURE & RURAL DEVELOPMENT	Department of STATE POLICE	Department of CIVIL RIGHTS	Department of CORRECTIONS
Department of EDUCATION	Department of ATTORNEY GENERAL	Department of HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES	Department of INSURANCE & FINANCIAL SERVICES
Department of LABOR & ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY	Department of ENVIRONMENT, GREAT LAKES, & ENERGY	Department of NATURAL RESOURCES	Department of STATE
Department of LICENSING & REGULATORY AFFAIRS	Department of MILITARY & VETERANS AFFAIRS	Department of TECHNOLOGY, MANAGEMENT & BUDGET	Department of TRANSPORTATION
	Department of TREASURY	Department of LIFELONG EDUCATION, ADVANCEMENT & POTENTIAL	

DUTIES OF THE GOVERNOR AND LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

The executive power is vested in the Governor, who is responsible for the faithful execution of the laws of the state. Elected by the people to a four-year term, the Governor:

- Supervises the departments of the executive branch and appoints members to state boards and commissions.
- May direct an investigation of any department of state government and may require written information from executive and administrative state officers on any subject relating to the performance of their duties.
- May remove elective and appointive officers of the executive branch for cause, as well as elective county, city, township, and village officers.
- Submits messages to the Legislature and recommends measures considered necessary or desirable.
- May issue executive orders to make changes in the organization of the executive branch of state government.



- Submits an annual state budget to the Legislature, recommending sufficient revenues to meet proposed expenditures.
- May issue executive orders to reduce budget expenditures in response to revenue shortfalls.
- May convene the Legislature in extra session.
- May call a special election to fill a vacancy in the Legislature or the U.S. House of Representatives, and may fill a vacancy in the U.S. Senate by appointment.
- May grant reprieves, commutations of sentences, and pardons.
- May seek extradition of fugitives from justice who have left the state and may issue warrants at the request of other governors for fugitives who may be found within this state.
- Signs all commissions and patents for state lands, and appoints notaries public and commissioners in other states to take acknowledgments of deeds for this state.
- Serves as chairperson of the State Administrative Board, which supervises and approves certain state expenditures, and has veto power over its actions.
- Serves as commander in chief of the state's armed forces.

The Lieutenant Governor is nominated at a party convention and elected with the Governor. The term of office is four years. The Lieutenant Governor serves as President of the Michigan Senate, but may vote only in case of a tie. The Lieutenant Governor may perform duties requested by the Governor, but no power vested in the Governor by the State Constitution may be delegated to the Lieutenant Governor. The Lieutenant Governor would succeed the Governor in case of death, impeachment, removal from office, or resignation. The Governor and Lieutenant Governor may not serve more than two terms.



STATE DEPARTMENTS AND AGENCIES

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Constitution Hall
525 West Allegan Street
P.O. Box 30017
Lansing, Michigan 48909
Phone: (800) 292-3939
Email: mda-info@michigan.gov
www.michigan.gov/mdard

The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD) works to assure food safety, protect animal and plant health, sustain environmental stewardship, provide consumer protection, enable rural development, and foster efficient administration operations through service, partnership, and collaboration. The department develops and implements safeguards to protect the public from disease and unsanitary conditions in connection with food production and food handling, product labeling, dairy products, animals, and plants. The department carries out responsibilities relating to food, standard weights and measures, farm produce storage, and dairy products; inspection and enforcement of animal health; control of plant pests and diseases; and inspection of beans and perishable fruits and vegetables.

DEPARTMENT OF ATTORNEY GENERAL

G. Mennen Williams Building
525 West Ottawa Street
P.O. Box 30212
Lansing, Michigan 48909
Phone: (517) 335-7622
Fax: (517) 335-7644
Email: miag@michigan.gov
www.michigan.gov/ag

The Attorney General is the state's top lawyer and law enforcement official, protecting and serving the people and interests of Michigan through a broad range of duties. The Attorney General may intervene in any lawsuit, criminal or civil, on behalf of the people of the state of Michigan. She advises and supervises prosecuting attorneys throughout Michigan and possesses certain investigative powers, including the power to investigate allegations of election fraud and complaints for the removal of public officials. She also may request grand jury investigations of crime in Michigan. When public legal matters arise, the Attorney General's Office renders opinions on matters of law, and provides legal counsel for the Legislature and for each officer, department, board, and commission of state government. The Attorney General's Office provides legal representation in court actions and assists in the conduct of official hearings held by state agencies. By law, the Attorney General cannot provide legal advice to private citizens.

DEPARTMENT OF CIVIL RIGHTS

Capitol Tower Building
110 West Michigan Avenue, Suite 800
Lansing, Michigan 48933
Phone: (517) 335-3165
Fax: (517) 241-0546
TTY: (517) 241-1965
Email: mdcr-info@michigan.gov
www.michigan.gov/mdcr
File a complaint: (800) 482-3604

The Department of Civil Rights, in implementing the policies of the Civil Rights Commission, investigates and resolves discrimination complaints in employment, public accommodation, public service, education, and housing against any person. It works to prevent discrimination through educational programs that promote voluntary compliance with civil rights laws.

MICHIGAN CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION

P.O. Box 30002
Lansing, Michigan 48909
Phone: (517) 284-0100
Fax: (517) 284-9952
Email: civilservicecommission@michigan.gov
www.michigan.gov/mdcs

The Civil Service Commission is a bipartisan commission that regulates conditions of employment for classified civil service workers in all of the departments of the executive branch of state government.

DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

Grandview Plaza
206 East Michigan Avenue
P.O. Box 30003
Lansing, Michigan 48909
Phone: (517) 335-1426
www.michigan.gov/corrections

The Department of Corrections administers Michigan's adult prison, probation and parole systems. The department has jurisdiction over all adults convicted of felonies who are sentenced to prison in the state. It administers and staffs all state prisons and the Special Alternative Incarceration facility. Department-employed field agents supervise probationers for the sentencing courts and supervise parolees or those felons who have left prison and are preparing for a full release from the jurisdiction of the state. Felons who are being supervised in the community prior to parole, including those on electronic monitoring and those in community corrections centers, also fall under the jurisdiction of this state department.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

John A. Hannah Building
608 West Allegan Street
P.O. Box 30008
Lansing, Michigan 48909
Phone: (833) 633-5788
Fax: (517) 355-4565
www.michigan.gov/mde

The Department of Education (MDE) is the state administrative agency implementing federal and state legislative mandates in the field of education. Among the department's primary functions are providing educational leadership, developing educational standards, and administering state aid programs to school districts, public school academies, and other public education agencies. The department, which is responsible for the certification of teachers, provides technical assistance to local districts, communities, and individual schools and educators in regard to curriculum, standards, school improvement, and school programs.



DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT, GREAT LAKES, AND ENERGY

Constitutional Hall
525 West Allegan Street
P.O. Box 30473
Lansing, Michigan 48909
Phone: (800) 662-9278
www.michigan.gov/egle
Environmental Complaint or Emergency:
(800) 292-4706

The Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) works to protect Michigan's environment and public health by managing air, water, land, and energy resources. The department enforces the state's statutes and policies dealing with the use and condition of our water, soil, air, and minerals. This task includes monitoring environmental quality, close communication with federal and local officials, and processing permits.



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

333 South Grand Avenue
P.O. Box 30195
Lansing, Michigan 48909
Phone: (517) 241-3740
www.michigan.gov/mdhhs
Report Abuse and Neglect: (855) 444-3911

The Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) strives to promote better health outcomes, reduce health risks, and support stable and safe families while encouraging selfsufficiency. The department administers numerous financial programs, including those related to child care, development, and support; employment; food, cash, and home energy assistance for eligible families; medical and disability assistance; and emergency relief. The Department of Health and Human Services operates a wide range of service programs, including those pertaining to adoption, adults with disabilities, foster care, juvenile justice, family preservation, domestic violence, protecting children from abuse, migrant outreach, refugee services, and teen parent and youth services.



DEPARTMENT OF INSURANCE AND FINANCIAL SERVICES

Stevens T. Mason Building
530 West Allegan Street, 7th Floor
P.O. Box 30220
Lansing, Michigan 48909
Phone: (517) 284-8800 or (877) 999-6442
Fax: (517) 284-8837
www.michigan.gov/difs

The Department of Insurance and Financial Services (DIFS) is responsible for regulating Michigan's financial industries, including banks, credit unions, insurance, mortgage companies, and other consumer finance lenders. The department administers 39 public acts and regulates a variety of individual licensees and entities, including Blue Cross Blue Shield, 26 HMOs, 87 banks, 139 domestic insurance companies, 157 credit unions, 1,447 foreign insurance companies, 224,077 individual insurance agents, 18,239 insurance agencies, 8,668 mortgage licensees and registrants, 616 deferred presentment companies and 2,560 other consumer finance-related entities. It can offer assistance to consumers if they have questions or complaints about credit unions, insurance companies, banks, and HMOs.

DEPARTMENT OF LABOR AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

105 West Allegan Street
Lansing, Michigan 48933
Phone: (517) 241-6712
Email: LEO-DirectorOffice@michigan.gov
www.michigan.gov/leo

The Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity (LEO) provides the connections, expertise and innovative solutions to promote business growth, build vibrant communities, create affordable housing, generate tourism, and attract and retain key talent to Michigan.

DEPARTMENT OF LICENSING AND REGULATORY AFFAIRS

Ottawa Building
611 West Ottawa Street
P.O. Box 30004
Lansing, Michigan 48909
Phone: (517) 335-9700
www.michigan.gov/lara

The Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs (LARA) supports business growth and job creation while safeguarding Michigan citizens through a simple, fair, efficient, and transparent regulatory structure.

LARA has three primary focuses:

(1) Licensing and Regulatory; (2) The Michigan Administrative Hearing System; and (3) The Office of Regulatory Reinvention (ORR).

LARA oversees the licensing and regulation of individuals and entities on an annual basis. It supports the health, safety and economic well-being of the public through services and regulation of the activities of organizations and individuals.

DEPARTMENT OF MILITARY AND VETERANS AFFAIRS

3411 North Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard
Lansing, Michigan 48906
Phone: (517) 481-8083
Veterans Phone: (800) MICH-VET
www.michigan.gov/dmva

The Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA) is the state agency that administers the Michigan Army and the Air National Guard. The department supervises two state-operated, long-term veterans care facilities and cooperates fully with the federal government and Air National Guard in managing various facilities throughout the state. Michigan National Guard units are available to the Governor to assist local and state government in coping with natural disasters and civil emergencies.

DEPARTMENT OF LIFELONG EDUCATION, ADVANCEMENT AND POTENTIAL

105 W. Allegan Street
Lansing, MI 48933
P.O. Box 30002
Lansing, Michigan 48909
Phone: (517) 284-0146 or (833) 665-8116
www.michigan.gov/mileap

The Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement, and Potential (MiLEAP) was created under Executive Order 2023-6 by

Governor Gretchen Whitmer to expand opportunities and improve outcomes from birth to postsecondary so anyone can 'make it in Michigan' with a solid education and a path to a good-paying job.

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Constitution Hall
525 West Allegan Street
P.O. Box 30028
Lansing, Michigan 48909
Phone: (517) 284-6367
Fax: (517) 335-4242
www.michigan.gov/dnr

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) works to protect natural and cultural resources, ensure sustainable recreation use and enjoyment, enable strong natural resource-based economies, improve and build strong relationships and partnerships, and foster effective business practices and good governance. Management responsibilities of the department extend to wildlife and fisheries; overseeing hunting and fishing throughout the state; and maintaining and enhancing the state park system.



DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Richard H. Austin Building
430 West Allegan Street
Lansing, Michigan 48918
Phone: (888) SOS-MICH • (888) 767-6424
www.michigan.gov/sos

The Department of State, the oldest department in Michigan state government, is administered by the Secretary of State. (SOS) The Secretary of State has constitutional as well as statutory duties. The Department of State is responsible for licensing drivers, the registration and titling of vehicles, the regulation of automobile dealers and repair facilities, the registration of voters and administration of elections, and the certification of documents and public records.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE POLICE

P.O. Box 30634
Lansing, Michigan 48909
Phone: (517) 332-2521
www.michigan.gov/msp

The Department of State Police (MSP) is charged with broad responsibilities in the area of public safety. The department provides not only direct police service to citizens in the form of traffic enforcement and criminal investigation, but also a wide range of law enforcement support services to local agencies through crime labs, canine units, and tactical assistance.

DEPARTMENT OF TECHNOLOGY, MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET

Elliott-Larsen Building, 2nd Floor
320 South Walnut Street
P.O. Box 30026
Lansing, Michigan 48909
Phone: (517) 241-5545
Fax: (517) 241-8715
E-mail: DTMB@michigan.gov
www.michigan.gov/dtmb

The Department of Technology, Management and Budget (DTMB) promotes a unified approach to information technology management and provides centralized administration of services including auditing, budgeting, employee resources, financial services, fleet management, mail, printing, property management, purchasing, records management, and retirement services for departments and agencies in the executive branch of state government.

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

State Transportation Building
425 West Ottawa Street
P.O. Box 30050
Lansing, Michigan 48909
Phone: (517) 241-2400
www.michigan.gov/mdot

The Department of Transportation (MDOT) is responsible for Michigan's multi-modal transportation network. Its mission includes providing quality transportation services for the 9,669-mile state highway system, comprised of all its I-, US- and M-numbered routes. The department administers programs for all other modes, ranging from air, rail, and bus transit to bicycle paths and Great Lakes port development. The department's duties include developing and implementing comprehensive transportation plans for the entire state, administering state and federal funds allocated to these modes, and administering federal aid programs for local roads and bridges.



DEPARTMENT OF TREASURY

Richard H. Austin Building
430 West Allegan Street
Lansing, Michigan 48933
Phone: (517) 335-7508
www.michigan.gov/treasury
(*Do Not use for Taxes)*

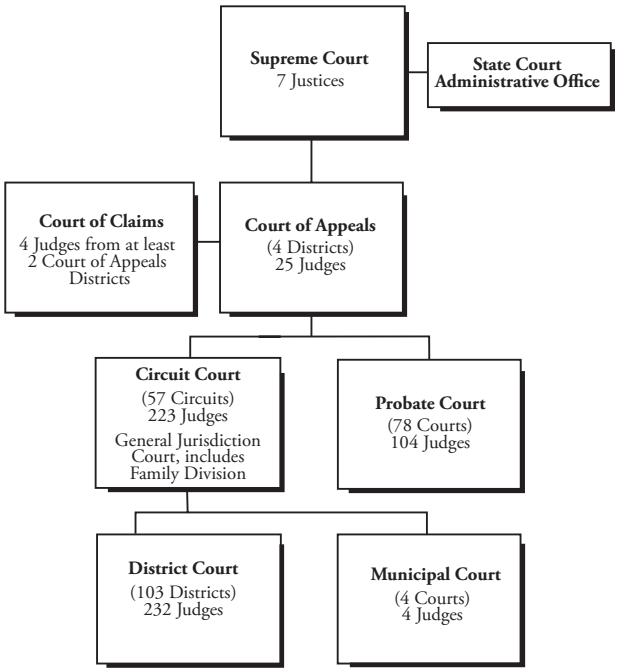
The Department of Treasury is the chief fiscal agency of the state of Michigan and acts as an economic advisor to the Governor on tax and revenue policy issues. Under the State Treasurer's direction, the department collects, invests, and disburses state monies. It collects and administers over $20 billion a year in state taxes and safeguards the credit of the state. The department also plays a major role in revenue estimating; oversees any necessary interim borrowings and all long-term bonding; and is responsible for the fiscal health of Michigan's local governments and schools.

THE JUDICIAL BRANCH

ORGANIZATION CHART

The State Constitution provides that "The judicial power of the state is vested exclusively in one court of justice which shall be divided into one supreme court, one court of appeals, one trial court of general jurisdiction known as the circuit court, one probate court, and courts of limited jurisdiction that the legislature may establish by two-thirds vote of the members elected to and serving in each house."

The following description of Michigan's judicial system is taken from *One Court of Justice*—a publication of the State Court Administrative Office.



APPELLATE COURTS

Supreme Court

The Michigan Supreme Court is the highest court in the state, hearing cases appealed to it from the Court of Appeals. The Supreme Court has the authority to decide which cases it will hear. If an application is granted, the Supreme Court will hear the case; if denied, the decision made by the lower court remains unchanged. The Supreme Court also has original jurisdiction over some matters.

In addition to its judicial duties, the Supreme Court is responsible for the general supervision of all courts in the state. The Supreme Court also establishes rules for practice and procedure in all courts.

The Supreme Court consists of seven justices: the Chief Justice and six Associate Justices. The Justices are elected for eight-year terms on statewide non-partisan ballots. The Chief Justice is chosen by the court and serves a two-year term.

Court of Appeals

The Court of Appeals was established by the State Constitution as an "intermediate" court between the Supreme Court and the Circuit Court. Judges of the Court of Appeals are chosen in nonpartisan elections from four districts of approximately equal population.

TRIAL COURTS

Circuit Court

Circuit Courts are referred to as the trial courts of general jurisdiction in Michigan because of the very broad powers of this central part of the state's court system. Circuit Court has jurisdiction over all actions except those given by state law to another court. Generally speaking, the Circuit Court handles all civil cases involving more than $25,000; all criminal cases where the defendant could be sent to prison; and all family and domestic relations cases, including divorce, paternity actions, juvenile proceedings, and adoptions.

Circuit judges are elected for six-year terms on nonpartisan ballots.

Court of Claims

The Court of Claims has jurisdiction limited to hearing cases where someone is suing the state. As a general rule, a state cannot be sued without its consent. Michigan granted that consent by establishing the Court of Claims. The Court of Claims is housed within the Michigan Court of Appeals. The Supreme Court selects four Appeals Court justices to serve on the Court of Claims.

Probate Court

The Probate Court is a court of limited jurisdiction. This court's main functions are supervising the probating of wills and the administration of estates, trusts, conservatorships, and guardianships and dealing with matters related to people protected by the court because of mental illness or developmental disabilities.

Probate judges are elected for six-year terms on nonpartisan ballots.

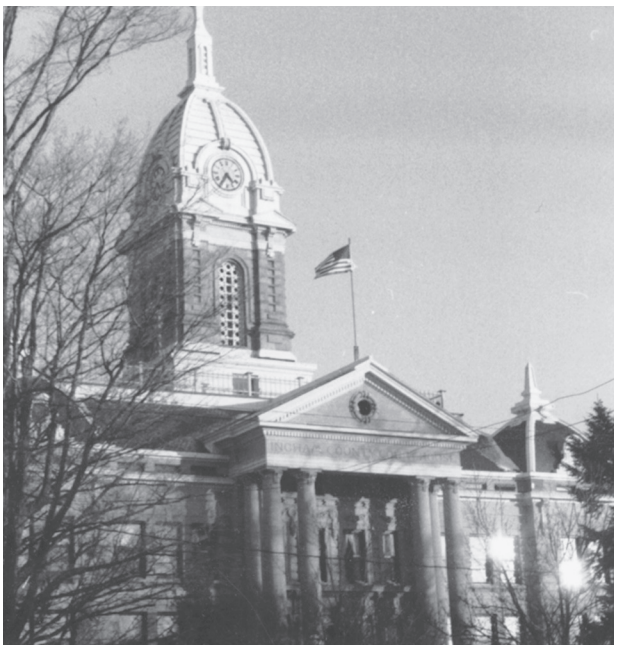
District Court

The District Court has exclusive jurisdiction of all civil (not criminal) cases up to $25,000 and handles a variety of other proceedings. For criminal cases, the District Court conducts preliminary examinations in felony cases and handles all misdemeanors where punishment does not exceed one year in jail.

District judges are elected for six-year terms on nonpartisan ballots.

Municipal Court

Municipal Court civil jurisdiction is limited to $1,500. There are four municipal courts in Michigan. Typical cases include misdemeanors, traffic and ordinance violations and jury trials.



LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN MICHIGAN

Local government is the foundation of modern democracy. From the founding of New England to today's complex world, local government has been the seed from which democracy has grown and flourished.

In Michigan's early years as a territory, although ostensibly governed under the provisions of the Northwest Ordinance, local government played a key role in the life of an average person. Due to the slow means of communication and transportation at the time, Michigan was, in effect, largely governed by local forms of government until it became the twenty-sixth state on January 26, 1837. Until the 1930s, local governments remained primarily responsible for providing direct services to the people of Michigan. This rich tradition of local government independence continues today, providing Michigan residents with an effective voice in the conduct of their everyday concerns.

Local governments, in general, were established to help provide citizens with a more direct voice in government and to promote more effective management of local concerns. Created by the state, local governments have those powers and immunities specifically provided by state law. In Michigan, the State Constitution has established six forms of local governmental entities: counties, townships, cities, villages, special districts and authorities, and school districts.

County Government

Counties, in terms of area, are the largest form of local government. Their relative size enables them to serve as an administrative arm of the state in many respects, providing for such services as the maintenance of roads and the recording of various types of official documents. With around 700 elected county commissioners throughout Michigan's 83 counties, this form of government truly provides a unique opportunity to become involved in the management of local issues.

General law counties (79 of 83) must have a board of commissioners, consisting of 5 to 21 single-member districts. Districts are re-apportioned every ten years. Commissioners must be registered voters and are elected in each even-numbered year. Counties are also required to elect, for four-year terms, a sheriff, a clerk, a treasurer, a register of deeds, and a prosecuting attorney. The county board of commissioners may combine or separate the offices of clerk and register of deeds.



Charter counties (Wayne and Macomb counties), established under the provisions of Public Act 293 of 1966, are organized under a charter prepared by a charter commission that must be approved by voters. A key difference of charter counties from general law counties is the selection of a chief administrative officer or elected county executive.

Another type of county government is the optional unified form (Bay and Oakland counties) permitted by Public Act 139 of 1973. This form permits either the election of a county executive or the appointment of a professional county manager by the board of commissioners.

Township Government

Townships are the second largest form of local government. Townships provide a number of important services to their residents. From supervising elections, assessing property, and collecting taxes to providing fire and police protection, township government makes an important contribution to the lives of Michigan citizens who are outside the jurisdiction of city government. There are more than 6,500 elected township officials in Michigan, making township government one of the most accessible to those concerned citizens wishing to become involved in local government.



Annual township meetings provide residents with a direct voice in township affairs. Usually held on the last Saturday in the last month of each fiscal year, township meetings traditionally provided electors of the township with a significant amount of influence on the conduct of township business. Although the complexity of the problems facing township governments and townships' ability to do away with the annual meeting itself under certain circumstances have somewhat limited a citizen's voice on township matters, regular meetings of township boards continue to provide the ordinary citizen with an important advisory role on township affairs.

Townships are constitutionally required to provide for the election of, for four-year terms, a township supervisor, clerk, treasurer, and two or four township trustees who serve four-year terms, all of whom then comprise the township board. Candidates for the township board must be registered voters, at least 18 years old, residents of Michigan, and residents of the township for at least 30 days prior to the primary election.

Charter townships are a slowly growing form of township government. Established under the provisions of Public Act 359 of 1947, charter townships are more formally structured, and are therefore somewhat less limited in the nature of their legislative and administrative powers. Charter townships usually have a stronger authority to tax and have greater protections from annexation by contiguous cities than general law townships. The charter township board can appoint a township superintendent, but if it chooses not to, the township supervisor automatically assumes the duties of this position. Charter townships are required to have four trustees.

City Government

City government is one of the most basic and familiar forms of local government. City government differs from village government in that a city is removed from township governance, and must therefore provide for its own operation as well as for those services normally provided by a township government. There are over 4,000 elected officials in Michigan's cities and villages. This provides an excellent means of becoming involved in local government. A city's services include police and fire protection, operation of its parks, election administration, public utilities, and others.

In the past, there were two main types of city government charters governing Michigan's incorporated cities, fourth class cities (those with populations of less than 10,000) and all other cities which were classified as special charter cities. According to the Michigan Municipal League, all but one of the special charter cities and, under the provisions of Public Act 334 of 1976, all fourth class cities have become reincorporated as home rule cities under Public Act 279 of 1909.

City charters provide for the qualifications for public office and the election of a mayor, but city governments may be governed through various types of organizations, with the council-manager currently being the most popular form. Under this system, an elected city council appoints a professional manager to administer policies and programs designated by the council. Other common forms of organization include the mayor-council form of government in which the mayor acts as the chief executive officer and a council serves in a legislative capacity, counter-balancing, to various degrees, the power of the mayor. A rarer form of organization is that of the city commission in which each elected member of the city commission serves as the head of a principal municipal department.



Village Government

A village, unlike a city, remains part of the township government for a few functions. A village normally provides several types of local services such as police and fire protection and the maintenance of streets and sidewalks, but must rely on the township for property assessment and general election administration.

A village is required, under the provisions of Public Act 3 of 1895, to elect a president, four to six trustees, a clerk, and a treasurer, with the president and trustees constituting the village council (the clerk and treasurer may also be appointed). An elected or appointed village officer must be a registered voter. The term of office generally lasts two to four years.

A charter village, incorporated under the provisions of Public Act 278 of 1909, differs from a general law village in that the charter generally provides a greater number of variations in the operation of the village, and may also provide greater taxing authority for the village. A village charter requires the election of a president, a clerk, and a legislative body.

Special Districts and Authorities

Special districts and authorities are designed to provide specific services to units of government within their area of jurisdiction. These authorities, which may be formed by two or more cities, villages, townships, or counties, are normally created to operate parks and public utilities, or provide sewage disposal, drainage, water, or transportation services. Each authority has the power to provide for the selection of officers, and may have the ability to levy taxes with voter approval. In addition, recent decades have seen the development of a number of other types of authorities, designed to provide specific

services. Downtown development authorities (DDAs) and business improvement districts (BIDs) are designed to promote downtown business districts. Tax increment financing authorities (TIFAs) are designed to promote growth in the community.



Some of the more well-known metropolitan districts are the Huron-Clinton Metropolitan Authority, which is designed to build and operate parks, the Detroit/Wayne County Port Authority, which has jurisdiction over the commercially navigable waters within its specific domain, and the Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation (SMART), which is designed to provide planning services for bus operations and other modes of transportation in southeastern Michigan.

School Districts

Traditionally, school districts are administered by a school board normally comprised of 3 to 11 members who are elected on a nonpartisan basis. Any registered voter who has been a resident of the district for at least 30 days prior to the election is eligible for appointment or election to a school board. School board members normally serve from four-to-six-year terms and meet monthly to set operational policy. Although certain standards for the operation of school districts are mandated by the State Board of Education, school board members have a considerable amount of discretion in determining school district policy and management. Participation on local school boards provides an excellent vehicle from which a concerned citizen may make a significant contribution to Michigan's outstanding system of education.

In the past, school districts in Michigan were classified into four types of districts—first, second, third, or fourth class—based on the number of students in that district. Since 1995, all school districts other than first class school districts have been reorganized as general powers school districts. Detroit is currently the only first class school district in the state.



Another form of school district is the intermediate school district, which is comprised of a number of smaller school districts joined together to provide services that the smaller districts normally are not able to supply on an individual basis. The exact services provided varies by district, but special education, career and technical education, and pre-K programs are often coordinated through intermediate school districts. Intermediate school districts are under the direction of a five- or seven-member intermediate school board. These school board members serve staggered six-year terms with no more than two seats up for election every two years.

Local Financing

Financing is key to the operation of local governments. In order to help local units of government provide necessary services, the state has granted them the authority to raise revenue through certain taxes, user fees, fines, and borrowing. It also has established certain limitations on the extent of this power. Local governments also receive funds from the state and federal government.

The primary source of local revenues is usually property taxes, with the amount levied against a property determined by multiplying the taxable value of the property and the tax rate. In Michigan, the taxable value is generally set at up to 50 percent of the true cash value of the property. The tax rate is expressed in mills (one mill equals one dollar of taxation per $1,000 of taxable value). The State Constitution limits how much the taxable value of a property can increase each year to the rate of inflation or 5 percent, whichever is less, unless the property is transferred to a new owner.

State law also limits a local unit of government's general property taxing authority. These limits, however, do not include voter-approved millage proposals for various items, such as public safety, roads, sewers, or other authorized purposes.

Another source of local taxation is the city income tax. Cities, with voter approval, may institute an income tax of not more that 1 percent on corporations and residents, and not more than 0.5 percent on nonresidents working in that city, with some exceptions.

Aside from taxes, local governments may charge fees for services like water/sewer and trash removal, issue fines for various violations, and borrow money. Locals also recieve funds from the state via revenue sharing and other means, as well as grants from the federal government.

Schools are funded mainly by state sources, including the sales tax, state income taxes, and the state education property tax. Lottery, tobacco, liquor, casino, and a few other taxes are also earmarked to schools. Locally, additional property taxes, with restrictions, may be levied for schools.



MY MICHIGAN GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

U.S. Senator

Name: District:

Address:

Phone: Staff Contact Name:

Notes:

U.S. Representative

Name: District:

Address:

Phone: Staff Contact Name:

Notes:

Governor

Name:

Address:

Phone: Staff Contact Name:

Notes:

Lieutenant Governor

Name:

Address:

Phone: Staff Contact Name:

Notes:

State Senator

Name: District:

Address:

Phone: Staff Contact Name:

Notes:

State Representative

Name: District:

Address:

Phone: Staff Contact Name:

Notes:

MY MICHIGAN GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS *(Cont.)*

Mayor, City Council, Township Clerk *or other*

Name: District:

Address:

Phone: Staff Contact Name:

Notes:

County Commissioner

Name: District:

Address:

Phone: Staff Contact Name:

Notes:

Additional Contact

Name: Phone:

Address:

City: Title:

Notes:

Additional Contact

Name: Phone:

Address:

City: Title:

Notes:

Additional Contact

Name: Phone:

Address:

City: Title:

Notes:

Additional Contact

Name: Phone:

Address:

City: Title:

Notes:

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