

MACKINAC CENTER
FOR PUBLIC POLICY

PUBLIC POLICY **RECOMMENDATIONS**

2026

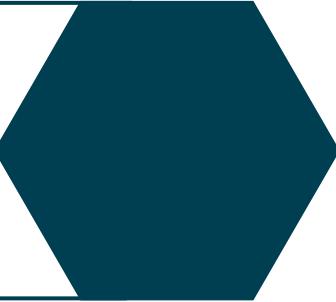




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Top Policy Priorities



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Create economic development accountability

Michigan's business subsidy policies fail to adequately report on failures, abstain from disclosing hundreds of millions in payments, and keep details of offers secret until deals are made. Lawmakers should pass legislation to fix these problems with existing subsidy programs.



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Reject proposed subsidy programs for hand-picked corporations

For the first time since 2000, lawmakers approved no new select business subsidies last year. These programs are expensive to the state budget and unfair to the businesses that do not receive subsidies. There's no quality evidence they improve the state's economy.



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Make government more transparent

Michigan is still one of the only states in the country that exempts its Legislature and governor from public documents disclosure. Public bodies seem to be getting worse at complying with public record requests in a timely and comprehensive manner. Policymakers from both parties have promised this reform for years. The time has come to get it done.



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Ensure reliable electricity

Michigan policymakers' decision to transition the state to less reliable power sources increases electricity costs for businesses and families. It also puts our electrical grid under strain, and there's good reason for concern about its future reliability. With the technology sector increasing demand for energy, policymakers must ensure that the state generates enough reliable electricity to keep the lights on. More nuclear energy is the answer.



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Reduce burdens on workers

The state's occupational licensing requirements put hurdles in the way of Michiganders trying to earn a living. Licensing restricts the supply of workers, which is especially troublesome in the face of labor shortages. Policymakers should reduce those burdens and promote a thorough review of other harmful regulations and administrative rules that unnecessarily make earning a living more difficult. The Legislature should also provide automatic and universal licensing reciprocity for people who are licensed in other states and who want to transfer their license so they can work in Michigan.



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Remove unnecessary regulatory barriers

Policymakers often point to population growth as a key metric of state progress. But state and local regulations make it more difficult and expensive to build new housing, find a job or start a business. Many of these regulations, such as local zoning ordinances and permitting mandates, do little more than artificially reduce supply and increase the cost of living and working in Michigan.



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Improve economic development transparency and accountability

Michigan's business subsidy policies fail to adequately report on failures, abstain from disclosing hundreds of millions in payments, and keep details of offers secret until deals are made. Lawmakers should pass legislation to fix these problems with existing subsidy programs.

[🔗 mackinac.org/33959](http://mackinac.org/33959)

Refuse selective business subsidies

Michigan operates the nation's most expensive and profligate business subsidy programs. Politically favored corporations receive hundreds of millions in cash every year. Lawmakers should just say "no" to economic development programs.

[🔗 mackinac.org/32005](http://mackinac.org/32005)

Pass a Sustainable Michigan Budget

Lawmakers spent a lot more than usual over the past few years out of Michigan's growing revenue. For fiscal stability, legislators should pass a Sustainable Michigan Budget, where spending does not increase by more than the annual growth rate of the state population plus the inflation rate. This would prevent waste and protect taxpayers.

[🔗 mackinac.org/30609](http://mackinac.org/30609)

Favor tax cuts over tax increases

Lawmakers will feel pressure to raise taxes as state revenue growth slows. Michigan already spends too much, and lawmakers ought to reject plans to collect even more in taxes from residents.

[🔗 mackinac.org/32526](http://mackinac.org/32526)

Education



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Expand school choice options

The number of Michigan families who rely on school choice for their children has grown significantly over the last three decades. About a quarter of all students now enroll in a public school of their own choosing. Policymakers should empower more parents to enroll their children in the school that works best for them and remove barriers to educational innovators and entrepreneurs who want to provide more learning opportunities for students.

[🔗 mackinac.org/32939](https://mackinac.org/32939)

Create meaningful school accountability

Myriad factors make it difficult for public schools to succeed with every student. But as tax-funded entities, public schools must be held accountable. The state should set rigorous financial and academic standards for schools. These must be meaningfully and transparently enforced with valid and reliable teacher evaluations and other accountability measures to incentivize schools to improve. Schools that repeatedly fail these standards should no longer be allowed to serve Michigan students and taxpayers.

[🔗 mackinac.org/33267](https://mackinac.org/33267)

Ensure equal treatment of public schools

Michigan's public schools are too often carved into niches, such as rural and urban, district-run and charter, brick-and-mortar and online. Differentiating schools may be useful at times, but for funding purposes, the state should treat public schools equally. They all provide educational services to Michigan students and should receive the same funding and be held to the same standards.

[🔗 mackinac.org/32809](https://mackinac.org/32809)

Enhance curriculum transparency

Increased parental concern about the content taught in classrooms calls for schools to operate with even more accountability and transparency. School curricula, course syllabi and staff training materials should be made publicly available on a district's website. State law grants parents the right to "[r]eview the curriculum, textbooks, and teaching materials of the school in ... a reasonable time and place and in a reasonable manner." Schools must make good on that right.

[🔗 mackinac.org/29762](https://mackinac.org/29762)



Replace aging power plants with nuclear, not wind and solar

A renaissance in nuclear power provides a reliable, low-cost power source compared to wind and solar and should be considered in utilities' plans for replacing aging power plants. No existing dispatchable power plant should be closed until its dispatchable replacement is operational. Specifically, the Fermi Power Plant is already licensed for an additional 1,100 MW facility, and both the JH Campbell and Monroe coal-fired plants may be suitable locations for either large scale or small modular reactor units.

 mackinac.org/33936

Save millions by preventing early closures of power plants

Lawmakers should delay power plant closings at least until 2028. Passing a law by April would allow Consumers Energy to participate in the Capacity Auction, which would give the state more than a \$100 million in revenue. The legislation should also require the Michigan Public Service Commission to fully consider cost and reliability comparisons between solar, wind and nuclear power and authorize nuclear power construction in place of wind and solar to meet clean power goals.

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Maintain reliable electricity

In December 2023, Michigan passed legislation that mandates the state meet net-zero carbon emissions and 100% "clean energy" requirements by 2040. Our modeling shows this plan will have almost no impact on global climate, but it will make electricity in Michigan far less reliable. Grid managers and operators across the continent warn that the rush to "decarbonize" the grid and build more expensive and unreliable wind and solar is causing instability and blackouts. Policymakers, regulators and utilities need to reorient their focus to ensuring Michiganders have access to reliable electricity.

 mackinac.org/netzero



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Keep Line 5 open and build the Line 5 Tunnel

Michigan needs the products transported by the Line 5 pipeline. Both the pipeline and the tunnel project, which would relocate the pipeline to a concrete-lined tunnel 100 feet below the bed of the Great Lakes, have been actively supported by an international and bipartisan mix of elected officials, business interests and unions from across the Great Lakes region. But the Whitmer administration has carried out a consistent campaign to shut down the pipeline, delaying construction of the tunnel. State policymakers should encourage federal regulators to approve the final permits for this essential upgrade to Michigan's energy infrastructure.

 mackinac.org/33441

Ensure Michigan is in attainment for National Ambient Air Quality Standards

Michigan's air quality often fails federal standards because of wildfire smoke from Canada. The state has no control over this. Michigan policymakers should pass a resolution to urge the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to automatically exempt the state from these standards when Canadian wildfires pollute Michigan air and place the state in attainment for the National Ambient Air Quality Standards. Being in attainment has economic benefits of easier permitting of new and expanding industry. The EPA issues warnings of impending high air pollution days. These days should not count against Michigan's air quality if Canadian wildfires are to blame.

Regulation



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Reduce occupational licensing burdens

Occupational licensure requires people to get permission from the government to work legally. It often requires hours of education and training, fees and testing. Michigan mandates a license to work for about 180 occupations, about 20% of the total workforce. The state has made good, bipartisan reforms on this issue in the last decade, but there's more to do.

To ensure that licensure properly balances protecting the public without unnecessary obstacles for people trying to find work, Michigan should: 1) Join the five other states that regularly review all licensing rules to ensure they still make sense. 2) Fully reciprocate with other states, making it easy for people with licenses from other states to move and immediately begin working in Michigan. 3) Only prevent those with a criminal background from being able to get properly licensed if they were convicted of a felony and the crime is directly related to the occupation for which they seek a license to work.

mackinac.org/licensure

Increase housing supply

Policymakers should speed up the rate of processing construction permits at the state and local level. They should eliminate or significantly reduce the many licensing requirements for builders and workers that are required for residential construction. The Legislature should pass statewide zoning reform that would prevent local laws from unnecessarily limiting construction, such as requiring minimum home sizes, mandatory parking lots, needless setback limits and aesthetic requirements. Policymakers should encourage locals to allow more multifamily housing, to offer preapproved building plans and to cut down on regulatory costs, inspections and approval times.

mackinac.org/32599

Expand scope of practice for health professionals

Michigan faces a widespread shortage of primary care providers, and state rules on mid-level health care providers make the problem worse. Specifically, scope-of-practice restrictions prohibit licensed health care professionals — including nurses, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, nurse anesthetists and pharmacists — from practicing to the full extent of their education and training. Lawmakers should lessen these restrictions to increase access and reduce the costs of essential health care services. Removing these unnecessary licensing and scope of practice restrictions will relieve stress on the overall system by creating a larger pool of health professionals to treat ailing Michigan residents.

mackinac.org/33904

Elections



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Defend Michigan's votes in presidential elections

Since the American founding, the Electoral College has guaranteed that Michigan's votes in a presidential election count regardless of how other states administer their elections. A new movement has arisen, however, to encourage states to nullify this part of the U.S. Constitution through an interstate compact. Sixteen states and the District of Columbia have already joined this compact, effectively handing over 205 presidential electors to the whims of California with its lax election safeguards. Michigan lawmakers should reject any effort to join the National Popular Vote Interstate Compact and instead clarify in the state constitution that the state will award its presidential electors only based on votes cast by Michigan residents.

mackinac.org/28515

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Transparency



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Fix FOIA

Michigan consistently ranks as one of the worst states for government transparency. Citizens attempting to obtain public records regularly encounter excessive delays, fees and redactions. The state is also one of only a few where the governor and Legislature are exempt from FOIA. Lawmakers should amend FOIA to open all of government to transparency and accountability.

[🔗 mackinac.org/31368](https://mackinac.org/31368)

Require economic development transparency

Michigan used to disclose exactly how much the state spent on corporate welfare subsidies. Every company, how much it received in incentives and what it pledged to do with the money, was detailed. This is no longer the case, and the state spends hundreds of millions of dollars, the details of which are kept secret from the public. Michigan should not use taxpayer dollars to subsidize corporations, but if it chooses to do so, lawmakers should change the law to ensure that these deals are fully transparent to taxpayers footing the bill.

[🔗 mackinac.org/33959](https://mackinac.org/33959)

Make transparency the default

Michigan's Freedom of Information Act requires people seeking information about how their government operates to submit a formal request for public records. This makes FOIA reactive, burdening requestors filing a request, paying a fee and waiting weeks for the records. While this can be reasonable for documents that are not created in the ordinary course of business, certain information that is regularly generated and used by governments should be disclosed by default, without the need for a request. Lawmakers should amend FOIA to require some documents, like meeting minutes, financial reports and vendor contracts, to be published within 30 days of their creation.

[🔗 mackinac.org/transparency](https://mackinac.org/transparency)

Criminal Justice



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Smart on crime, but not soft on crime

Reforms to criminal justice policies should be reviewed based on three criteria. First, and most importantly, policies must improve public safety. Any policy that fails to make Michigan communities safer should be rejected regardless of any peripheral benefits claimed. Secondly, policies should save taxpayer money — either in the short or long term. Lastly, policies that enhance the ability of ex-offenders to earn their own success through meaningful employment should be prioritized.

[🔗 mackinac.org/26244](https://mackinac.org/26244)

Eliminate civil asset forfeiture

Forfeiture enables the government to take ownership of property that law enforcement believes was used in a crime or resulted from criminal activity. For years, this practice was abused, with some police departments padding their budgets by seizing property from people, many of whom were never convicted of a crime. The state has made reforms in this area, but these do not fully protect Michiganders from forfeiture abuse. Policymakers should eliminate civil forfeiture altogether and only allow someone's property to be forfeited after they've been convicted in court of a crime.

[🔗 mackinac.org/s2023-02](https://mackinac.org/s2023-02)

Prioritize education and workforce training in prisons

Research published by the Mackinac Center in 2023 showed that inmates who participate in education and workforce training during their incarceration have lower rates of recidivism, higher rates of employment and higher earnings than nonparticipants. This research also found that workforce training had the highest return-on-investment per state dollars spent, while college education had the highest ROI per participant. Policymakers should expand the availability of education and workforce training in Michigan prisons, while adult basic education and GED programming within the Michigan Department of Corrections should be structured as feeders for postsecondary options. The Michigan Legislature should also authorize "earned time" productivity credits as an incentive for MDOC inmates to participate in and complete these programs that are proven to reduce their likelihood to reoffend.

[🔗 mackinac.org/s2023-01](https://mackinac.org/s2023-01)



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Repeal SEIU dues skim

The government union SEIU Healthcare Michigan successfully lobbied the Legislature to permit it to unionize home care providers. These people are typically family members of elderly or disabled Medicaid recipients. They are not state employees, but Michigan law treats them as such solely for the purpose of allowing the SEIU to skim dues off of their Medicaid payments. The Legislature should end this forced and fake unionization scheme.

[🔗 mackinac.org/33300](https://mackinac.org/33300)

End government collection of union dues

The Michigan Legislature repealed a ban on school districts using public resources to assist unions in collecting dues from their members. This prohibition should be reinstated. Taxpayer resources should not be used to collect the dues of unions, which are private associations. A 2018 U.S. Supreme Court ruling also made clear that unions representing public employees are inherently political, making publicly financed assistance even less justifiable. Unions can collect their own dues.

[🔗 mackinac.org/31795](https://mackinac.org/31795)

Restore essential worker protections

In 2024, lawmakers passed several policies that will hurt workers and Michigan's economy. With Michigan's popular right-to-work law now repealed, many employees are confused about their rights and need guidance to fully understand and exercise them. Additionally, expanded subjects of bargaining, additional prevailing wage requirements, and new workplace rules will make Michigan less competitive and weaken the economy. Michigan lawmakers should adopt policies that will ensure not only that workers understand their rights but also provide them a meaningful opportunity to choose whether unionization best represents their interests.

[🔗 mackinac.org/30490](https://mackinac.org/30490)

Janus implementation

The U.S. Supreme Court ruling in Janus v. AFSCME found that public employees have First Amendment rights to determine whether to pay a union, and that payment to a union cannot be mandated as a condition of employment. Michigan lawmakers should ensure that state and local agencies comply with this ruling by only withholding dues from paychecks if they have proof of clear and affirmative consent from employees who have been advised of their rights.

[🔗 mackinac.org/janus](https://mackinac.org/janus)



If you have any questions or seek further clarification about these policy recommendations, please contact the experts at their email addresses listed previously. To see an online version, please visit:

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