Dear Friend,

Hello and welcome to my e-newsletter for April 2016!

**Contact information**
Serving the constituents of the 58th House District is very important to me and I encourage residents to contact my office with any state or local issues by calling (517) 373-1794, emailing ericleutheuser@house.mi.gov or by visiting my website at www.RepEricLeutheuser.com. I look forward to serving you and encourage everyone to contact my office if I can assist you in any way, or if you have an idea to help move our state forward.

**Joint committee investigates Grand Rapids Vets Home audit**
A series of joint committee hearings conducted by the House Committee on Military and Veterans Affairs and the Committee on Oversight and Ethics reviewed the Auditor General’s report regarding the shortcomings of the Grand Rapids Home for Veterans, which was released in February. The report stated that basic room checks were not performed, fall alarms were not checked, and there were not sufficient controls for certain prescription drugs. Lawmakers, outraged by these findings, have committed themselves to investigating the root cause of the issues and finding solutions for better conditions at the Home that veterans deserve. The committee heard testimony from the Auditor General, the Military and Veterans Affairs Agency and the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs. After hearing testimony, the committees called for the State’s Attorney General to further investigate the Home.

**State unemployment rate continues to fall**
In February, Michigan added 36,000 jobs as the unemployment rate fell to just 4.8 percent, according to figures released in March. That rate is below the national unemployment rate, and is the lowest it’s been since June 2001, proving that Michigan is, in fact, the comeback state.

**House passes abortion coercion bills**
Legislation that would make it a crime to force a woman to have an abortion against her will passed out of the House. The bill states that stopping or threatening to stop any financial, contractual or work relationship after a pregnant woman has stated her wish not to have an abortion is a form of coercion and is therefore unlawful. Committee testimony on the bill from victims told personal stories about very troubling instances of coercion happening in Michigan and across the country right now. We have to protect these vulnerable
women from abuse. The bill now moves to the Senate for further consideration.

**State school board policy changes raise concerns for parents**
The State Board of Education is suggesting new policies that many feel give important parental rights to the government and potentially put children in danger. The policies, pertaining to Lesbian Gay Bi-sexual Transgender and Questioning students, say students should be allowed to choose their own names and change their own gender in the school database, all without parental approval. Under these new policies, parents would not be informed of these decisions made by their own children. Concerned parents who would like their voices heard are encouraged to contact the MDE. Input may be submitted online at the public comment site everyvoicecounts.mi.org.

**Senior Update**

**Living Well, Aging Well**

It’s inspiring when older Americans share their experience, strength and hope with their local communities. Many older adults have discovered the pleasure of trying new things and “reinventing” themselves, staying healthy and engaged citizens as they progress through life.

Our area offers a number of opportunities to be involved and active in the community. Senior Centers, churches, service clubs and many other organizations provide enjoyable activities and events for residents of all ages. Festivals, sporting events, theater, concerts, parades and other gatherings bring people together for great and memorable occasions.

I’d like to invite you to explore the opportunities available to our seasoned Michiganders at a new website hosted by the State of Michigan. See how we’re living well, and aging well at www.michigan.gov/aging

**Safer roads and tax relief for seniors**

I supported House Bill 4370, now Public Act 179 of 2015, which extends the Homestead Property Tax Credit to help middle-class homeowners and renters, as well as seniors on a fixed income who make up to $60,000. In addition to improving our state’s infrastructure, PA 179 as passed, also provides tax relief to lower income families, the middle class, seniors and every single worker in the state, in the form of an increase in the tax credit and state income tax reductions.

The credit means about $200 million more in the pockets of our state’s hard-working taxpayers. The legislation also increases the maximum amount of the Homestead Property Tax Credit beginning with the 2018 tax year. The legislation makes other changes to the homestead credit designed to increase the amount of the credit or the number of individuals eligible to claim it, or both.

**Retirement security**
Currently, the income tax treatment of retirement income of married couples filing jointly is based on the age of the older spouse. I support House Bill 4124, which will make a small technical clarification to the Income Tax Act to ensure that surviving spouses are not subjected to a tax increase as a result of the death of their loved one.

**Synchronizing multiple prescription medications**

Sometimes you want to refill multiple prescriptions at once, but can’t – simply because they were not prescribed at the same time. My colleagues and I are working on legislation that would make it easier for people to “synchronize” certain refills and save trips to the drug store.

**Helping family caregivers**

More than two million Michiganders have taken on the responsibility of helping their loved ones to live independently at home. Over the years, there has been a shift to home-based care after a hospitalization. Usually a family member of the loved one takes on the responsibility for after-care. To help ease concerns of those wishing to be caregivers, lawmakers across the country have been introducing bills to ensure that caregivers are given the help they need from the hospital before their loved one is discharged. I supported the Designated Caregiver Act – PA85 of 2016, to allow a patient or their legal guardian to designate a caregiver after entry into a hospital to ensure proper after-care assistance for the patient.

**Veterans Update**

There are more than 650,000 veterans residing in Michigan and many more residents currently serving in the United States Armed Forces. I know the very real challenges they face every day are serious, and we are here to help. My colleagues and I in the House of Representatives have focused on several pieces of legislation to make veterans’ quality of life a key priority in Michigan.

**Academic Success**

In order to make it easier for veterans to return to school upon re-entry to civilian life, Public Act 44 of 2015 (House Bill 4060) allows military training and experience to be recognized as qualifications acceptable towards academic credit at four-year public universities. This expands upon legislation passed last term, to aid veterans and those currently serving in completing their education in a relatively timely manner in the community college arena.

**Employment and Skilled Trades**
Veterans obtain a rare set of invaluable skills and talents through educational and occupational experience, which makes them uniquely fit for civilian careers. The House passed House Bill 4134, now PA 191 of 2015, which allows military training to count toward civilian licensure to help veterans looking for work as boiler installers, repairers or inspectors.