Friends and Neighbors,

During the first decade of the 21st century, the people of Michigan faced a terrible crisis. We lost almost 1 million private-sector jobs, our roads and bridges were allowed to crumble and we were the only state to lose population.

People wanted change and when Republicans took control of the Michigan House in 2011, we listened intently to everyone’s concerns. The people of Michigan wanted their government to be more efficient, effective and accountable, and we moved forward with real solutions to our state’s challenges.

The results speak for themselves. Instead of double-digit jobless rates, Michigan’s unemployment now stands at 4.5 percent, the lowest since January 2001. More than 475,000 private sector jobs have been created. Not only does Michigan have more jobs, they are good, high-paying jobs. In fact, Michigan has the fastest growth in personal income in the Midwest and the third-fastest growth nationally.

To help build on our record of success, our commitment to Michigan residents will remain strong. We realize families are still struggling in Michigan, so we’ll continue to work to help our economy grow, end wasteful government spending and protect all residents.

By listening to you, we all can continue to strengthen Michigan.

Sincerely,

JASON SHEPPARD  
State Representative, 56th District

(855) SHEP-056 • JasonSheppard@house.mi.gov • www.RepJasonSheppard.com
The state House has approved landmark legislation to help strengthen the educational development of all Michigan children in order to give them the best chance at success in life.

House Bill 4822 creates a proactive literacy system that is designed to help K-5 students become proficient in English Language Arts on their third grade assessment before entering fourth grade.

The ability to read by the end of third grade opens doors and broadens horizons more than any other academic skill. That's the emphasis of this legislation – to give children and educators the tools to develop a stronger educational foundation beyond third grade.

Michigan currently ranks 41st in fourth grade reading, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Currently, 16 states have similar policies aimed at improving third-grade reading proficiency.

The state's most recently passed school aid budget includes the most funding ever for K-12 students, as well as a per-pupil funding boost for every school district in the state. For the sixth year in a row, the Legislature and governor completed the budget months ahead of schedule to allow local school officials to plan ahead and properly establish their individual budgets. School funding for K-12 education in the GOP-led budget is at its highest level in the state's history. We are spending $14.2 billion in classrooms to give our children a quality education. We're also identifying and bolstering struggling schools to ensure a level playing field for all Michigan students.

We've also worked to reduce school debt so more funding goes directly to the classroom where it belongs. You work hard for your income, and we'll continue to work just as hard to protect it. To make government spending more effective, Republicans alleviated more than $1 billion of overall debt in the state budget this year alone and $20 billion total long-term debt over the last six years.

We want to ensure all Michigan children receive a quality education, regardless of where they live. The budget we approved provides an unprecedented investment in our kids so they have the tools needed to succeed in the future.

The state House has approved a bi-partisan bill that would expand the Good Samaritan law in Michigan.

House Republicans have focused on combatting the opioid epidemic that is sweeping through Michigan and the nation. We've ensured that first responders have medication on hand to save the lives of those who are overdosing, as well as making rehabilitator medications available to friends and family members of those who are recovering from drug abuse.

We also expanded current law so people can seek help for friends who are overdosing without facing criminal charges for doing so. Opioids are highly addictive medications that relieve pain. They include drugs like Vicodin, OxyContin, Percocet, morphine and codeine. Michigan ranks 10th nationally in per capita prescription rates of opioid pain relievers and 18th in the nation for all overdose deaths.

We made historic reforms to the teacher retirement system that is sending more funding to the classroom to directly benefit our children and grandchildren. Before 1994, schools paid a flat 5 percent of their payroll into the retirement system with the state paying the remaining costs. If our reforms weren't enacted, that figure could have grown to a whopping 27 percent of their payroll into retirement, which would have drained even more money away from the classroom. Thanks in part to our action, Michigan now leads the nation in good budgeting practices.

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The state budget, approved months ahead of schedule for the sixth year in a row, keeps overall spending well below the rate of inflation while increasing funding for our top priorities. We went line-by-line through the budget, tightened our belts and ensured that government lives within its means.

Along with spending the most ever for K-12 schools, the budget includes the most funding in history for our roads and bridges. Our economy gets even stronger when job providers and motorists are able to travel safely and efficiently. Also included in the budget are substantial increases in public safety and community health programs. We made the right choices to strengthen Michigan's most critical services.

The budget protects Michigan families by again limiting the amount that state universities can charge in tuition to a whopping 27 percent of their payroll into retirement, which would have drained even more money away from the classroom. Thanks in part to our action, Michigan now leads the nation in good budgeting practices.

House Republicans have worked hard to pay down $20 billion of long-term state debt so our children and grandchildren don't get stuck with the massive bill.

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