ACTION PLAN

The Best Way Forward
Common-Sense Leadership for the People of Michigan

2017-18 House Republican Action Plan
# The Best Way Forward

**Common-Sense Leadership for the People of Michigan**

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**2017-18 House Republican Action Plan**
Dear Michigan Residents,

With the utmost respect to the designers of our coat of arms that has graced the Michigan state flag since 1911, we’d like to offer a contemporary update: “If you seek a pleasant peninsula in recovery, look about you.”

Indeed, Michigan’s recovery from the Lost Decade is well into its seventh year, with little sign of abatement. Republican control of the executive office and both chambers of the Legislature have set the state on a sure path for expansion and sustained job growth.

For the third legislative term in a row, Michigan House Republicans are pleased to present their 2017-2018 Action Plan, *The Best Way Forward: Common-Sense Leadership for the People of Michigan*. This bold and comprehensive plan provides a blueprint for governance that will guide us over the next two years.

We began publicly unveiling our action plans because we believe the people of Michigan deserve greater transparency from their state elected officials. Everyone wants us to find ways to open the government and make it more accessible to people. We invite you to take time to review our plan, and more importantly, hold us accountable to it.

Many of the items, like reducing the income tax, ending unsustainable public employee legacy costs, expanding options for job training and education or making car insurance affordable, have eluded lawmakers for far too long.

House Republicans are eager to tackle these seemingly insurmountable barriers in the months ahead. As always, we welcome your feedback as we find the best way forward for the people of Michigan.

Sincerely,

Tom Leonard
Speaker of the House

Representative Tim Kelly
Chair, Policy Development Committee
The people of Michigan want us to make the tough choices necessary to protect their future. We realize the best way forward will not always be the easiest path to take.

Although we’ve made great strides to improve life in Michigan, we understand many people are still struggling to make ends meet. That is why we won’t shy away from the tough choices; we will embrace them.

We will work to make life better in Michigan by:

**Forcing state government to live within its means**

We want a government that is more efficient, effective and accountable. That’s why, for six consecutive years, we have balanced the budget just like Michigan families have to do. We’ve also become a national leader in paying down debt. When state government tightens its belt, it means more tax dollars staying at home in the pocketbooks of the Michigan families who need it more. We’ve also completed a balanced budget ahead of schedule, giving ample time to schools and governments preparing for the new fiscal year. We must continue to control government spending going forward and ensure taxpayer money is spent responsibly. We are committed to thoroughly reviewing and evaluating all department budgets through the budget process, exercising legislative oversight to keep departments in line, and continuing to produce a balanced budget which best reflects the priorities of our citizens.

**Protecting people’s property rights**

Private property rights are incredibly important to the people of Michigan. Protecting property rights is a fundamental condition for all other liberties, and the government’s ability to seize private property was always meant to be only a power of last resort. We will continue to review and reform our laws to ensure fairness and accountability when government undertakes this extreme measure. Put simply, it should never be easy for the government to take someone’s private property. Strengthening these rights will continue to reinforce Michigan’s reputation as a leader in private property rights.
**Putting more money in the classroom to benefit students**

The Michigan Public School Employee Retirement System’s debt has grown so immense that it is hurting our kids. The system is only 61-percent funded and has more than $25 billion in long-term debt. Currently, 36 percent of education dollars for payroll go to cover pension liabilities. As that gigantic liability continues to grow, more and more resources are redirected out of the classroom, hurting all Michigan students.

Without continued reforms, the system will drain valuable resources out of the classroom. That means fewer teachers and bigger classes, even though government funding for schools keeps going up and up. We are committed to looking for a solution to curb the growing debt and end the long-term financial drain taking money away from students, where it belongs.

**Reducing auto insurance rates**

Michigan is one of 12 states that currently operate under a “no-fault” system of automobile insurance. Under this system, Michigan drivers pay some of the highest auto insurance rates in the country. A number of factors contribute to these high costs, including uninsured drivers, out-of-state residents who don’t pay into the system, increased auto insurance fraud, and the skyrocketing costs of health care. Our no-fault system must be reassessed with an eye toward reducing costs. People deserve a more efficient and fair auto insurance system, and we will work to protect drivers while making auto insurance rates more affordable.

“Honestly, is there anyone in Michigan who’s happy with the cost of their auto insurance? Everyone agrees that something needs to be done to reduce costs. Many senior citizens are living on fixed incomes and can’t afford increases on premiums every year. My car represents my independence, and Lansing needs to do something to give all drivers some relief.”

Josephine Schwan
PARTNERING WITH LOCAL COMMUNITIES

We make Michigan a better place to live and work by strengthening our local communities. We’ve helped cities, townships and villages by eliminating a patchwork of local regulations that hinder job creation, and are eager to build even stronger communities.

During the 2017-18 legislative session, we will continue to provide local communities with the tools and resources they need to make their neighborhoods the best places to live, work and raise a family.

We will work together to help build an even better Michigan by:

Helping our local communities

People deserve healthier, safer neighborhoods and communities, but our local governments face many obstacles. Many are stuck with increasing labor costs and unmanageable retirement costs, as well as outdated tax and spending plans that do not reflect the modern economy. While many communities have taken steps to reduce the growth of pension and health-care liabilities, overall costs for retiree pensions and health care continue to increase at alarming rates. Local governments are currently estimated to have more than $14 billion in debt, which includes $10.1 billion for retiree health care and $4 billion for pensions. Something has to change before our local communities fall permanently behind and start going bankrupt.

We are committed to finding solutions that assist local communities while also working to provide more stability and increased flexibility. Fixing growing liabilities also means that any reforms made must balance the interests and needs of retirees, current employees and future employees by ensuring access to quality health care, a good-paying job and retirement benefits. We look forward to a continued discussion on this important topic and finding a long-term solution that helps protect both our local communities and their valuable employees.
Fixing our roads and bridges

Michigan drivers need better roads and stronger bridges, but outdated laws mean that our government is not making the most efficient use of hard-earned taxpayer dollars. We will look for additional ways to ensure that these dollars are put to their best use and review current spending plans to ensure local road builders have the flexibility they need to meet their community’s needs. We will also review our current road building regulations and contracting requirements to ensure our state and local road builders are working together to fund our roads and bridges at a lower cost.
Less government means more freedom for everyone. That’s why we have worked to cut job-killing regulations and will work to reduce the income tax for hard-working families.

We will find additional ways to lower the cost of living for families and end over-regulation so families can prosper. Whether we’re talking about people’s lives or livelihoods, the best way forward is always the path to less government.

We will give people more freedom by:

Helping workers keep more of what they earn

The people of Michigan work hard for their income, and we will work just as hard to protect it. Over the past six years, House Republicans have passed many reforms to create a more balanced tax system for people and job providers. While there has been substantial improvement, the numbers show that Michigan’s residents and businesses still dedicate a significant amount of their income to paying taxes. A simple and fair tax code is key to signaling that Michigan is a welcoming place for workers and job providers alike. Therefore, further action is necessary to lower the state’s tax burden and improve the lives of every worker in Michigan, especially those living paycheck to paycheck.

We will consider proposals to improve the current tax system by focusing on the areas of reducing personal income taxes and examining and simplifying the tax code. We also want to protect taxpayers from government bureaucrats who can sometimes make the process of paying taxes more painful than the payment itself. Because taxes are still one of the largest financial burdens for individuals and businesses in Michigan, tax reform will be one of our top priorities.

Strengthening our economy and creating better-paying jobs

Michigan’s economy continues to improve, but we also realize many families are still struggling. That’s why we must do more to attract new job providers to our state and support their growth. We will review new economic proposals, government incentives and financing options to find the best plan for both Michigan taxpayers and our local small businesses.

To provide people with more opportunities, we will support a broad-based economic environment that is friendly to job creation and business growth, no matter the size of the business. We are also going to protect the taxpayers’ investment by making sure the funds used by the Michigan Economic Development Corporation are transparent to the public, directed toward long-term viability, help small businesses and are not wasted on picking winners and losers. In doing so, we will continue to make Michigan an even more attractive place to live and work for everyone.
Strengthening agriculture and protecting natural resources

Agriculture is the second largest part of our state’s economy, and Michigan has the second-most diverse agriculture industry in the nation. We are committed to an environment that fosters growth and ensures a stable future for all farmers. We will continue to support the Food & Agriculture Strategic Growth Initiative, which is a competitive grant process aimed at maximizing industry expansion to boost economic growth, create jobs and uncover new opportunities for the state’s overall prosperity. We will also protect personal property rights and private land uses while preventing the over-regulation that can put small, family farms out of business. We must ensure unnecessary roadblocks do not impede the work of our robust farming industry. There is simply too much at stake for our friends and neighbors.

Preserving our state’s natural resources is also necessary. Michigan’s abundant lakes, rivers, forests and natural habitats are sources of immense pride and wonderful memories that can last for decades. They are why so many people love to live in Michigan and why our state is such a highly regarded destination for tourism. We believe people should be able to hike, hunt, fish and boat without too much government interference. We will find the right balance between access to these amazing resources and their preservation for future generations. We will also work to prevent and eradicate invasive species to help safeguard our environment.

Making government honest and open

Because good government requires accountability, the Michigan Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) was established in 1976 to provide public access to most records of public bodies. The intent was to allow people to better participate in the democratic process by providing them with complete information regarding the actions of public officials and employees who serve them. Historically, the Legislature, governor and lieutenant governor have been exempt from FOIA. People deserve more transparency from their elected officials. We will remove the roadblocks to public access of government records and create a more transparent and accountable state government.

We also need to improve the transparency laws already on the books. We will explore opportunities for streamlining reports and collecting them into an easily accessible location. Citizens cannot actively participate in their government if they lack the information and resources to understand how their government operates.
Extending internet service to rural areas

As the state, country and world become more connected via the internet, a reliable, fast connection is increasingly necessary to conduct business, learn, consume entertainment, and even socialize. Many Michiganders still do not have access to broadband that offers the highest speeds, and thousands do not have access to any broadband at all. Given the importance of a fast and reliable internet connection in today’s world, areas that do not have access to high-speed broadband are at a significant disadvantage when it comes to keeping and attracting jobs and residents. We will continue to explore this important issue to ensure reliable and fast internet access is available to everyone.

Cutting government regulations to help improve people’s lives

Burdensome regulations unjustifiably complicate people’s everyday lives and deter businesses from creating new jobs. The multiple levels of government rules, policies, bulletins, and administrative practices frequently lead to confusion, unnecessary expenses, and inefficiencies. In years past, the Legislature’s diminished oversight role in the rulemaking process has contributed to improper administrative rules and overzealous state employees who are not directly accountable to the people they regulate. Other forms of red tape such as excessive fees and duplicative permit requirements prevent job expansion and keep wages low. Unnecessary and outdated licensure requirements stifle competition, hurt Michigan workers and ultimately increase prices for consumers.

We are committed to reducing these burdens through streamlining state permitting processes, limiting extensive and new licensing requirements, and updating the state rulemaking process to increase legislative oversight. Creating a simple, fair and efficient regulatory system will bolster Michigan’s comeback economy, and is the best way forward for the state to serve as a partner, rather than hindrance, to its people.
Investing in our infrastructure and energy needs

With the passage of the recent roads package, Michigan has taken significant steps to improve the basic foundation of our transportation system. But we will not be complacent. As Michigan’s economy continues to improve, it is not only imperative that we have good roads, but also strong systems to accommodate growing demands on our water systems, utilities and the rest of our infrastructure framework.

House Republicans have taken the lead on fixing water infrastructure failures in Michigan. But the people of this state deserve better than a cleanup crew; they deserve smarter planning that can build better systems before disaster strikes.

We will study and improve existing systems and regulations, and make smart, targeted investments that will make our state a safe and enjoyable place to live, work and raise a family. This includes a focus on the stable and affordable delivery of energy to every citizen and business, especially those in our Upper Peninsula. It also includes access to quality drinking water. Every citizen in Michigan deserves to live and travel across our state without interruption of our most basic needs.

Protecting religious freedoms

This country was founded on religious liberty. In fact, the very first right recognized in our Constitution’s Bill of Rights is that of religious freedom. As stated by the Michigan Supreme Court, our history forcefully attests “the Founding Fathers envisioned the protection of the free exercise of religion as an affirmative duty of the government mandated by the inherent nature of religious liberty, not one of mere ‘toleration’ by government.”

Regrettably, threats to religious liberties have increased with the size of the administrative state. House Republicans will remain vigilant and work diligently to protect these fundamental rights against undue government interference.

Defending Second Amendment rights

The Second Amendment protects the right of the people to bear arms for the defense of life and liberty. This fundamental right is plainly and forcefully enshrined in both the U.S. and Michigan constitutions. Yet this most basic right is constantly under attack by those who would like to limit the ability of law-abiding citizens to protect themselves, their families and their property. We will continue to protect all law-abiding gun owners from unfair restrictions on their right to bear arms, while also protecting the safety of Michigan residents.
VALUING OUR CULTURE OF LIFE

Our culture and people suffer greatly when we devalue human life at any stage. Valuing life means valuing children, families and senior citizens, and recognizing the vital need to protect people’s health and well-being. We have worked to help the mentally ill and ensure young children find adoptive homes, but our work is not complete.

We will place an even greater value on all life by:

Lifting up the mentally ill and their families

We’re committed to evaluating our existing behavioral health system to provide better care to people. This includes assessing our local delivery of services to individuals with mental wellness challenges, developmental disabilities and substance abuse disorders. Further, we need to review alternative options for those who find themselves in the criminal justice system, including diversion courts and treatment options for both those incarcerated and those on parole.

We must focus on ensuring our investment in behavioral health is targeted, meets certain minimum standards and provides people with the care and job training needed to live independent, self-determined lives. Evaluating our existing structures and investing in their successes will enhance our ability to best care for citizens.

Helping people from falling victim to opioids

The opioid epidemic continues to plague our state and nation. Prescription drug abuse has become one of the fastest-growing public health concerns. With the ever-increasing number and strength of opiates on the market, the likelihood of a person accidentally overdosing or abusing products continues to rise. The Legislature recently took the first steps to protect individuals suffering from these new threats, but more can be done.

Early intervention, training for school and law enforcement personnel, and improving the state’s Automated Prescription System are good ways to combat opioid abuse before it’s too late. Further, while opioid use and abuse has been on the rise, the state and country have seen a related increase in illicit drug use. In light of this, we will assess the state of illegal drug use in our state, and review current substance abuse disorder services. We are committed to pursuing these necessary initiatives to ensure that people are safe.

“Mentally ill prisoners have a whole set of different challenges when it comes to becoming productive members of society. So much can be gained if we improve the way mental health services are delivered, especially before people have contact with the legal system. We need to give a voice to a vulnerable population that, frankly, has lacked necessary support.”

Ionia County Sheriff Dale Miller
Preserving life

The gift of life is our most precious asset and our most basic right. From the moment of conception, every life should be celebrated, supported, cherished and preserved. This is key to a just society. We are ready to stand up for the sanctity of life with respect and care from beginning to end.

We’ll guard against policies that chip away at the protections afforded to our unborn children. Policies should instead focus on the compassionate support and encouragement of parents in the midst of tough decisions, so they know their decisions to continue with pregnancy are supported and respected. We should maintain a culture in which people living with disabilities and the elderly are valued and cared for through all the stages of their lives. We remain committed to strong protections for our state’s most vulnerable residents, along with quality support services to assist pregnant women and expectant fathers.

Protecting seniors, children and families

Our society is only as strong as our most vulnerable population. Seniors, dependent adults and children deserve to live in a place where they feel safe, are encouraged to thrive, and are valued in their homes and communities. When the state steps in to regulate and supervise services for these valued citizens, we must make sure the system actually does its job assisting and protecting them. Businesses and institutions working with the state to provide services also must be able to operate in a system that is consistent and fair in its regulation. Regulated entities such as homes for the aged, adult foster care, and day care centers should be held to the proper standards of care, but they must also be encouraged to grow and open new facilities to help more people. We are committed to making sure all of our seniors, children and vulnerable citizens are cared for with the utmost dignity and respect.
Increasing and preserving access to quality health care

The delivery of health care services today is marked by ever-evolving technology, varying education and training requirements, and the constant restructuring of organized providers. Throughout these changes, Michigan must focus on developing and implementing the newest and best practices in delivery of health-care services while improving access to affordable health care for people. We must adopt the most current standards, as well as regulations that are less restrictive but more effective, all with an aim toward ensuring patient safety and well-being. We will explore opportunities to streamline regulations and licensing practices to expand the ability of health-care providers and licensees to serve patients and make quality care more accessible for everyone.

The future of the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare) remains unsettled, though it is clear that many parts will either be repealed or left to the states to decide or administer. Undoubtedly, both traditional Medicaid and the Healthy Michigan program could see alterations. Any changes to the delivery of funding to the state or to eligibility would have a tremendous impact on Michigan’s budget and residents. Adding to these potential changes at the federal level, challenges remain for working family households to obtain affordable health care coverage. Health care for Michigan residents should be just as obtainable for our working citizens as it is for our vulnerable population. We’ll make adjustments as needed or required, and they will be reflective of the overall needs of our state and its people.

Honoring Michigan veterans

Michigan veterans deserve to live in a welcoming state that supports and improves their quality of life. There are a variety of benefits made available to veterans on both the federal and state level, but too many veterans are not taking advantage of the benefits they so richly deserve.

We remain committed to bridging all gaps that are contributing to the lack of participation in the resources available to them. Support for our veterans comes in many forms, including occupational training and new career opportunities. For example, several states have adopted programs to introduce, recruit and train veterans in the skills required to operate sustainable farming operations. We will explore similar opportunities and more through state and federal resources to educate and train our veterans for new opportunities and careers.
We are only as good as our next generation. That is why it’s so important to give all children the best chance at success in life, no matter what community or region they may call home.

We will consider bold ideas to improve education for all children while making sure vocational and technical education programs are stronger to prepare young people for the careers of today and tomorrow.

We will continue to make education a priority by:

**Expanding career opportunities in the skilled trades**

The skilled-trades job sector is growing at a faster rate than many other areas of employment, placing pressure on businesses seeking a professionally trained workforce which is in short supply. At the same time, we have many displaced workers who want new skills and access to new opportunities. In response, the state has taken the initiative to enhance preparatory programs and increase access to training. Through on-the-job training and early/middle college programs, businesses have been able to cultivate and retain a skilled work force in an attempt to meet their increasing demand.

While much progress has been achieved, further efforts are needed to assist the skilled labor industry and strengthen this sector of the job market. Michigan employers have expressed concern regarding the undersized pool of talent from which they are seeking to hire workers who have the skills necessary to perform the available jobs. We also need a better plan for retaining and developing workers, as well as the need to integrate new technologies. That is why the House is committed to exploring both proven and new solutions. We will support and expand the opportunities for high school students and post-high school graduates to obtain the training necessary to fill and keep these jobs. We will also work with the business community to look for private-public partnership opportunities to address this talent deficit. By better matching supply and demand in the workforce, Michigan’s economy will improve, and so will the lives of thousands of workers and their families.

“We’ve had strong growth at Fullerton Tool for the last several years, but we’ve had challenges finding a skilled work force to fill the new jobs that have been created. It’s important for public schools to properly prepare students for all the jobs in demand today and in the future, including the skilled trades.”

Patrick Curry
Fullerton Tool, Saginaw
Giving students and parents more educational freedom

Parents should have every opportunity to send their child to a school that best fits their child’s needs. This must include many options, such as charter public schools, traditional public schools, private schools, online schools, and home schools. There is no better measure of a child’s potential for success in school than a parent actively engaged in his or her child’s education. We will support proposals to fund students instead of institutions, and give parents more control over their child’s education. Opportunities such as vouchers or education savings accounts to empower students and parents should remain at the center of our discussion. The status quo and special interests will not support this decision, but Michigan parents and students deserve every option and every chance at success. We will continue that important discussion and pursue policies based on the best interests of the child, rather than the best interests of bureaucrats and failing systems.

Investing in our next generation

Michigan’s students deserve a first-class education system that prepares them for the future and can respond to the changing dynamics of new technology and learning methods. To that end, we have championed initiatives to improve early literacy and update teacher certification.

We must now address a myriad of other challenges, including adapting to new technologies and both the positive and negative effects of social media. Schools must have the ability to hire qualified teachers with unique attributes that will contribute to the success of every child in the classroom. Funding for our students should be fair, no matter where they live in the state and schools should be able to teach children free from burdens such as excessive testing and government reporting. When it comes to setting standards, parents and local educational leaders know best, not bureaucrats in Washington, D.C. We will continue to champion efforts to put more state funding in our classrooms, instead of it being spent on overhead and paperwork, so teachers and students have the necessary resources to succeed. We remain committed to supporting the best educational opportunity for every child in every type of educational setting in Michigan.
We’d like to thank the following Policy Development Committee members for their work on the 2017-18 Action Plan:

Rep. Tim Kelly, Chair
Rep. Sue Allor
Rep. Tommy Brann
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