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## Michigan refuses to share food stamp data with feds — and it could cost taxpayers \$300 million

*USDA slams Michigan for protecting 'criminals over taxpayers' in SNAP dispute*

BY SCOTT MCCLALLEN  
May 26, 2026

If the state of Michigan shared data from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program with the federal government, it could save state taxpayers around \$300 million come fiscal year 2028.

But it won't share data or explain why.

Twenty-eight states and the territory of Guam are sharing SNAP data with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the federal agency says it has already found about \$3 billion worth of fraud and abuse across the states that submitted data.

The Department of Agriculture's SNAP integrity team analyzes data provided by states and scrubs all available information to end indiscriminate welfare fraud. Michigan's problem is twofold: The state struggles to disburse benefits accurately, and criminals

loot the program yearly. In 2025, the state reported \$7.7 million of SNAP fraud, down from \$14 million in 2024.

From 2023 to 2024, SNAP fraud in Michigan jumped by nearly 400%. The state's high payment error rate of 9.53% could cost taxpayers as much as \$300 million starting in fiscal year 2028, but the state is not participating in the federal effort to fix those problems.

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services did not respond to a request for comment.

The USDA slammed Michigan and 21 other states including California, New York, and Minnesota, for not sharing SNAP data.

"They choose to protect illegals, criminals, and bad actors over the American taxpayer," a USDA spokesperson told Michigan Capitol Confidential in an email. "Under Secretary [Brooke] Rollins' leadership, USDA remains committed to

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Photo by MCPP

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Continued from **SNAP data**, Page 1

ensuring USDA upholds its nutrition programs with the highest levels of integrity, while protecting both participants and the American taxpayer.”

The 29 states that have handed over their data are Alabama, Alaska, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, West Virginia, and Wyoming.

The SNAP program costs about \$100 billion annually and serves roughly 41 million people nationwide.

CapCon has chronicled the saga of criminals stealing SNAP benefits from vulnerable residents over several years.

In 2023, three Detroiters allegedly stole \$4 million in SNAP benefits, and this year, a Detroit couple were charged with stealing another \$1.1 million in benefits.

About 1.4 million people in Michigan rely on SNAP. The names are confidential, but the ages aren't.

Criminals stealing benefits have preyed on Michiganders of all ages, according to more than 500 pages of police reports of SNAP fraud that CapCon obtained. Of the state's roughly 1.4 million people who rely on the SNAP program, about 481,170 are ages 21 and over, according to a document that Michigan Capitol Confidential obtained through a records request.

About 297,670 people ages 21-41 are on SNAP, while 237,834 are ages 42-61. The remaining 187,800 people range in age from 62 to older than 104.

About 15 people born before 1923 receive benefits. “By sharing data, Michigan can protect those most in need, get the criminals out, and save its hardworking taxpayers millions of dollars,” the Department of Agriculture said. ■

## Number of public-school employees reaches 18-year high

*Michigan's student population plummets, number of employees soars nearly 10%*

BY MICHIGAN CAPITOL CONFIDENTIAL STAFF  
*April 1, 2026*

Michigan K-12 public schools have more employees now than at any point in the last 18 years, according to the state's Center for Educational Performance and Information. The number of students decreased by more than 180,000 over that period. The spike in headcount was largely a byproduct of a hiring spree during Gov. Whitmer's COVID-era lockdowns.

Public schools employed 381,571 people in the 2024-25 school year, according to MI School Data, operated by the state of Michigan. By comparison, Michigan public schools had 338,216 employees in the 2007-08 year, the earliest year for which online records are available. The extra 33,355 employees represents an increase of nearly 10%.

Public schools shed more than 180,000 students during that same time, but taxpayers got no relief from the reduced workload as the state hired up during its reaction to COVID-19.

Whitmer announced in December 2021 that Michigan would spend \$240 million in state revenue for schools to hire another 560 psychologists, social workers, counselors and nurses to address student mental health concerns during pandemic-era school closures.

Mental health is not the only driver of costs, however. Michigan also had 117,002 public school teachers in 2024-25. That's the highest number of teachers since 2007-08.

Some districts have increased their hiring while others now have fewer teachers. The East Lansing School District grew from 422 employees in 2018-19 to 733 in

2024-25. Its teaching staff increased from 223 in 2018-19 to 354 in 2024-25. Enrollment during those six years also went up, going from 3,607 students to 3,728.

Livonia Public Schools, however, has seen an enrollment decline from 14,184 in 2018-19 to 13,153. Its workforce increased from 2,617 in 2018-19 to 2,692 in 2024-25. The number of teachers jumped from 953 to 1,008 over those six years.

The state's largest school district, the Detroit Public Schools Community District, saw a slight decrease in enrollment and a slight increase in employment. Detroit had 7,649 employees in 2018-19 and 7,891 in 2024-25. Enrollment, however, dropped by 1,138 students to 49,038 in 2024-25.

The school system used money from a 2020 settlement with the state to hire more employees. Michigan lawmakers approved a \$94 million payment as part of a settlement in a right-to-learn lawsuit filed against the state. Detroit school officials used that money to hire more teachers' aides as well as more teachers.

K-12 schools were able to hire more teachers because school funding increased dramatically.

The sum of state and federal funding for K-12 schools jumped from \$14.8 billion in 2018-19 to \$21.2 billion in 2025-26, according to the Senate Fiscal Agency. When adjusted for changes in the Consumer Price Index, the amount for 2018-19 is \$19.2 billion.

The Michigan Department of Education and the Michigan Education Association did not respond to requests for comment. ■

# Court of Claims tells baseball pork project, ‘Yer out!’

*Preliminary injunction freezes further payments until court reaches final decision*



BY JAMIE A. HOPE  
May 18, 2026

Big changes could come to the state government in the wake of a ruling by the Michigan Court of Claims temporarily blocking some legislative earmarks included in the state.

The Court of Claims ruled May 12 in favor of the Mackinac Center Legal Foundation's request for a preliminary injunction that could prevent legislators from approving district spending requests unless they meet a constitutionally required threshold of a two-thirds yes vote in each chamber.

"The preliminary injunction stops further payments from the challenged grant funding until the court reaches a final decision on the merits of the case," a press

release issued by the Mackinac Center read.

The Mackinac Center filed a lawsuit against the Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity in May 2025, targeting projects awarded to select private organizations at the request of individual legislators.

The lawsuit cited a \$1.5 million grant for Jimmy John's Field in Utica and \$1 million for Jackson Field in Lansing. It is unclear how much of the grant money has been dispersed to date.

The court said that some types of grants are not counted as local awards and are thus not subject to the two-thirds requirement.

Exempt grants include allocations for highways that would offer a statewide benefit, as well as major cultural institutions. The ruling did not, however,

offer a clear definition of those institutions.

At issue is a clause in the state's constitution which requires a two-thirds supermajority vote of the Legislature before taxpayer money can be appropriated to private entities.

"This ruling is a major victory for Michigan taxpayers and the rule of law," said Patrick Wright, vice president for legal affairs at the Mackinac Center Legal Foundation.

The Michigan Constitution is clear, Wright said. Lawmakers cannot funnel taxpayer dollars to favored projects and private interests without meeting the constitutional supermajority requirement.

"The court's decision prevents additional unconstitutional spending while this case proceeds," Wright added.

Michigan Capitol Confidential has published many articles about select earmarks, also known as community enhancement grants. Recipients have included a curling center, cricket field, auto shows and union programs, a ballet, and the arts.

"The earmark process often isn't transparent," James Hohman, director of fiscal policy at the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, wrote in 2024.

If it is in the public's interest to award a grant, Hohman told CapCon in an email, legislators should set up a grant program, establish criteria and select the best projects.

Handing out money to projects selected by legislators, Hohman added, ensures that the state is not spending money wisely. ■

# Grand Rapids stripped comptroller's authority after he questioned spending, lawsuit says

*Court denies early motion in Grand Rapids comptroller lawsuit*

BY SCOTT MCCLALLEN

March 23, 2026

The Grand Rapids city comptroller, who alleges that various other officials violated the city charter by transferring some of his duties, staffers and budget to other offices, suffered a setback last month in his lawsuit against the city commission, manager and chief financial officer.

Judge George Jay Quist of the 17th Circuit Court of Kent County ruled against comptroller Max Frantz, who asked the court to enjoin employees outside his office from performing duties previously housed in his office. Quist also denied Frantz's request that the court order Grand Rapids to pay his legal expenses.

Frantz, in a lawsuit filed in December 2025, said that officials violated the city charter, the rough equivalent of the city's constitution, by transferring several responsibilities from his office to the city manager and others in the executive branch. The comptroller, a part-time position, is elected independently to a four-year term, and the charter gives specific responsibilities to the office, Frantz said. The city manager and attorney started to downsize his office after he had lodged several complaints about city employees, including the city manager and chief financial officer.

Frantz filed a complaint with the Michigan State Police in August 2024, according to his lawsuit, saying that City Manager Mark Washington had misused city funds. Washington, Frantz said, used city funds to pay a \$323 restaurant bill at Bistro Bella Vita and tried to get the city to pay an \$822 restaurant bill on behalf of an organization of which he was a board member. The local prosecutor declined to press charges. But Frantz approached the state police again in November 2024, according to the lawsuit, saying that Chief Financial Officer Molly Clarin and others may have violated the Open Meetings Act.

The next month, Frantz said, the city manager and attorney started a move to transfer some of the comptroller's responsibilities to the city manager's subordinates. The transfer involved 13 employees and \$1.3 million in funding.

The city rejects the accusations. It cites the Feb. 27 ruling from Quist that denied Frantz's motions for a preliminary injunction and a specially appointed counsel.

Quist wrote in part: "While the Court respects Plaintiff (Frantz's) arguments regarding the alleged violations, he has failed to meet his burden of proving success on the merits. It is too early in the case for the Court to make an informed decision regarding whether Defendants (Washington, Clarin and commissioners) violated the Charter, the (Home Rule City Act), and/or the (Uniform Budgeting and Accounting Act). Because Plaintiff has the burden of proof, the Court finds this factor is neutral



Photo by Shutterstock

and favors denying the preliminary injunction." A city spokesperson told Michigan Capitol Confidential in an email that the 2024 reorganization optimized the city's financial structure and was "rooted in good governance."

"As stated in a prior media release, in 2024, the city manager, in consultation with the city treasurer, human resources director, and city attorney, determined that certain positions — based on their functions — would more appropriately report to the City's chief financial officer or the city treasurer," Steven J. Guitar, media relations manager, wrote.

"As evidenced by the comptroller's recently presented annual comprehensive financial report," Guitar continued, "the City fully embraces the comptroller's independent review and reporting of our public finances."

The Grand Rapids City Commission appoints the city manager to serve as the chief executive officer for the city. Meanwhile, Frantz is an elected official whose term stretches through 2026. Commissioners appointed Frantz as comptroller in December 2019 after the previous comptroller resigned. He won a four-year term when he ran unopposed in 2022.

"My concern is absolutely misuse of authority," Frantz told CapCon in a phone interview. "These internal controls were set up for a reason. Whether it's something one week from now, six months from now, or five years from now, the groundwork has been laid to create that type of environment to allow for misuse of authority by concentrating all of these powers under one individual or office, which our charter doesn't authorize."

The city charter creates three divisions to manage finances. The treasurer collects city money, the city manager builds the budget, and the comptroller issues payments of funds and provides accounting to the public.

Frantz said that the change consolidates power under the city manager, who is appointed, not elected. But the charter authorizes certain duties to elected officials, which doesn't include Washington's office, he said.

"This is how the system is set up by design," Frantz said. "We've had checks and balances in our government that really serve to benefit the public. The issue is that the city manager with this fiscal services department created financial officers reporting to the city manager, which have usurped the duties of the comptroller's office," Frantz added.

Grand Rapidians have rejected structural changes in 1969, 1971, and 2012, Frantz wrote in the lawsuit.

Consolidating spending and auditing functions in the same department is a clear internal conflict of interest, Nicholas Gumina, an attorney at Eardley Law offices that represents Frantz, told CapCon in a phone interview.

"The lawsuit aims to restore the separation of powers that's provided for under the city charter," Gumina said. "The separation of powers, at its core, is important because it creates a separate financial oversight that is not supposed to be controlled by either the executive or legislative branches of the city government." ■



Photo by Shutterstock

## Michigan spent \$16.7M on ad blitz in fiscal year 2025

*State drops millions on streaming ads to lure tourists*

BY SCOTT MCCLALLEN

April 9, 2026

The state of Michigan spent \$16.7 million on its Pure Michigan tourism campaign between fall 2024 and summer 2025, according to a document Michigan Capitol Confidential obtained through a records request.

The advertising campaign aims to bring people to Michigan to live, work, and visit. Lawmakers appropriated the funds from the annual state budget.

The campaign spent \$194,700 in fall 2024 on a regional and national winter brand campaign and on online search engine advertising.

It spent more than \$2 million from January 2025 through March. The agency spent \$1.3 million advertising on Amazon Prime Video, Hulu, Netflix, and others that target regional and national areas, Nick Nerbonne, the media and digital director of Travel Michigan of the Michigan Economic Development Corp., told CapCon in an email.

It spent \$481,072 on a national summer brand campaign, \$175,000 on a winter brand campaign, and \$87,600 on paid search.

The economic development agency ramped up spending in the spring and summer of 2025. It spent \$7.8 million from April 2025 through June 2025. That included \$4 million on

Amazon Connected TV, \$1.4 million on a summer brand campaign, \$1.3 million on national cable, and \$771,602 on print advertising. The agency targeted a handful of cities with advertising. It spent \$37,160 for residents of Atlanta, \$37,122 on Chicago, and \$26,432 on Nashville.

Summer 2025 Pure Michigan spending totaled \$6.5 million. That includes \$2.4 million on a national fall brand campaign, \$2.2 million on Amazon Connected TV, \$684,931 on national cable, \$481,072 on a summer brand campaign, and \$233,900 on U.S. paid search.

The spending campaign targeted three cities with advertising: \$407,122 for Chicago, \$37,160 for Atlanta and \$26,432 for Nashville.

Since 2006, Michigan has spent more than \$261 million on advertising that urges people to visit Michigan.

The fiscal year 2025 ads were seen in Alpena, Detroit, Flint, Grand Rapids, Lansing, Marquette and Traverse City. The “Keep It Fresh” campaign highlighted water activities, family travel and other activities. Streaming services including Netflix, Amazon, Peacock, Hulu, and Disney+ hosted advertising that showed Michigan landscapes.

The spring and summer campaign reached into other markets, including Albany, Austin, Baton Rouge, Boston, Miami, Orlando, and Phoenix.

Marketing coverage included major publications such as The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times, Chicago Magazine, Forbes and CNN.

The campaign boosted website visits to 9.5 million from October 2024 through September 2025, according to the document.

In 2024, the MEDC claims that the Pure Michigan campaign attracted 789,000 visits.

In Chicago, the Michigan Economic Development Corp. advertised via wrapped double-decker buses and rideshare cars.

The MEDC claims that the Pure Michigan program brings a return on investment but keeps the methodology and data used to calculate that number a secret, Michael LaFaive, senior director of the Morey Fiscal Policy Initiative at the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, told CapCon in an email.

“Inflation is a hot topic these days, but the state has been inflating its claims of Pure Michigan success since it first started running tourism promotion advertisements,” LaFaive wrote. “They claim that their 2024 advertising campaign returned \$12.22 to every \$1 spent. This is up from \$2.11 in 2006, despite declines in promotion spending overall.” ■

## McMorrow budget figures don't add up

*State senator understates growth in state government*



Photo by MCP

BY SCOTT MCCLALLEN  
April 2, 2026

Sen. Mallory McMorrow overstated Michigan's population growth and understated the growth of state tax collections in a March 9 MIRS News interview.

"Adjusted for inflation, the state of Michigan is operating with the same revenue we had in 1968 despite gaining more than 3 million people from then until today," said McMorrow, who will run for a United States Senate seat this fall.

The state's revenue and population numbers do not align with the senator's claims, James Hohman, a fiscal policy expert at the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, told Michigan Capitol Confidential.

Michigan's population increased from 8.7 million in 1968 to 10.1 million in 2025, an increase of 1.4 million, not 3 million.

McMorrow also said that state revenue has been flat since 1968. The record doesn't support that claim, Hohman said. State revenue was \$2 billion in the 1967-68 fiscal year. If the state government revenue trend were flat, state revenue, adjusted for inflation, would be \$18.9

billion. Instead, it was \$48.9 billion in 2024-25, an increase of 2330%.

This means the state spent \$2,178 per person in 1967-68 but \$4,832 in 2024-25, for a 122% increase.

McMorrow did not respond to a request for comment.

"We saw a presentation in state Senate Appropriations that shows that our revenues simply are not keeping up," McMorrow told MIRS. "However, the tax burden has shifted off of corporations and on to middle-income taxpayers. So I hear residents saying, 'I feel like I'm paying a lot. I'm not getting anything for it,' and we need a fairer tax structure that supports the revenue that we need to ensure we can appropriately fund our schools, our roads, our infrastructure and, especially right now, Medicaid."

Other states have recently increased their tax rates. Washington recently passed a 9.9% income tax, effective in 2028, on incomes over \$1 million. Massachusetts enacted a 4% percent surcharge on incomes over \$1 million annually.

A similar tax proposal failed to garner enough signatures to reach the 2026 ballot in Michigan. ■

## Overpayments in state food program spike 1,852% in one year

*No explanation for nearly 20-fold increase from 2023 to 2024, while program participation shrank*

BY SCOTT MCCLALLEN  
March 6, 2026

A state health program that has served fewer residents in recent years saw a nearly 20-fold increase in overpayments from 2023 to 2024, according to records obtained by Michigan Capitol Confidential.

The Michigan Combined Application Project, or MiCAP, helps get food benefits to individuals who receive Supplemental Security Income payments from the Social Security Administration. It paid 15,059 residents more than \$45 million in fiscal year 2022, but it also overpaid by nearly \$87,000. Documents CapCon received through a records request show a spike in overpayments over the following two years.

- Fiscal year 2022: 15,059 recipients were paid \$45,685,525. There were 456 overpayments totaling \$86,980.
- Fiscal year 2023: 14,410 recipients were paid \$38,878,154. There were 440 overpayments totaling \$123,652.
- Fiscal year 2024: 13,585 recipients who were paid \$29,015,443. There were 8,588 overpayments totaling \$441,083.
- Fiscal year 2025: 12,386 recipients who were paid \$27,487,237. There were 545 overpayments totaling \$390,137.

The jump in MiCAP overpayments from fiscal year 2023 to 2024 — 440 to 8,588 — amounts to a 1,852% increase. In dollar terms, the overpayment spike — from \$123,980 to \$441,083 — comes to a 256% increase. Participation in MiCAP is limited to individuals whose only income comes from SSI, who are at least 18 years old, reside in Michigan, are

not institutionalized, and don't buy and prepare food with others.

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services says the program helps residents buy more groceries. It also, the department says, reduces the paperwork beneficiaries must complete by combining interviews with the federal Social Security Administration and state officials.

Michigan Capitol Confidential received information about MiCAP payments through a public records request filed Aug. 19, 2025.

The state health department did not respond to a request for comment on the apparent anomaly in overpayments. It employs around 14,000 people.

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's newest budget proposal calls for \$800 million in new taxes, with much of that going to fund the state health department. Whitmer wants \$780.4 million in new or increased taxes on gambling, tobacco, vapes and non-tobacco nicotine products for Medicaid funding. She has targeted another \$91.9 million to support changes to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

Michigan faces higher costs in SNAP and Medicaid because it struggles to disburse benefits accurately. In one case, a state employee allegedly approved and denied benefit requests without interviewing residents.

Criminals stole at least \$14 million through Michigan's SNAP program in 2024, CapCon has reported. The health department plans to maintain its focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion objectives through 2030, according to documents obtained through a records request. ■

# Lawmakers, advocates push housing reform to address high costs and shortages

*Panelists say that zoning laws, local requirements drive up housing costs*



Photo by MCPP

BY JAMIE A. HOPE  
April 7, 2026

Housing has become so expensive, a Michigan legislator said recently, that prospective homebuyers hope for a recession, anticipating it would bring down prices. That glum prospect, along with ideas for legislative solutions, was the subject of a March 11 roundtable discussion on housing, hosted by the Mackinac Center for Public Policy.

"When I go online and read the threads, I see young people literally praying for a market crash, praying for us to be in a literal recession so that they can purchase a home," said Rep. Kristian Grant, D-Grand Rapids.

Grant was joined at the event by Rep. Joseph Aragona, R-Clinton Township, who said that home prices have increased by more than \$100,000 in some areas of the state in the last five years. Rents in some places have doubled, he said.

The two legislators discussed a package of bills they introduced aimed at lowering housing costs and increasing supply. Grant has sponsored House bills 5401, 5529 and 5582, which address housing and zoning. Aragona is the primary sponsor of House Bill 5532.

Lauren Strickland, executive director of Abundant Housing Michigan and a panelist at the roundtable, said her organization supports legislation solutions.

Tran Calvin, a Grand Rapids filmmaker and board member of Abundant Housing Michigan, also endorsed the legislation and spoke of his time living in Manhattan. He said his rent on the Lower East Side rose from \$2,800 to \$4,000 during his time in New York City.

Michigan's current vacancy rate is 0.9%, said Calvin, who called that amount far below a healthy level of 5%.

The state lacks roughly 119,000 homes, said Calvin, who cited the Michigan

Infrastructure and Transportation Association. This shortage, he said, could hinder efforts to attract new residents.

Local governments sometimes contribute to the problem, panelists said.

The city of Walker bans accessory dwelling units, which are small secondary housing units on the same property as a primary home, Calvin said. Kentwood, also in the Grand Rapids area, requires a minimum lot size of five acres in rural residential areas.

In Southeast Michigan, Rochester Hills requires one acre for homes in its lowest-density residential zone and half an acre in the next-lowest-density zone.

Detroit, Calvin said, has effectively locked out 82% of its vacant lots from development by lot size and setback requirements.

One proposal floated in the Michigan House would prohibit local bans on accessory dwelling units. Concerns that such a change would change neighborhood

landscapes are overstated, Grant said, adding that 2% to 3% of residents would likely build these units.

In Detroit and many other old cities, many homes were built before modern zoning laws, meaning they do not meet today's requirements and could require costly upgrades. Standards have changed, and a typical 1960s-era two-bedroom home would not be permitted under current regulations in some municipalities, Calvin told the roundtable audience.

Local governments require permits for housing, and Aragona said that delays in processing permit applications make it harder to bring new housing to market.

State officials are also implicated, Aragona said. The Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy takes an average of three to four months to review a permit, said Aragona, who wants to speed up that process. ■

# Whitmer seeks more money for college program with 12% completion rate

*Governor's college tuition assistance program lacks measures of success or failure*

BY JAMIE A. HOPE  
March 11, 2026

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer requests an additional \$25 million for an education program with an 88% incompletion rate in her 2027 and 2028 Executive Budget Recommendation.

The governor signed into being Michigan Reconnect in 2021 with the goal of providing taxpayer-funded community college classes to residents 25 and older studying for an associate degree or skills certification. The program was originally budgeted at \$30 million.

“The governor’s recommendation raises total Reconnect funding to \$67 million and calls for lowering the eligibility age to 21, significantly broadening access to associate

degrees and workforce credentials for adult learners,” stated Whitmer’s budget.

In the four years since the program began, the state has not developed measures to determine if it is successful, according to a blog post by Molly Macek, education policy expert, and James Hohman, fiscal policy director at the Mackinac Center for Public Policy.

The post noted that only 11% of 123,193 participants in the program have earned credentials.

That figure later increased to 12%, according to a state-run dashboard that tracks the program.

One of the concerns over the program, according to Macek and Hohman, is that legislators do not assess whether Michigan Reconnect helps recipients in their careers.

Although colleges file annual reports

stating how many students use the program, the state does not require schools to report whether participation has led to higher-paying jobs.

Michigan Capitol Confidential asked four of the state’s largest community colleges how many students were enrolled through Michigan Reconnect and how many graduated each year since the program began.

The institutions were: Grand Rapids Community College, Lansing Community College, Wayne County Community College District, and Washtenaw Community College.

Lansing Community College, the only school that responded, had 726 students receiving Michigan Reconnect tuition assistance in 2021-22, and 756 students in 2022-23. It has 963 Michigan Reconnect

students in 2023-24.

The number of college students who graduated using the program was 39 in 2021, with another 64 in 2022. The year 2023 saw 146 participate, another 212 received benefits through the college in 2024, and 148 used the program in 2025, according to an email from Marilyn Twine, public information officer at Lansing Community College.

Twine told CapCon that the numbers do not give the full story. She said totals can be influenced by a number of factors, including part-time status of students and when the program started.

Michigan Reconnect is one element of the governor’s Sixty by 30 plan — which aims to ensure that 60% of Michigan adults hold a skill certificate or college degree by 2030. ■

# At Flint Schools, teachers are doing great – students, not so much

*Flint schools get \$33,151 per pupil but 90% of third through eighth graders aren't proficient at reading*



Photo by Shutterstock

BY MICHIGAN CAPITOL  
CONFIDENTIAL STAFF  
May 11, 2026

In 2024-25, nearly all of Flint Community Schools’ students in grades three through eight — 90% — were not proficient in English Language Arts, which is largely reading and writing.

And 96% of students in grades three through six were not proficient in math. That’s according to the district’s performance on the M-STEP, Michigan’s official standardized tests for student proficiency.

Despite this track record, the Michigan Education Association announced it had honored Flint union president Karen Christian with its Paul Blewett Friend of

Education Award on April 23. The MEA award goes to someone who “did the most to improve the lives of teachers, to further the goals of the MEA or to further the cause of public education,” according to a nominating form available on the union website.

Felicia Naimark, a Flint educator and secretary-treasurer of the United Teachers of Flint, the MEA affiliate, presented Christian with the award.

“While other districts have had their struggles, Flint is unlike many in our difficulties from the effects of the auto industry moving out of the Flint area to the water crisis, the changeover in superintendents, and the instability of our board,” Naimark said, according to an MEA account of the evening. “We are not an easy district to be president of. Karen fights every day for our staff and students.”

General Motors Corp. began shuttering its plants in 1987, nearly 40 years ago. Flint’s water crisis began 12 years ago. Christian’s tenure as union president reaches back to 2014, according to a social media post the union made.

Naimark didn’t cite inadequate funding as a reason for the district’s dismal academic performance.

The Flint district received \$33,151 for each

student in 2024-25, or \$9,284 more than the state average of \$23,867. Flint gets that extra money because 90% of its students are classified as “economically disadvantaged,” which qualifies the district for additional state and federal funds.

Flint is among the best-funded districts in the state, despite the city’s struggling community.

Flint residents had a median household income of \$37,646, as of 2024.

School employees do far better. Christian, a teacher and union president, earns \$88,546 a year at Flint Public Schools. The average annual salary of a Flint teacher in 2024-25 was \$70,825.

And Flint’s leadership doesn’t blame educators for the students’ dismal performance on state testing, at least according to staff evaluations.

Flint gave 98% of its 149 teachers the highest of three possible job ratings in 2024-25: “effective.” Three teachers (2%) were given the “developing” rating. None were rated as “needing support.”

Each of the district’s 15 administrators was given the highest “effective” rating in 2024-25.

Flint Community Schools didn’t return a message seeking comment. ■

# Troy schools pay consultants six figures to teach shuttered curriculum

*'Units of Study' phased out statewide*

BY JAMIE A. HOPE

May 21, 2026

The Troy School District paid more than \$100,000 during the 2025-26 school year to consultants who teach a curriculum the state has retired. Gov. Gretchen Whitmer signed a new literacy law in 2024 that moved Michigan away from the Units of Study curriculum. The curriculum is not on the state's approved list for an accepted literacy curriculum.

But the Troy school district signed a contract for the current academic year to pay consultants with Mossflower Reading and Writing Project \$118,400, according to documents Michigan Capitol Confidential obtained through a Freedom of Information Act request.

The state enacted the 2024 legislation in an effort to arrest declining literacy results. That change came amid a nationwide reaction against the "whole language" curriculum for literacy training developed by Lucy M. Calkins and based at Columbia University in New York. Both Calkins and her curriculum came under intense media and academic scrutiny in the early 2020s, and Columbia shut down its Teachers College Reading and Writing Project in 2023.

This is not the first time Troy hired the Mossflower consultancy.

Troy paid the organization \$173,000 in the 2023-24 academic year for literacy consulting.

"Our instructional practices and curriculum decisions are aligned with the requirements and timelines outlined in PA 146," said Kendra Montante, director of communications and strategic initiatives for the Troy School District. "Like many districts across the state, our adoption and transition process is phased to ensure fidelity, thoughtful implementation, and, most importantly, continuity of learning for our students."

The payments reflect previously established professional learning and instructional support that continued during this transition period, according to Montante.



Photo by Shutterstock

While the state has provided guidance on approved literacy tools, she said, districts must also ensure that students continue to receive consistent, high-quality instruction while new curriculum reviews, selections, and implementations are underway.

The balanced literacy method, which emphasizes visual and contextual cues, was once widely adopted, but it fell out of favor as reading scores lagged and experts raised questions about the whole-language methodology.

"Balanced literacy doesn't teach students to read," Molly Macek, director of education policy at the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, wrote in 2023. "This is because English consists of letters that create meaning when combined into words. It is a code that must be deciphered. Readers must be able to match letters to their respective

sounds and decode words before they can read and comprehend more complex texts."

After Columbia shut down the Reading and Writing Project, Calkins created the Mossflower Reading and Writing Project, which continues to promote the curriculum.

"Michigan's public schools have produced some of the worst reading scores in the nation," Michael Van Beek, director of research at the Mackinac Center, told CapCon in an email, adding that unscientific curricula contribute to this poor performance.

"The Troy School District appears to be doubling down on these failed methods," Van Beek said.

The district's level of reading proficiency at the crucial third-grade level has dropped from roughly three-quarters to two-thirds over the past

decade. Among third graders, 669 of 904 Troy students, or 74%, were proficient or advanced in English Language Arts in the 2018-19 M-STEP results. By 2024-25, only 536 of 813 third graders, or 66%, were either proficient or advanced.

Michigan's 2024 literacy law will take effect in the 2027-28 academic year.

The Troy district still promotes the curriculum on its website.

"Through units of study, Troy ELA students will be widely and explicitly immersed in books to support growth in academic language and concepts, along with support in growing social-emotional skills, empathy, community, critical lenses, growth-mindset, and more," the website reads.

The Michigan Department of Education forwarded a press release to CapCon when asked for comment. ■

# Whitmer spent \$209,604 on Germany, Italy trips

## *Gov mum on who paid for Olympics ticket*

BY SCOTT MCCLALLEN

March 30, 2026

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer spent \$209,604 on nine days of travel to Germany and Italy in February, according to documents obtained through a records request.

Whitmer stayed in Germany Feb. 11 to 15, then spent Feb. 15-20 in Italy, where she attended the Winter Olympics.

Michigan Capitol Confidential obtained the documents from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation through a records request. On average, Whitmer's entourage spent more than \$23,000 every day.

The Detroit News first reported the trip's cost but didn't release documents.

Whitmer spent \$113,317 on her Germany trip. She brought 11 people. Five were from the Michigan State Police. The others were

Paul D. Rogers, the adjutant general of the Michigan National Guard; JoAnne Huls, Whitmer's chief of staff; Zack Pohl, the deputy chief of staff; John Gutierrez, the director of Michigan's Office of Defense and Aerospace Innovation; and Vltako Tomic-Bobas, investment director of the Michigan Economic Development Corporation.

Here's a breakdown of the expenses by category:

- Transportation: \$49,710.57
- Airfare: \$36,710.57
- Hotels: \$20,052.46
- Airport fees and services \$3,838.17
- Meals: \$3,500.06.

Travelers stayed at Le Meridien Hotel in Munich. They ate at Irmi Restaurant. Whitmer spoke on a panel titled "Breaking (with) the past - Seismic Shifts in U.S. Foreign Policy."

The trips aimed to attract foreign investment to Michigan, Danielle Emerson, MEDC public relations manager, told CapCon in an email.

"The value of the investment missions to Germany and Italy were highlighted in the press releases sent out: The opening one, which highlights an investment by RENK, the value of Germany as Michigan's 4th largest international investor, and touting Michigan's defense industry and capabilities with influential leaders at the Munich Security Conference; the second one, which discusses relationship-building with existing companies like ItalDesign, as well as attracting businesses; and the concluding release, which highlights all the companies visited, as well as strategic partners like Fincantieri, which partners with the University of Michigan's Naval Architecture and Marine Engineering program – the

only of its kind in the nation. And, as you know, investment trips are not funded with taxpayer dollars."

Whitmer spent \$96,287.56 on her trip to Italy:

- Transportation: \$44,850.72:
- Hotels: \$36,111.92
- Airfare: \$6,330.92
- Meals: \$4,334.38
- Airport fees and services: \$3,887.04
- Event catering: \$1,763

Whitmer posted a video while attending the Olympics. CapCon asked the MEDC who paid for the tickets but the agency claimed that this information fell under an exemption for "information of a personal nature that would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of an individual's privacy." ■

# Michigan Dems tout green energy benefits, but renewables are just 5% of state's power mix

## *Dems defend wind and solar*

BY MICHIGAN CAPITOL

CONFIDENTIAL STAFF

May 19, 2026

The Michigan House Democrats posted a meme on Facebook criticizing Republicans for not embracing renewable energy.

"Costs across the board are too high, leaving more Michigan families struggling to make ends meet. House Republicans want to roll back clean energy efforts like their counterparts in DC, increasing your costs. Can you say 'out of touch?'"

The April 27 Facebook meme then stated:

"Michigan Renewable Energy Means: Less Reliance On Foreign Countries.

Hometown Investments & Lower Costs For You" However, federal data show renewable energy remains a relatively small part of Michigan's overall energy use and electricity supply.

Across the entire economy—including transportation, heating, and industry—renewable energy accounted for about 5.2% of Michigan's total energy consumption in 2023, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

Within the electric power sector specifically, renewables made up about 5.6% of the energy used to generate electricity, while natural gas accounted for 41.6%, nuclear power 28.1%, and coal 23%.

The two figures measure different things: the broader consumption number reflects all energy use in the state, while the electric power figure focuses only on fuels used to produce electricity.

Renewable energy provides intermittent energy, which means that solar panels only provide energy when the sun shines and wind turbines only provide energy when the wind blows. However, Michiganders need reliable energy at all times.

The Michigan chapter of Americans for Prosperity said that green energy mandates in the state make energy more expensive and less reliable.

"Michigan families and job creators depend on reliable, affordable electricity," AFP-Michigan spokeswoman Billie Rajzer said. "Yet today, rising energy costs, increasing demand from new industries, and policies that restrict competition are placing growing pressure on Michiganders. Mandated renewable energy requirements in Michigan are falling short, and continued support for them shows that Michigan House Democrats are the ones out of touch."

Nationwide, renewable energy has received significantly more federal subsidies in recent years than other forms of energy.

The latest comprehensive federal accounting of energy subsidies comes

from the U.S. Energy Information Administration, which analyzed federal support in fiscal year 2022.

That report found the federal government provided about \$15.6 billion in subsidies to renewable energy, compared with roughly \$3.2 billion for fossil fuels.

However, the Inflation Reduction Act was signed into law on Aug. 16, 2022—just weeks before the fiscal year ended on Sept. 30. Because the EIA report measures subsidies actually paid out during that period, it captures little to none of the law's funding.

Most of the law's incentives—estimated at roughly \$370 billion initially and potentially far higher over time—did not begin flowing until 2023 and beyond. As a result, the EIA report effectively reflects a pre-IRA baseline rather than current subsidy levels. ■

# Michigan attorney general's office drives no electric vehicles

*As Nessel alleges oil companies are suppressing EV demand, her own staff chooses gas*



Photo by Shutterstock

BY SCOTT MCCLALLEN  
April 23, 2026

The state of Michigan owns or leases only 41 electric vehicles, according to records from the Department of Technology, Management and Budget. The state's revealed preference for traditional gas-powered automobiles contrasts sharply with its lawsuit against oil companies, which alleges that cartelization by Big Oil, not consumer choice, accounts for poor sales of electric vehicles and solar panels.

In October 2024 Attorney General Dana Nessel's office selected three private law firms that specialize in activist litigation to sue oil companies for allegedly contributing to climate change. But a document Michigan Capitol Confidential obtained through a records request

indicates that Nessel's office has fueled gas-powered vehicles at gas stations affiliated with the companies the state is suing.

The record, which includes two years of gas station receipts, does not show much demand for electric vehicles among the attorney general's staff. Nessel's office doesn't use electric vehicles, Kimberly Bush, the director of its office of public information and education, told CapCon in an email.

"[The Department of Technology Management and Budget] Vehicle & Travel is responsible for guiding agencies in the selection, ordering, and use of state vehicles, based on how the vehicle will be deployed, as well as the availability of vehicles from the manufacturers the state contracts with," Bush wrote. "At

the present time, DTMB provides the (attorney general's office) with 2-3 vehicle options to choose. EV options were not available; however, it is our understanding that DTMB is working in that direction."

The lawsuit claims that a group of petroleum companies and a trade group — BP PLC, Chevron Corp., Exxon Mobil Corp., Shell PLC, and the American Petroleum Institute — violated the Sherman Antitrust Act, the Clayton Antitrust Act and the Michigan Antitrust Reform Act. These oil companies allegedly colluded to wreck consumer demand for electric vehicles and solar panels, according to the lawsuit.

The state of Michigan set a goal of having 2 million electric vehicles on Michigan's roads by 2030. There are currently 102,880 electric vehicles and 19,385 plug-in electric hybrids registered, according to a document CapCon obtained from the Michigan Department of State through a records request.

The state is about 1.8 million electric vehicles short of the MI Health Climate plan goal, or 6.1% toward the 2030 goal as of April 1, 2026. Big Three automakers have reported low consumer demand for electric vehicles.

The attorney general's office is not the only area of state government where EV enthusiasm is waning.

In her 2025 proposed budget, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer proposed spending \$85 million in taxpayer funds to subsidize electric vehicles, and in 2023 she ordered the state's roughly 14,000-vehicle fleet to convert to electric. But the governor included no money for electric vehicles in her latest budget.

Nessel's lawsuit blames oil interests for lackluster EV demand, alleging that gas stations should have built electric charging networks. Michigan is building an EV charging network through the federal National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Program, which allocated \$106 million to the state across three funding rounds. So far, the state has started work on 82 NEVI fast-charging sites, according to a dashboard from the Michigan Department of Transportation. Of those 82 sites, seven are operational, four are under construction, 21 are in design, and 50 are awaiting a contract.

Michigan is administering federal funds to make EV charging accessible, Jocelyn Garza, deputy director of public affairs for communications and media relations for the Michigan Department of Transportation, told CapCon in an email.

"MDOT is administering federal funding identified by the National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Formula Program to fund states to strategically deploy EV charging infrastructure and establish an interconnected network, making EV charging accessible for all users," Garza wrote. "Our updated plan meets criteria supported by U.S. Transportation Secretary, Sean Duffy."

The state of Michigan is preparing to spend \$51 million in the third round of federal grants.

Though Nessel's office doesn't drive any EVs, some other state departments do.

There are over 7 million gas-powered vehicles registered statewide. ■



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# Michigan sees steep decline in 2026 national economic ranking

*Right-to-work repeal, higher minimum wage, high taxes drag down state's score*

BY JAMIE A. HOPE  
May 5, 2026

Michigan fell 13 spots in an annual ranking of economic competitiveness — the third worst fall for any state since reporting began in 2008.

The Great Lakes State dropped from 19th place nationally to 32nd in just one year, according to the 2026 edition of “Rich States Poor States,” an annual report published by the American Legislative Exchange Council. “Rich States Poor States” ranks the economic competitiveness of states based on differences in tax rates, minimum wage laws, liability costs and other state policies. The ALEC-Laffer State Economic Competitiveness Index considers a total of 15 variables to establish a state's standing.

Michigan's highest ranking came during the years of former Gov. Rick Snyder, when it reached 12th place in 2019.

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer posted on X April 21 that “\$#1+ is expensive” and vowed never to stop working to lower costs for Michigan's families.

But Jonathan Williams, president and chief economist at ALEC and one of the authors of the report, said changes during the Whitmer administration helped drag down the state's ranking.

In an interview with Michigan Capitol Confidential, Williams listed three key policy changes the state made during Whitmer's tenure. Each, he said, contributed to Michigan's lower ranking in 2026: hiking the minimum wage, increasing personal and business income tax rates, and repealing the state's right-to-work law.

Ending Michigan's status as a right-to-work state, which happened in 2024, is a real problem for the state's economic outlook, according to Williams.

Neighboring states of Wisconsin and Indiana have right-to-work, he added.

Businesses looking for a competitive environment are more likely to choose those states, Williams noted, but a Democratic trifecta that held power in 2023 and 2024 repealed Michigan's right-to-work law.

Williams pointed to the state's increased minimum wage as another stumbling block.

Minimum wage laws lead to fewer jobs, Michael LaFaive, senior director of the Morey Fiscal Policy Initiative at the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, wrote in a 2021 blog post.

“Research shows that while some workers may see their wages increased, others will lose their existing jobs or have a harder time finding others,” said LaFaive.

The state's personal and business income taxes also drag down the state's economic competitiveness, said Williams, adding that Michigan can help itself economically by reducing the tax burden it places on residents and businesses.

“Michigan has fallen behind in the general outlook of the states based on states that are racing to cut taxes right now to become more competitive,” Williams said.

He noted that Michigan has fallen behind on cutting personal and business income taxes. This is a bipartisan issue, Williams said, and some Democratic governors are looking to reduce taxes.

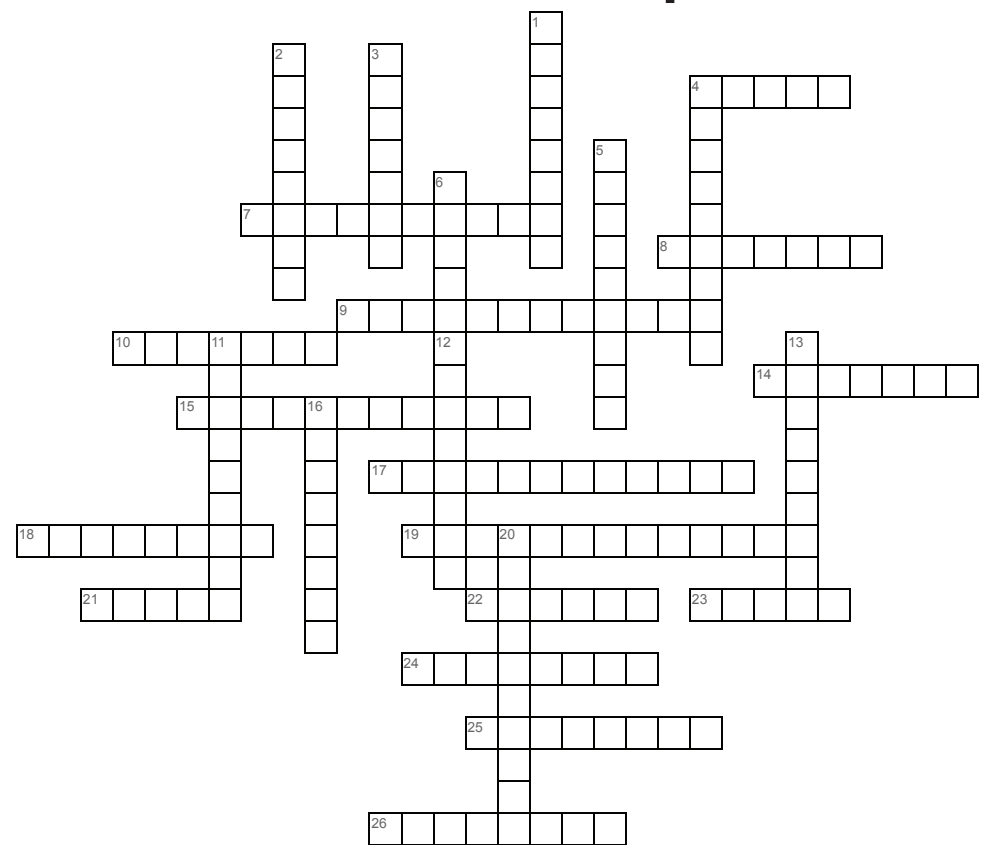
“Even Colorado Gov. Jared Polis has advocated for tax rate reductions on personal income tax and called for the complete elimination of the personal income tax in Colorado for economic development reasons,” he said.

The bottom line, according to Williams, is that states fall behind by standing still.

“And Michigan has fallen behind, as many of its key competitor states have realized, cutting taxes, especially taxes on small business and hardworking taxpayers, is an incredible economic benefit for them,” he said.

Whitmer did not respond to a request for comment. ■

## Summer crossword puzzle



### Across

- 4) Detroit-born soda brand
- 7) Tall shoreline structure guiding ships
- 8) The largest of all Pacific salmon
- 9) Manufacturing system perfected by Ford
- 10) Popular boat for lake days
- 12) Scenic highway beloved by tourists and bumper stickers alike
- 14) Ginger ale created in Detroit during the Civil War era
- 15) Bavarian-themed tourist town known for chicken dinners
- 17) Michigan's largest natural freshwater spring
- 18) Island famous for fudge and no cars
- 19) Colorful Lake Superior cliffs best viewed by boat
- 21) Sweet treat strongly tied to Mackinac Island
- 22) Card game unofficially considered Michigan's favorite pastime
- 23) Sandy hills along Lake Michigan

24) Historic Detroit avenue tied to cruising culture

25) Northern Michigan city known for cherries

26) Baking mix company headquartered in Chelsea, Michigan

### Down

- 1) Michigan stone hunted on beaches
- 2) Common fish caught in summer lakes
- 3) Abandoned iron-smelting ghost town preserved as a state park
- 4) Massive ship often spotted on the Great Lakes
- 5) Glowing insects seen on warm nights
- 6) Resort known for skiing and avalanche bay
- 11) Deep inland lake known for Caribbean-blue water
- 13) Detroit island park designed in part by Olmsted
- 16) Paddling activity common on Michigan rivers
- 20) Alpena-area preserve filled with shipwrecks