



WEEKLY LEGISLATIVE REPORT

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Please route to all interested parties in your township.

STATE CUTS: ENTIRE AGRICULTURE PROGRAMS JEOPARDIZED

As state departments attempt to implement the latest round of current fiscal year budget cuts that impact almost every department in an across-the-board fashion, MTA is learning of several cuts inside the Michigan Department of Agriculture (MDA) that raise enormous questions. As proposed, the Right-to-Farm (RTF) program and the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP) stand to lose all eight of their employees by June 8. MTA is raising the question about what will happen with the program? Under state law, the state is obligated to administer the RTF program. Who will do on-site farm inspections? What will happen when residents have questions or concerns about specific agriculture operations? MTA has also learned that there is a chance that migrant housing inspections administered by MDA inspectors will also lose its entire staff. The state is also obligated under current law to conduct migrant housing inspections. Budget cuts approved through the executive order on May 5 will undoubtedly be receiving attention from the Appropriations Committees in the House and Senate this week as these layoff deadlines are fast approaching. Short-term and long-term program outlooks will have to be addressed by legislators.

EVALUATION OF STATE OPERATIONS BEGINS

Lt. Gov. John Cherry has begun the effort to evaluate the overall operation of state government. The program, as outlined by the governor in her State of the State address, tries to answer the question: "What does state government do?" To this point, seven core functions have been identified: public safety, which protects people in their homes, workplaces and communities; education, which is a lifelong experience; public systems, which includes all of the infrastructure that allows us to communicate and supports commerce; well-being, which looks to ensure that all citizens have access to the essentials of food, shelter and health care; sustainability, which provides stewardship of the state's air, land and water; economic opportunity, which stimulates economic growth; and efficiency and effectiveness, which reviews the other programs to see that the job is being done right. The objective is to consolidate state government into groupings that match each of these objectives. For further information on this project, consider attending the MTA Summer Legislative Conference being held Aug. 12-14 in Frankenmuth. Call MTA or visit our Web site for further details.

HOUSE DUMPS PAGES

In an effort to save money, the House of Representatives eliminated its page program. Historically, the House has employed 20 college students on a yearly basis. Each page works 20 hours a week at this minimum-wage job. Pages are responsible for running errands during the day, which often includes moving documents between offices. In the past, one of the chief functions of the pages was transporting "blue books" between the offices and the Capitol building. Blue books were the binders that contained all of the bills that were to be discussed for final passage on that particular day. Those books, which could be more than a foot thick during appropriation time, were carted in laundry bin-type carts across the street from the House office building to the Capitol by two or three pages straining to move the carts that often contained 1,000 pounds of paper. Today, that system has been replaced with laptop computers. Volunteer interns are being sought to replace the pages for the future.

LEGISLATURE PLANS SESSION INTO THE SUMMER

Traditionally, the Legislature looks to wrap up all appropriation issues by July 4 and go into recess during the months of July and August. At this point, both the House and Senate are looking at continuing to work during most of July with no commitment to what will happen in August. Regular sessions will be held on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays each week in June. However, the Legislature will break between June 29 and July 10. The House has then scheduled session days for the remainder of July, while the Senate has listed those days as tentative.

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