

CAPITOL NEWS UPDATE

WEEK OF MARCH 11, 2019

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OPEN RECORDS BILLS MOVE TO HOUSE

Bipartisan bills designed to expand transparency by including the Executive Office in the Freedom of Information Act in Michigan were approved by a House committee this week, after several changes to the original legislation.

The legislation would create the Legislative Open Records Act, require the Legislature to hold onto records for two-years instead of the original bill's 30 days, and exempt communications between the Executive Office and constituents. Communications with registered lobbyists, state employees and appointees do not qualify as constituents and would not be exempt from FOIA. Legislators also have the same exemption for constituent communications.

If passed, the bills would take effect on Jan. 1, 2020. Appeals under LORA would continue to be handled by the Legislative Council, unlike appeals under FOIA which are handled by a court.

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer supports the amended version of the bills, along with Progress Michigan. Whitmer has indicated that she still believes judicial review is important.

The House has passed similar legislation in previous years, without Senate support.

WHITMER PAUSES WORK ON CARO PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL

In a surprise move, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's administration announced this week that it is halting construction plans approved by former Gov. Rick Snyder to replace an aging Caro Psychiatric Hospital with a new state psychiatric hospital in Caro.

Officials from the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services announced that the decision is based on concerns with staffing shortages, the ability for patients' families to be involved in their treatment, and access to water.

DHHS Director Robert Gordon said they are seeking outside consultation to review the project and will look at "access to trained staff and proximity to family and community services," as part of the decision. The state has not yet named a consultant for the project, but recommendations for the hospital are expected to be reported in June.

The state will continue to operate the current Caro Psychiatric Hospital during the review. The current hospital was built in 1914 and can serve 150 adults. The new hospital was expected to serve 200 adults, and open in 2021.

INTERNET AND FANTASY SPORTS GAMING BILLS REINTRODUCED

Legislation to legalize fantasy sports and regulate online gaming was reintroduced last week, with sponsors hopeful for a new outcome. Similar legislation was passed by the Legislature but vetoed by former Gov. Rick Snyder in his final days in office during last year's Lame-Duck session.

Last session's legislation included a package of five bills to regulate online gaming through the Detroit and tribal casinos, and also legalize and regulate fantasy sports. In addition, the legislation eased restrictions on individuals with past convictions holding supplier licenses. Legislators completed a major rewrite of the bills before passing last year, laying out details for how the state and the city of Detroit would split the tax on winnings.

Sen. Curtis Hertel Jr. (D-East Lansing), one of the bill sponsors, has said the bills are the same as last year.

BILL COULD ALLOW FOR SNOW DAYS DURING STATE OF EMERGENCY TO BE FORGIVEN

The House Education committee passed amended legislation this week to make an exception to the state rules for snow days called during state emergency declarations.

If passed, House Bill 4206, sponsored by Rep. Ben Frederick (R-Owosso), would allow school districts to not count snow days that occurred during state of emergency declarations, which means the days would not be counted against the school's snow day allotment.

Currently, Michigan public schools can cancel up to six days per year and can apply for a waiver for three more.

Rep. Frederick introduced the bills this year, after severe winter weather caused a high number of snow days in January and February, and Gov. Gretchen Whitmer called a state of emergency for weather on Jan. 29.

Democrats have called for amendments to the bill to include requirements to pay hourly workers on days when school is canceled during a state of emergency.

MM&A Briefs

Attorney General creates Hate Crimes Unit

Attorney General Dana Nessel announced last week that she is setting up a Hate Crimes Unit within the Criminal Division of her department. The Unit will focus on victims of crime based on the alleged perpetrator's bias against any particular group of people.

The new unit will accept tips from individuals and law enforcement agencies, with credible tips followed up on, and if needed, independent investigations.

Laura Toy running for Livonia Mayor

Former legislator and Livonia City Council President Laura Toy is running to become the next mayor of Livonia. The incumbent mayor is not seeking election. Toy served in the House from 1999-2002, in the Senate from 2003-2006, and recently worked as a staffer in the Senate.

Calendar of Important Events

March 15 House Minority Leader Christine Greig (D-Farmington Hills) Fundraiser

Location: 7 p.m., 21031 East Farm Lane Court, Northville

March 19 Rep. Steve Marino (R-Harrison Twp.) Fundraiser

Location: 7:30 a.m., Michigan Beer and Wine Wholesalers, Hop and Vine Room

Rep. Michele Hoytenga (R-Manton) Fundraiser

Location: 8 a.m., Mediteran Café, Lansing, 8 a.m.

Sen. Mallory McMorrow (D-Royal Oak) Fundraiser

Location: 8:30 a.m., Governor's Room, Karoub Associates, Lansing

Rep. Jim Ellison (D-Royal Oak) Fundraiser

Location: 11:30 a.m., Michigan Health & Hospital Association, Lansing

Rep. Rachel Hood (D-Grand Rapids) Fundraiser

Location: 11:30 a.m., Michigan Licensed Beverage Association, Lansing

House Democratic Fund Fundraiser

Location: 5 p.m., Radisson Lansing, Lansing

Sen. Curt VanderWall (R-Ludington) Fundraiser

Location: 5 p.m., Michigan Licensed Beverage Association, Lansing

Rep. Brandt Iden (R-Oshtemo Twp.) Fundraiser

Location, 5:30 p.m., Michigan Beer and Wine Wholesalers, Lansing

March 20 Rep. Beth Griffin (R-Mattawan) Fundraiser

Location: 7:30 a.m., Grand Traverse Pie Company, Lansing

Rep. Graham Filler (R-DeWitt) Fundraiser

Location: 7:30 a.m., Michigan Beer and Wine Wholesalers, Lansing

Sen. Lana Theis (R-Brighton) Fundraiser

Location: 7:30 a.m., Governor's Room, Karoub Associates, Lansing

U.S. Rep. John Moolenaar (R) Fundraiser

Location: 8:30 a.m., Dykema Gossett, Lansing

Rep. Lynn Afendoulis (R-Grand Rapids Twp.) Fundraiser

Location: 11:30 a.m., Michigan Municipal League, Lansing

March 20 **Rep. Julie Brixie (D-Okemos) Fundraiser**
Location: 12 p.m., Michigan Health & Hospital Association, Lansing

Michigan Senate Democratic Fund Fundraiser
Location: 5 p.m., Envie, Lansing

Senate Majority 2018 PAC Fundraiser
Location: 5 p.m., Michigan Beer and Wine Wholesalers, Lansing

March 21 **Rep. Ann Bollin (R-Brighton) Fundraiser**
Location: 7:30 a.m., Grand Traverse Pie Company, Lansing

Rep. Jason Sheppard (R-Temperance) Fundraiser
Karoub Associates, Governors' Room, Lansing, 7:30 a.m.

Rep. Gary Howell (R-North Branch) Fundraiser
Location: 8 a.m., Michigan Beer and Wine Wholesalers Association, Lansing

U.S. Rep. Dan Kildee (D) Fundraiser
Location: 8:30 a.m., Michigan Health and Hospital Association, Lansing

Rep. Alex Garza (D-Taylor) Fundraiser
Location: 10 a.m., Michigan Municipal League, Lansing

Rep. Donna Lasinski (D-Scio Twp.) Fundraiser
Location: 10:30 a.m., Michigan Beer and Wine Wholesalers, Lansing

Sen. Jim Ananich (D-Flint) PAC Fundraiser
Location: 11:30 a.m., Governor's Room, Karoub Associates, Lansing

March 22 **Sen. Lana Theis (R-Brighton) PAC Fundraiser**
Location: 7:30 a.m., Governor's Room, Karoub Associates, Lansing