

CAPITOL NEWS UPDATE

WEEK OF MARCH 30, 2020

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WHITMER SAYS MICHIGAN WEEKS AWAY FROM PEAK OF CORONAVIRUS CASES

During a press conference on Thursday, Governor Gretchen Whitmer said that Michigan's new coronavirus cases have risen to more than 10,000, and that Michigan is still three to six weeks away from reaching its peak.

Whitmer also discussed the possibility of a statewide curfew, saying that although it has not currently been discussed, as the administration watches other states, she would anticipate a conversation about curfews.

Whitmer, along with Department of Health and Human Services chief medical executive Dr. Joneigh Khaldun, also said that the state received new COVID-19 tests this week that can give results in 15 minutes and were being sent to Detroit, and that President Donald Trump approved her request to have Air and Army National Guard troops assist with humanitarian efforts and to distribute supplies.

WHITMER CLOSES SCHOOL BUILDINGS FOR REMAINDER OF SCHOOL YEAR

Gov. Whitmer also announced on Thursday that she has issued an executive order to close school buildings for the last nine weeks of the 2019-20 school year, shifting teaching from in person to distance learning, due to the peak number of Michigan's COVID-19 cases still being three to six weeks away.

Whitmer, who has two daughters in high school including a senior, said that the move "is the best thing that we can do for the health of our children, for the tens of thousands of educators in Michigan who work in our schools. This will ensure more kids and educators will return to school happy and healthy at the start of the next school year. It will protect more families from the spread of COVID-19."

According to the Executive Order:

High school seniors who were passing their courses can graduate this year. Any seniors failing a course as of March 11 must get the opportunity to demonstrate learning in the subject and receive credit.

Districts will no longer need approval from the Michigan Department of Education to start school before Labor Day if they want to get an early start on the 2020-21 school year, nor will they need approval to move to year-round schooling for the 2020-21 school year.

On distance learning – The Department of Education, in collaboration with the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators and the Michigan Council of Charter School Authorizers, must distribute a model template to school districts for a distance learning plan by

Friday, April 3. ISDs and charter school authorizing bodies must review and approve or reject plans starting April 8.

K-12 districts will then develop their plans, which must be implemented no later than April 28. Plans must be approved for charter schools and K-12 districts to receive their state school aid payment.

Whitmer said, "This doesn't mean our kids will stop learning. Plans will be different based on district. The plans will be locally driven and reflect the best interest of the kids in their communities. That means learning by phone or mail or online. That means project-based learning and paper packets. Telephone lessons and things that can be used as means of alternative mode of delivering instruction."

GOVERNOR ENCOURAGES LEGISLATURE TO MEET ONCE, PASS 70-DAY EMERGENCY EXTENSION

Republican legislature wants once-per month session, shorter extension

Gov. Whitmer and the Republican-led House and Senate disagree on whether or not the Legislature should return to Lansing to hold session as the cases of COVID-19 continue to rise.

After first imploring the Legislature not to meet or congregate, and referencing the recent death of Rep. Isaac Robinson (D-Detroit) who is believed to have died of COVID-19, Gov. Whitmer more recently suggested through spokesperson Tiffany Brown, that the Legislature "meet soon, pass a 70-day extension, and then return home and stay safe as we move through the expected height of this crisis."

The change came after Whitmer called on the Legislature to expand the state's disaster and emergency declarations by 70 days.

Senate Majority Leader Mike Shirkey (R-Clarklake) and other Republicans in both chambers have voiced opposition to the 70-day proposal and are still planning to have a Legislative session on April 7 to extend the declarations for less time.

Both chambers plan to implement safety precautions including having members come in in small groups to check in before leaving the building, having few or no staff on the floor, and allowing a concurrent resolution extending the order to be passed through a voice vote with few members in the chamber.

Road Construction Continues Across Michigan

As long as construction workers can practice social distancing measures and be appropriately protected, the Michigan Department of Transportation has said that road and bridge projects in the state will continue during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Contractors can proceed with state trunkline projects as long as they feel their workers can do their work in a safe manner, according to MDOT spokesperson Jeff Cranson. "In cases where a contractor feels they cannot begin or continue work because of concerns about their work force, supply chains or other things related to COVID-19, the delays will be excusable and liquidated damages will not be assessed," Cranson said.

The clarification came after the Michigan Infrastructure and Transportation Association (MITA) reached an agreement between their organization and MDOT related to what construction work could be deemed essential.

State Unemployment Claims Top 300k in One Week

From March 22 to March 28, more 311,086 first time jobless claims were filed in the state of Michigan. This was more than double the 130,000 first time claims filed the previous week, according to the U.S. Department of Labor report released on Thursday.

Across the U.S., the two-week total of first-time claims is about 10 million. The high number comes as states are limiting business activity across the country and issuing stay-at-home orders and suggestions in an effort to slow the spread of COVID-19.

First State-Approved Auto Rates Show Savings

The Insurance Services Office has had its proposed auto rates approved by the state today, according to Rep. Jason Wentworth (R-Farwell), Chair of the House Select Committee on Reducing Car Insurance Rates.

Although it does not sell policies to customers, the ISO is a rate organization that provides information to the insurance industry. Insurance providers that are members of ISO may use the rate information for their own policies that would eventually be sold to drivers, Wentworth said.

The insurance rates approved for ISO for unlimited personal injury protection (PIP) would mean a 17.1 savings for customers. This is over the state-called for 10 percent threshold.

In addition:

- For \$500,000 in PIP coverage, the rates for ISO would result in 22% savings (more than the mandated 20%).
- For \$250,000 in coverage, the savings would be 36.6%, (more than the mandated 35%)
- For \$50,000 in PIP coverage, the savings would be 56.1% (higher than the 45% mandated savings).

The state appears to remain on track for the auto reform law to go fully into effect July 1.

MM&A Briefs

Rep. Isaac Robinson of Detroit Dead at 44, COVID-19 Suspected

Rep. Isaac Robinson (D-Detroit) died last Sunday amid concerns that he had COVID-19. Robinson was first elected the 4th House District in 2018, succeeding his mother, former Rep. Rose Mary Robinson.

According to his mother in Crain's Detroit, Robinson was transported by ambulance from his home to the Detroit Medical Center Hospital where he passed away. She said he had breathing difficulty but resisted seeking medical attention.

Robinson was an attorney who was known for union organizing, and who sat on the Commerce and Trade, Regulatory Reform and Tax Policy committees. He was also known for advocating for issues benefiting low-income residents and labor. He did not attend the last House session on March 17.

Whitmer Revises Order Limiting Veterinary Procedures

Gov. Whitmer rescinded an executive order this week that limited veterinary procedures to those deemed essential and issued a new order that included revisions related to telemedicine and use of personal protection equipment. According to the new order, all veterinary facilities must implement a plan to temporarily postpone all non-essential veterinary services and perform all essential services by telemedicine to the fullest extent possible for the duration of time the new coronavirus emergency is in effect. The order also mandates that the use of personal protection equipment by veterinarians that could otherwise be used for the care of people must be minimized as much as possible.