

CAPITOL NEWS UPDATE

WEEK OF APRIL 13, 2020

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STATE DEATH TOLL OVER 2,000

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services reported Thursday that the statewide death toll from coronavirus has risen to 2,093, with 107 deaths occurring within the last 24 hours before the report.

The number of confirmed cases also continued to increase with 1,204 cases reported on Thursday equaling a total of 29,263 total confirmed cases in the state.

Also, DHHS reported that as of Wednesday night, 22,680 hospital beds were available in the state. Of those, 667 were in adult intensive care units and 2,800 in emergency departments across the state, according to Gongwer News. In addition, there were 1,754 ventilators available as part of a total of 3,304 ventilators.

REGIONAL GOVERNORS ANNOUNCE PARTNERSHIP TO JUMPSTART ECONOMIES

On Thursday, Governor Whitmer, along with the governors of Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin announced a regional partnership focused on reopening the state's economies during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Comprised of five Democrats and two Republicans, the governors said four factors will influence when they will reopen the economy: sustained control of the rate of new infections and hospitalizations; enhanced ability to test and trace; sufficient health care capacity to handle resurgence; and best practices for social distancing in the workplace.

"We recognize that our economies are all reliant on each other, and we must work together to safely reopen them so hardworking people can get back to work and businesses can get back on their feet," the governors said in a joint statement.

Some of the differences between the states include the restrictions and length of their stay-at-home orders.

SENATE REPUBLICANS RELEASE PLAN TO REOPEN ECONOMY

Senate Republicans on Thursday unexpectedly released a five-phase plan to revive the economy, with the first phase of the plan would allow low-risk businesses to reopen if they maintain social distancing and provide personal protective equipment to employees. It also recommends residents wear masks during essential tasks like necessary travel or grocery shopping.

The remaining stages would be adopted as the number of COVID-19 cases and deaths declined for set periods of time and health care systems have an increased capacity.

For example, the second phase would be initiated once COVID-19 cases and deaths fell for five of seven days, and hospital systems were below 75 percent capacity. These would include lower risk businesses operating under safety precautions, and some outdoor recreational activities, minimal regional travel.

The third phase would happen once COVID-19 cases declined for 17 of 21 days, and health care system capacity is reduced to below 50 percent. This would open the doors to gatherings of less than 100, and bars and restaurants open with 50 percent capacity. The fourth phase would be when cases and deaths declined for 19 of 21 days and health care systems seeing capacity reduced below 33 percent and if the state is not experiencing a shortage of COVID-19 tests.

Each stage includes more businesses operating, larger allowable gatherings, and a higher percentage of capacity for bars and restaurants until restrictions are lifted with the final stage happening once there is no active spreading of the virus or a vaccine is available for 30 days.

Senate Majority Leader Mike Shirkey (R-Clarklake) invited comments from the Medical community about the plan and said that the plan was shared with Governor Whitmer, with a request for a response by April 30.

Democrats on the Senate bipartisan workgroup set up to make similar plans and others accused Shirkey of undermining the workgroup.

MUCC TO CHALLENGE WHITMER'S ORDER ON MOTORIZED BOATING

The Michigan United Conservation Clubs Executive Board voted this week to file a lawsuit challenging Governor Whitmer's Executive Order 2020-42 as it applies to motorized boating.

MUCC said its members were concerned over the interpretation of whether or not motorboating is allowed due to the order, and how the language about shooting ranges applies to sportsman's clubs across the state which are mostly volunteer-based and not staffed.

In a press release, MUCC said its members understand the risks in high use areas in the state:

“We support measures to mitigate risks in these highly frequented locations. However, these are only a few small examples of the thousands of public and private successes we have throughout Michigan that are infrequently visited by people with motorboats and could be vital to Michiganders' mental health and well-being during this time.”

The organization also recommends anglers continue to use social distancing and best health practices during this time.

REPUBLICANS BILLS WOULD CURB GOVERNOR'S EMERGENCY POWERS

Lawmakers introduced bills in both the House and Senate this week to amend the state's Emergency Manager acts, reducing the powers of the Executive Office and preventing the Governor from tighter stay-at-home restrictions.

The bills would repeal the 1945 Emergency Powers of the Governor Act, and amend the Emergency Manager Act of 1976. Governor Whitmer has cited both acts in many of her executive orders.

Senate Bill 857 was introduced by Sen. Tom Barrett (R-Charlotte) and would completely repeal the 1945 Emergency Powers of the Governor Act. Other bills would require a shorter period for when a governor who issues a state of disaster must request an extension from the Legislature and prohibit the governor from banning the sale or purchase of firearms and ammunition under the 1945 and 1976 acts.

The House Bills would also reduce emergency powers and repeal the 1945 act, along with allowing for reduced property taxes due to travel restrictions and prohibiting the confiscation of firearms.

If passed, Governor Whitmer can veto the measures.

WHITMER ORDERS NURSING HOMES AND LONG-TERM CARE FACILITIES TO DO MORE TO PREVENT THE SPREAD OF COVID-19

Governor Gretchen Whitmer signed another Executive Order this week to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 in nursing homes and long-term care facilities. The order comes after the Michigan division of the Service Employees International Union pushed for emergency regulations in nursing homes, after around 50 of their members have had the Coronavirus since the beginning of the outbreak.

Executive Order 2020-50 requires nursing homes and long-term care facilities to adhere to a list of protections and precautions for residents and employees.

To begin with, the order requires that facilities less than 80 percent full must create a unit for those residents who test positive for COVID-19 and provide personal protective equipment to employees. Facilities over 80 percent full are required to send COVID-19 positive residents to a state-designated regional “hub” facility that will only provide care to residents who test positive. The order also requires any resident who is medically unstable to be sent to a hospital.

Other patient-based regulations prohibit facilities from evicting or discharging patients for not paying and denying admission based on COVID-19 testing requirements. They also require best efforts to provide telemedicine to residents for doctor’s appointments, behavioral health visits and occupational or physical therapy, require facilities to accept the return of residents if they have been hospitalized, cancel all communal dining and internal/external group activities throughout the duration of the emergency and disaster periods, and ensure the facilities take all necessary precautions to disinfect and clean facilities in accordance to U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines.

In addition, stronger protections for employees based on the order ensure facilities provide personal protective equipment and hand sanitizer to all employees who interact with residents; notify employees of any COVID-19 cases within 12 hours, and notify the health department within 24 hours, and prohibit them from punishing staff if they stay home due to coronavirus symptoms or testing positive for the virus.

MM&A Briefs

Former Republican Senator Runs for Oakland County Exec Position

Former Sen. Mike Kowall of White Lake filed to run as a candidate for Oakland County executive on Thursday. He is the only Republican running.

A Democratic primary is already set between Oakland County Executive Dave Coulter and Oakland County Treasurer Andy Meisner. Coulter was appointed by the Board of Commissioners last year after the death of former County Executive L. Brooks Patterson.

Kowall, who served in the House from 1999-2002, became White Lake Township supervisor, and then returned to serve in the Senate from 2011-18, was a top aide to Patterson before his death.

Amash Eyes Presidential Run

U.S. Rep. Justin Amash suggested he might run for president on Twitter this week in response to a comment made by President Donald Trump.

"Americans who believe in limited government deserve another option," Mr. Amash (I-Cascade Township) tweeted. In response to another user, he also said, "I'm looking at it closely this week."

Meijer Files for Congressional Seat

Republican Peter Meijer, a Grand Rapids business executive officially announced he will be running for the seat U.S. Rep. Justin Amash is currently holding in Michigan's third congressional district. Meijer has already raised more than \$350,000 in the first quarter of 2020 and gathered 1,375 ballot signatures.