

CAPITOL NEWS UPDATE

WEEK OF APRIL 26, 2021



McAlvey Merchant
& ASSOCIATES

GOVERNOR TIES GATHERING LIMITS, REOPENING, TO VACCINATIONS

Governor Gretchen Whitmer announced specific metrics on Thursday tying the percentage of Michigan residents who receive the COVID-19 vaccine to a phased approach of lifting capacity and gathering limits and restrictions on everything from working at home requirements to indoor sports stadiums, funeral homes, bars, restaurants, and retailers.

Currently, 49.6% of Michigan's residents 16 and older have received at least one dose of the vaccine.

Phases for the reopening of businesses and gatherings will be:

- **55% first dose**
Two weeks after the population meets this mark, the state will lift the requirement that all work be done remotely unless it can only be done in person.
- **60% first dose**
The curfew on bars and restaurants will end. Capacity limits at indoor sports stadiums, funeral homes, conference halls and banquet centers will increase to 25% and gyms to 50%.
- **65% first dose**
Two weeks after the population meets this mark, all indoor capacity will be lifted, with only social distancing requirements remaining.
- **70% first dose**
The Department of Health and Human Services will lift the epidemic order.

Also, a revised DHHS order will be released shortly that will open outdoor gathering limits to correspond with new guidance from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The CDC's new guidelines include allowing vaccinated people to attend small outdoor gatherings without wearing a mask.

Whitmer also cautioned that she will put the brakes on the plan by region if new cases remain greater than 250 per 1 million people as a seven-day average in a Michigan Economic Recovery Committee region, when the state is looking at lifting restrictions for the 65% vaccinated phase in that region.

The approach is the first time the administration has laid out specific metrics for reopening since the pandemic began. Governor Whitmer said the plan included input from legislative leaders of both parties. Business groups and Republican legislative leaders said they are grateful for having a path to reopening, but that the specific metrics are what they have been requesting for some time.

"For 11 out of the last 15 months, we didn't have vaccines. And so we couldn't tie something to a metric that isn't really the best tool that we have to get back to normal," Whitmer said.

House Speaker Jason Wentworth (R-Farwell) said, "I'm glad we took a stand for the people we represent and used every tool at our disposal to get the governor to this point. Now we need to continue to push to improve this plan and make it work for the people who are still waiting for a real light at the end of the tunnel."

GORDON GIVES MORE DETAILS ON RESIGNATION

Former director of the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services Robert Gordon appeared before the House Oversight Committee on Thursday after being subpoenaed by the committee regarding his resignation and severance payment.

Gordon told the committee that he resigned after Governor Whitmer told him she wanted to go in a different direction. He also said that the idea for his \$155,000 severance package with a confidentiality clause came from the Department of Attorney General.

The legislature has scrutinized Gordon's resignation and severance payment since his resignation in January.

Gordon told the committee that he resigned after a zoom call with members of the governor's staff and the Governor, who told thanked him for his service on the call and said it was time to go in a "new direction."

Gordon said that the Governor asked for his resignation after they disagreed on how to handle the pandemic restrictions and that there was a "reasonable" difference of opinion on the executive order, which Gordon signed, that relaxed restrictions relating to restaurants, among other things.

"I think this was a difference of opinion that was in a gray area where I don't think that there was a clear right answer. That's why I made one recommendation; we reached another conclusion. I was quite comfortable signing the order," Gordon said.

Rep. Steve Johnson (R-Wayland) said that the severance payment offered to Gordon by the Department of Attorney General was a violation of the Constitution.

During the hearing legislators asked Gordon whether he thought the separation payment was justified.

"I worked my heart out. And the stakes were enormous. I used to read regularly stories about those who had lost their lives, and it had a big impact on me because every life is sacred," Gordon said.

"So, if you're asking me if the taxpayers got a good deal on my public service, with respect, I believe they did."

BENSON PROPOSES IMPROVEMENTS, LEGISLATIVE AGENDA TO IMPROVE CUSTOMER SERVICE AT SOS OFFICES

With waiting times at Secretary of State offices on the rise, recent technology crashes and branch closures due to COVID-19 exposure, Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson announced Thursday new efforts to improve customer service at SOS offices. Benson also called on the Legislature to support funding and legislation that would streamline services making them more convenient and efficient.

Benson's proposed improvements include:

- Keeping the appointment system instituted during the pandemic instead of the take-a-number system.
- Increasing branch appointments by 10 percent, or about 35,000 appointments a month
- Allowing for multi-year vehicle registrations
- Remote driver's license testing
- Dedicated staff to answer phones and help people with limited internet access make appointments.
- Allowing Secretary of state workers to handle customer appointments in online settings
- Allowing military commercial driver's license training to count as civilian driver's license training
- Allowing customers to submit their own photos for some driver's licenses and IDs, similar to passports
- Provide funding for "pop-up" branches in places such as grocery stores, banks and cafes.

"We need lawmakers to join us as innovators in furthering a vision for the people of Michigan, not serve as obstructionists trying to force us back into an unworkable inefficient and expensive model from the past," Benson said.

WORKER SAFETY PACKAGE INTRODUCED BY HOUSE DEMS

House Democrats Rep. Terry Sabo (D-Muskegon), Rep. Samantha Steckloff (D-Farmington Hills) and Rep. Laurie Pohutsky (D-Livonia) recently introduced legislation to address worker safety issues related to COVID-19.

HB 4748-50, along with others, will address issues such as providing an infectious disease presumption to essential workers if they contract COVID; waiving the one-week waiting requirement under workers' comp for COVID 19 cases to ensure a worker will not be penalized for contracting the COVID 19 virus; and prohibiting an employer from taking an adverse employment action against an employee who reports a safety hazard or refuses to work because of it.

"Your job should not come at the expense of your health and safety," Sabo said at an online press conference.

MM&A BRIEFS

MICHIGAN POPULATION DROPS, WILL LOSE SEAT IN CONGRESS

Michigan's population has dropped, and the state will lose a Congressional seat for the fifth consecutive census, bringing its total to 13 seats.

Census officials released the official 2020 counts of state-by-populations, showing that seats from states with shrinking or slower growing populations are shifted to states with faster growth rates. Michigan dropped from the eighth most populous state in the 2010 Census to 10th.

SALDANO ANNOUNCES GUBERNATORIAL BID

Garret Saldano, a 42-year-old Kalamazoo-area chiropractor and former Western Michigan University linebacker announced his candidacy for governor this week. The Republican was a leading opponent to Governor Whitmer's stay-at-home orders. He has had support from his popular Facebook group Michiganders Against Excessive Quarantine which had more than 400,000 members before it was shutdown.

CALENDAR OF IMPORTANT EVENTS

April 29 Rep. Steve Carra (R-Three Rivers) Fundraiser

Location: 7:30 a.m., Karoub Associates, Lansing

Sen. Ed McBroom (R-Vulcan)

Memorial Honoring Sen. Casperson & Frank Egeler

Location: 8:30 a.m., Senate Committee Room, Boji Tower, Lansing

Sen. Tom Barrett (R-Charlotte) - Barrett Brigade Leadership Fund

Location: 12 p.m., Karoub Associates, Lansing

May 4 Rep. Thomas Albert (R-Lowell) Breakfast Reception

Location: 8 a.m., Karoub Associates, Lansing

Rep. Bradley Slagh (R-Zeeland) Reception

Location: 4:30 p.m., Michigrain, Lansing

Rep. Michele Hoytenga (R-Manton) for Michigan

Location: 4:30 p.m. Michigan Beer and Wine Wholesalers Association, Lansing

May 5 Rep. Scott VanSingel (R-Grant) Fundraiser

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

- May 5** **Rep. Joe Bellino (R-Monroe) Leadership Breakfast**
Location: 7:30 a.m., Marketing Resource Group, 215 S. Washington Sq., Lansing
- Rep. Mari Manoogian (D-Birmingham) Fundraiser**
Location: 7:45 a.m., Karoub Associates, Lansing
- Senate Republican Campaign Committee Fundraiser**
Location: 5:30 p.m., The University Club, Michigan State University, 3435 Forest Road, Lansing
- May 6** **Rep. Annette Glenn (R-Midland) Fundraiser**
Location: 7:30 a.m., Karoub Associates, Lansing
- Recharge with Rep. Yousef Rabhi (D-Ann Arbor)**
Location: 10 a.m., Michigan Beer and Wine Wholesalers Association, Lansing
- May 11** **Breakfast Reception with Rep. Julie Alexander (R-Hanover)**
Location: 8 a.m., Karoub Associates, Lansing
- May 12** **Rep. Tommy Brann (R-Wyoming) CTE**
Location: 7:30 a.m., Marketing Resource Group, 215 S. Washington Sq., Lansing
- Sen. Roger Victory (R-Georgetown Twp.) Values Fund**
Location: 8 a.m., Michigan Beer and Wine Wholesalers Association, Lansing
- Rep. Amos O'Neal (D-Saginaw) Evening Reception**
Location: 4:30 p.m. Michigan Beer and Wine Wholesalers Association, Lansing
- May 13** **Rep. Andrew Beeler (R-Fort Gratiot) Breakfast Reception**
Location: 8 a.m., Karoub Associates, Lansing
- Sen. Rosemary Bayer (D-Beverly Hills) for Senate**
Web Conference (RSVP to receive link), 8:30 a.m.