

CAPITOL NEWS UPDATE

WEEK OF AUGUST 16, 2021



McAlvey Merchant
& ASSOCIATES

HOUSE COMMITTEE LOOKS AT BANNING BUSINESSES FROM MANDATING VACCINES, MASKS

The House Workforce, Trades and Talent Committee this week took up House Bill 4471 to prohibit businesses from requiring vaccinations, including but not limited to the COVID-19 vaccine.

The committee held a hearing on the bill on Thursday, before a packed committee room of supporters. Many of the witnesses questioned the safety and efficacy of vaccines and COVID immunization.

Committee chair Beth Griffin (R-Mattawan) said that many workers are being pressured by their employers to get the mRNA shot, and that health officials are biased and pushing information around the coronavirus vaccine, which is leading businesses to mandate immunizations, based on false information.

Sponsored by Rep. Sue Allor (R-Wolverine), the bill would block employers from firing or refusing to hire a qualified individual because they decline to receive one of the three vaccines outlined in the bill. It would also block employers from requiring those individuals to wear a surgical mask, display a mark distinguishing the unvaccinated individuals from others, disclose to the public the individual has declined a vaccination or retaliate against a person for filing a complaint under the bill.

In addition to COVID vaccines, the bill would block employers from requiring the flu and TDAP vaccines, and from requiring employees to wear masks.

"My constituents and people around the state are being mocked, threatened, and harassed, and shamed because they are exercising their right to not be forced to put something into their body. Fear is a powerful thing and people rightly want to know why they are being pressured hard for a shot when both vaccinated and unvaccinated people can get infected and pass this virus to others," Rep. Griffin said.

About 10 people spoke during the hearing, with only Brad Williams, with the Detroit Regional Chamber speaking in opposition. Williams said the bill "represents the type of big government overreach many of the proponents of this legislation have long railed against and attempts to implement a one-size-fits-all solution to the thousands of businesses across the state."

Business groups and health organizations oppose the bill, including the Michigan Chamber of Commerce, the Michigan Manufacturers Association, the Michigan Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Michigan State Medical Society, the Michigan Health and Hospital Association, and the Michigan Association of School Boards.

There was no vote on the bill this week, and Griffin did not say if she would call for a vote in the future.

DHHS HAS NO PLANS FOR BROAD MASKING OR GATHERING ORDERS

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services Director Elizabeth Hertel last week said that the department does not have plans to issue any “broad COVID-19 epidemic orders” involving mask mandates or limited gatherings.

Hertel said the previous orders with broad mask requirements and limited gathering sizes were necessary because they were “the best tools we had to mitigate transmission of COVID-19.” She said that having safe, effective vaccines available for the public has been effective, however masking and social distancing are still important because of the Delta variant.

Michigan’s Chief Medical Executive Dr. Joneigh Khaldun is recommending “universal masking in every school,” and recommends that as students prepare to return to classrooms, anyone eligible for the vaccine 12 and older should get one. She also said that parents should encourage or make children wear masks to school even if they are vaccinated.

WHITMER PROPOSES USING RELIEF FUNDS FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT

Governor Gretchen Whitmer announced a proposal this week to invest \$75 million in federal coronavirus relief funds in public safety including education, resources for police officers, and removing illegal guns off the streets.

The plan, which would need legislative approval, is called MI Safe Communities.

Whitmer cited increased crime in cities across the state, with violent crime jumping by 12.2% in the city of Detroit during 2020, as well as by 28% in Lansing, 42% in Sterling Heights, and 50% in Grand Rapids.

"I want to be very clear, there's not one solution to this complex problem. It's going to take a comprehensive plan that addresses every part of this complicated equation. We need the right solutions -- not the easy ones, not the most visible ones -- but the right solutions," Whitmer said.

Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan, Wayne County Prosecutor Kym Worthy, Interim Chief James White of the Detroit Police Department, U.S. Rep. Debbie Dingell (D-Dearborn), and Rep. Tyrone Carter (D-Detroit) joined Whitmer at the press conference in Detroit.

The state’s House Republicans had also passed a law-enforcement funding plan in May 2021, which included \$5 million for police officer signing bonuses, \$10 million for community policing grant programs, \$10 million for body cameras, \$2.15 million for recruitment marketing, \$30 million for assisting academy attendees, \$7.5 million for behavioral health programs, and \$10 million for job shadowing programs.

CRAIG FORMS TEAM TO ADDRESS ‘PUBLIC SAFETY CRISIS’

Former Detroit Police Chief and gubernatorial candidate James Craig also announced a Law Enforcement Action Team on the same day as Whitmer announced MI Safe Communities plan.

Craig said the team includes two Democratic sheriffs as part of a five-step plan to “resolve the public safety crisis.”

"Liberal politicians at the national, state, and local level are part of the problem rather than part of the solution," Craig said. He also said that some county prosecutors are refusing to enforce laws, refusing to hold criminals accountable, which puts communities at risk.

The comment refers to a recent policy by Ingham County Prosecutor Carol Siemon who is not charging for felony firearms offense due to concern that Black men are disproportionately impacted by the crime.

In support of Craig, former Gov. John Engler has also recently filed a statement of organization for a political action committee called “We Need the Chief.”

MM&A BRIEFS

FORMER U.S. REP. PAUL MITCHELL, 64, DIES FROM CANCER

Former U.S. Rep. Paul Mitchell died this week from stage 4 renal cancer. He was 64. Mitchell lived in Dryden Township, and is survived by his wife, Sherry, six children and six grandchildren.

Mitchell was a conservative Republican who left the party to become a political independent after disagreeing with former President Donald Trump after the 2020 election.

Mitchell is remembered by friends and colleagues for his integrity. A former corporate executive served two-terms as congressman from 2017 to 2020, with his last few weeks in Congress as an independent. Mitchell left the Republican party after criticizing GOP leadership aligning with Trump. Mitchell criticized Trump’s response to Charlottesville and called out the former President when he told four Congresswomen of color -- three of whom were born in the United States and one who is a naturalized citizen -- to "go back where they came from. "After becoming an independent he said he was “going to work with candidates who reflect principles that I think our country should stand for.”

JUDGE KAREN FORT HOOD, 68, DIES

Michigan’s first Black female Court of Appeals judge, Karen Fort Hood, of Detroit, died after a brief illness. Hood, who was one of the seven judges in the Court of Appeals’ first district, was also the first Black woman to serve as chair of the Michigan Judicial Tenure Commission. Hood was elected to the appeals court in 2002. She received her undergraduate degree from the Regents College of the University of the State of New York at Albany, and her law degree from the Detroit College of Law.

CALENDAR OF IMPORTANT EVENTS

Aug. 28 Sen. Stephanie Chang (D-Detroit) Reception

Location: 6 p.m., Hunan Cafe - 137-40 Northern Blvd., Flushing, New York

Aug. 29 Sen. Rosemary Bayer (D-Beverly Hills) for Senate

Location: 3 p.m., 21031 Eastfarm Lane Court, Farmington Hills

Aug. 30 Rep. Pauline Wendzel (R-Watervliet) 2nd Annual Golf Outing

Location: 10 a.m., The Point O' Woods Golf and Country Club, 1516 Roslin Road, Benton Harbor

Sen. Curtis Hertel, Jr. (D-East Lansing) for Michigan

Location: 5 p.m., 1860 Boxwood Lane, East Lansing

Aug. 31 Rep. John Roth (R-Traverse City) Breakfast Club

Location: 7:30 a.m., Cambria Hotel Traverse City, 255 Munson Ave. US 31, Traverse City

Sept. 1 Sen. John Bizon (R-Battle Creek) CTE

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

Sen. Dan Lauwers (R-Brockway) Majority Michigan Fund

Location: 5 p.m., Capital Prime-Four Seasons Room - 2324 Showtime Dr., Lansing

Sept. 2 Rep. Rachel Hood (D-Grand Rapids) - Blue Wave Happy Hour

Location: 4:30 p.m., 1405 Buchanan Ave., Grand Rapids