

To: CSR-MI Board
From: Todd Tennis, Cara Dobie and Courtney Austin
Date: January 19, 2024
RE: Legislative Update

The Legislature has returned from the winter recess, and are back to a semi-regular session schedule. The “semi-“ stems from the two vacancies in the House of Representatives which we expect will reduce the number of actual session days in that chamber until they are filled by special election in April. We are also now in an election year, which could have an impact on the amount of time the Legislature spends in session even beyond the special elections.

The State of the State Address has been scheduled for January 24. It is the first of two key events that will lay out the Governor’s agenda for 2024. The second – the Governor’s annual budget presentation – has not yet been scheduled but we expect it to occur in early February.

The latest Consensus Revenue Estimating Conference took place last week and painted a rosier than expected picture of the state’s financial situation. The House and Senate Fiscal Agencies, along with the Michigan Department of Treasury, reported that state revenues were stable and showed strength going into 2024. While Michigan is not experiencing a windfall like it has in previous years, the conference agreed that employment numbers were nearly back to pre-pandemic levels and that the outlook in the near future is good. While members of the House and Senate appropriations committees have been quietly saying for months that the upcoming budget process will be a difficult one, the latest revenue estimates at least provide some hope that the state will have adequate resources and flexibility to address its needs.

Legislative Work Slows Waiting for Special Elections

After an unusually early adjournment in 2023, it looks like 2024 might also have a lower number of session days than previous session. Legislators are beginning to introduce new bills as the Legislature officially returned to session in early January. However, the rapidity in which legislation might be taken up might be lessened this year according to many House and Senate leaders – at least for the first few months of it. The House currently stands at a 54-54 partisan split with two vacancies, and therefore the likelihood of controversial and partisan legislation moving in the early part of 2024 is virtually nil.

Vacant House seats in Warren and Westland were created when former Representatives Lori Stone (D-Warren) and Kevin Coleman (D-Westland) won their respective mayoral elections last November. The primary election for the two seats has been scheduled for January 30, and the general election will take place on April 16.

Candidates for House District 13 in Warren are as follows:

Democrats

Lamar Lemmons, III
Susanne Ostosh
Mai Xiong

Republicans

Curtiss Ostosh
Ronald Singer
Brandon Cumbee

Candidates for House District 25 in Westland are as follows:

Democrats

Melandie Hines
Shannon Rochon
Layla Taha
Andrea Rutkowski
Peter Herzberg

Republicans

Josh Powell

After the general election on April 16, it will likely take one to two weeks for the results to be certified and the winners to be seated in the House. If both races are won by Democrats, the House will return to a 56-54 Democratic majority and the expectation is that the House and Senate will have a more regular workload after that. However, if the Republicans pick up one or both seats in the special election (which is not expected but strange things happen in special elections), the power dynamic in Lansing would shift immediately and dramatically.

Federal Court Decision Requires Some Legislative District Lines to Be Redrawn

Over the holiday break, the US District Court of Western Michigan ruled that Michigan's new Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission violated the equal protection rights of black voters when it undertook a unique remapping plan for the city of Detroit and nearby suburbs. The decision ultimately stated that the Commission overwhelmingly drew lines on the basis of race and denied black voters proper representation. A federal judicial panel ordered the Commission to redraw six Senate districts and seven House districts.

Initially, under the ruling, the following districts must be redrawn:

Senate districts: 1, 3, 6, 8, 10 and 11.

House districts: 1, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12 and 14

The redraw of these House seats will likely affect several neighboring districts like: 4, 8, 13, 57, 58, 61 and 62. Districts 57, 58, 61 and 62 are all key swing districts that will impact partisan control of the House.

The ripple effect in the Senate will be even greater, with districts 2, 4, 5, 7, 9 and 12 all potentially affected. Districts 4, 9, 11 and 12 are all critical to Senate control.

In a later statement from the court, they have decided to issue a formal opinion related to the Senate maps at a later date, but the Commission is to begin redrawing at least the House maps by Feb 2nd. This allows for more time for those districts as the Senate is not up for election until 2026. The federal court did mandate that the Commission work with two special masters during the redrawing process. The Independent Redistricting Commission has appealed this decision to the US Supreme Court and is awaiting a decision, but in the meantime they have already begun their work on redrawing the maps.