



## Legislative Vice President Report, May 30, 2015

By Mary Pollock, Legislative Vice President

### Legislative VP Duties and Actions

Michigan NOW's Vice President is also the registered lobbyist for the organization. I represent Michigan NOW's position on proposed legislation to legislators, executive branch officials, and the public. To do this I daily read or listen to many sources of information about our issues and what is happening in the legislature and Congress, the Governor's office and occasionally the courts.

I testify orally and in writing, attend hearings where I put in cards expressing our support, opposition or neutrality, listen to testimony, research issues, call staffers or legislators to gather information or express our position and interact with other organizational representatives such as Planned Parenthood and the ACLU of Michigan.

I regularly attend the Michigan Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Treatment and Prevention Board, the funding agency for most of the DV/SA centers around the state. I represent Michigan NOW with the Michigan Equal Pay Day Coalition, serving as one of the three coordinators of it. I represent Michigan NOW on Mi Lead (a new women's rights organization coalition), with the pro-choice coalition, with the Progressive Women's Caucus, and with the redistricting collaborative. I serve on the Michigan NOW PAC and assist the PAC Administrator with her work.

Our written testimony is posted on the Michigan NOW Website and there is a bill status report there as well. This year Michigan NOW purchased a subscription to the MIRS daily news service which helps considerably in this work.

### Radio Stories

Michigan NOW subscribes to the Michigan News Connection, a news story generating service with a professional radio story producer assigned to Michigan. It always features an interview with

someone. The stories are sent to radio and TV stations across the state and nation. Typically we have about 300,000 listeners to the radio stations that pick up our stories.

We buy 8 stories a year. During the last subscription period we published stories on the right to breastfeed in public places; the new Mi Lead women's rights coalition; paid sick leave; equal pay day; faith leaders oppose license to discriminate bill; women sought for law enforcement roles; the pistol licensing bill and domestic violence; and Michigan companies fighting the birth control mandate.

### Facebook

Michigan NOW News, an e-mail news service through Yahoo Groups for Michigan NOW members only, is no longer being issued. Readers are advised to Friend Michigan NOW's Facebook page where I post practically daily (sometimes live from a hearing with a picture!) about state and federal legislative issues and articles about interesting women's rights issues from many different sources. We now have 1360 Likes and growing.

### 98<sup>th</sup> Michigan Legislature

The November 2014 election produced a more conservative Michigan Legislature, not good news for women's rights issues for the 2015-2016 session. Over one-third are new legislators because of term limits.

In the 110-member House, the Democrats lost 4 seats including the seats held by pro-choicers Theresa Abed (Grand Ledge) and Colleen Lamonte (Montague). There are now 63 Republicans and 47 Dems in the 110 member House, including 26 women (16 Dems, 10 Republicans) and 84 men. All the Republicans, including the women, are anti-

choice joined by at least two Dem men (Darany - Dearborn and Kosowski - Westland).

In the 38-member Senate, there is one less Democrat so the Republicans control the chamber 27 to 11. There are still only 4 women (3 Republicans, 1 Dem) with the noticeable absence of Democratic Senate Leader Gretchen Whitmer, who was termed out. Again, all Republicans are anti-choice giving them more than the 2/3 needed to override vetoes or put measures on the ballot.

A very bright spot is the further development of the Progressive Women's Caucus (formerly the Democratic Legislative Women's Caucus) made up predominantly of progressive legislators, staffers, and organizations. Michigan NOW is an organizational member. It is ably led by Rep. Winnie Brinks (D-Grand Rapids) with Task Forces dedicated to Women's Health, Pay Equity, and Economic Security.

### **Bills That Are Moving**

At this writing 120 bills or resolutions have been introduced that Michigan NOW is following. Twenty-seven of them have seen action of some kind including two which have been signed into law – PA 3 and 4 to abolish county gun boards and make it easier to get a concealed pistol permit.

**Welfare Reduction Due to Child Truancy** – HB 4041 would punish a whole family with reduced welfare benefits if a child in the household under 16 is truant from school. This is the current policy of the Department of Human Services. The bill has passed the House and Senate with immediate effect and awaits the Governor's signature. **Contact the Governor at (517) 373-3400 and urge a veto of this overly punitive method of dealing with truancy.**

**License To Discriminate Bills** - The license to discriminate bills, HB 4188, 4189, and 4190, await action by the Senate after being approved by the full House and the Senate Families, Seniors and Human Services Committee. These bills allow religiously-affiliated child placement agencies to discriminate against potential adoptive or foster parents based on

the sincerely held religious beliefs of the child-placing agency. This would exclude LGBT, divorced, single, or unmarried couples from eligibility to foster or adopt children by over 40 percent of the child-placing agencies in Michigan.

Michigan NOW opposed these bills in committee and urged all House members in a letter to vote no on them. **Contact your Michigan State Senator to urge a no vote.**

**Choose Life License Plate Bill** - The Michigan Senate has approved SB 84, a Choose Life license plate bill. It would divert \$25 from the proceeds of buying the plate to a Right To Life controlled fund. 29 other states and Washington, D.C. that offer a "Choose Life" license plate. Sales in these jurisdictions have raised more than \$21 million nationwide, indicating that there would be considerable demand for the plate in Michigan and significant money raised for anti-choice messaging and organizations.

I testified orally against this bill on Michigan NOW's behalf in Committee, suggesting various amendments to make the bill more even-handed and actually prevent unintended pregnancies, the leading cause of abortions. This sparked quite a dialogue with the Chair of the Committee unlike others' testimony. The bill is now in the House Transportation Committee.

**Local Law Preemption** – HB 4052 would prohibit local units of government from establishing mandatory wage, benefit, and leave time requirements. An earlier version of the bill also prohibited stronger civil rights protections than federal or state law, potentially invalidating LGBT protections in 38 Michigan communities. The remaining bill would prevent cities from adopting paid sick leave or higher minimum wage requirements, for instance.

Michigan NOW put in written testimony opposing this bill but because of the demonstrations in and out of the hearing room, I was not allowed in the hearing room to put in a card requesting time to testify. It was reported out of committee along party lines.

The full House has passed the bill and it awaits a hearing in the Senate Michigan Competitiveness Committee.

**Michigan RFRA** – SB 4 is Michigan’s version of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act that created quite a stir in Indiana recently when major corporations objected to it. SB 4 would create a strict scrutiny standard for government to justify enforcement of any law affecting an organization with a sincerely held religious belief differing from the law. It gives religiously affiliated as well as private companies protection from civil rights laws.

The bill had a well-attended hearing in the Senate Judiciary Committee but it turns out two Committee Republicans oppose the measure so there were not the votes to report it out. The bill might have the votes in the full Senate to discharge it from the Committee however.

**For More Information** - For detail on the bills mentioned here and to **find your legislators**, go to [michnow.org](http://michnow.org) or [michiganlegislature.org](http://michiganlegislature.org).