

Ask Your Candidates

Taxes and revenues

1 Since the 1970s, the federal Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) has been considered a significant poverty reduction tool that encourages individuals to work. In 2006, Michigan created its own state-level EITC based on 20% of the federal tax credit. The governor and state lawmakers scaled back the Michigan EITC to 6% in 2011.

Would you support fully or partially restoring the state-level EITC to 10-20% of the federal tax credit?

2 Michigan is one of only seven states that continues to rely on a flat income tax rather than a graduated income tax, like the federal income tax. States with graduated income tax structures tax at higher rates as income rises, making it a more modern and equitable system.

Would you support reforming Michigan's income tax structure from a flat income tax rate to a graduated one?

3 Sales taxes are typically considered to be the most regressive type of tax, costing individuals earning low wages a larger proportion of their income compared to wealthier individuals. Expanding the sales tax to apply to services can serve to both increase revenue and make the sales tax less regressive. Even still, the sales tax will remain regressive, which is the reason some states offer sales tax credits to provide relief for individuals who earn the least.

Would you support extending the state's sales tax to services with a sales tax credit for filers with low wages?

4 While Michigan's actual tax revenues have grown year after year, when adjusted for inflation General Fund revenues are below 1968 levels and the School Aid Fund is below levels set in 1995. State lawmakers have continually pulled funds away from general state coffers to fund specific programs, such as road funding and the personal property tax repeal reimbursements. At the same time, the costs of providing Michigan residents the most basic services have grown, increasing pressure on our budget. This has meant that programs have had to be funded at the expense of others, furthering Michigan's disinvestment in its communities, education and other services on which its residents and businesses rely.

Would you support exploring new revenue sources or expanding existing ones, for example eliminating outdated and unnecessary tax exemptions or credits, to fund vital state services?

5 Michigan's personal income tax contributes nearly \$10 billion to our state coffers. It provides nearly one-third of our total state revenues, more than 1 in 5 of every state dollar for schools and more than \$7 out of every \$10 of our state General Fund. Some lawmakers have proposed steep cuts to—or systematically rolling back to 0—our state income tax rate. This would put at risk billions of dollars that are currently used to invest in our schools, public universities, community colleges, infrastructure, healthcare and public safety. On top of limiting our ability to invest in the things we all rely on, income tax rate cuts disproportionately benefit

high-income earners while providing little to families with low incomes.

Would you oppose efforts to significantly cut or roll back Michigan's income tax rate?

6 A triggered income tax rate reduction was implemented as part of the 2015 road funding plan. Starting in 2023, income tax rates will reduce if state General Fund revenues grow faster than the rate of inflation (the law puts in place a General Fund cap that is calculated by adjusting base year revenues by 1.425 times the cumulative inflation; General Fund growth above this cap would trigger an income tax rate reduction). Triggered

rate reductions may ultimately hurt Michigan's economy, budget and residents because we do not know whether they will be affordable once triggered, they can trigger during economic downturns or other times when revenues are badly needed, they primarily benefit the top 1% of taxpayers, and they enable policymakers to claim credit for cutting taxes while avoiding accountability for the consequences.

Would you support repealing the triggered income tax cuts and instead look at tax policies that encourage economic growth and help families with low incomes make ends meet, such as a graduated income tax or restoration of the Earned Income Tax Credit?

Help for struggling people and families

7 Michigan provides families with low incomes a small amount of heating assistance to allow them to qualify for additional federal food assistance ("heat and eat" policy). This has allowed these families to qualify for an additional \$76 in food assistance per month.

Do you favor the continued support of the "heat and eat" policy that allows families with low incomes to receive additional food assistance?

8 Given the high cost of child care, without assistance many parents find themselves in the difficult position of relying on unstable or even unsafe arrangements for their children or placing their jobs in jeopardy. And, we now know that high-quality child care can help children develop and be more ready for preschool and ultimately for school success. The number of families receiving child care assistance has dropped dramatically in Michigan in part because of state-set eligibility rules and because payments to providers are low.

Would you support the use of state and available federal funds to expand child care subsidies to more families with low incomes, increase payments to providers and improve the quality of child care?

9 Food assistance (through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) helps families experiencing financial difficulties purchase food,

helping parents feed and provide for their children without disrupting their lives. In 2012, Michigan passed a law that required the state to limit the amount of assets a person could have in order to qualify for food assistance. This was implemented just as the state was exiting a decade-long recession and at a time when most states (about two-thirds plus D.C.) were eliminating their own asset tests. This penalizes families that have saved for emergencies, their retirements or their children's futures by requiring them to spend their assets in order to receive food assistance.

Would you support legislation or policy changes that either increase the asset limit on food assistance or completely eliminate the requirement, joining most other states in the nation in doing so?

10 Children in families that must rely temporarily on state income assistance live in increasingly deep poverty as a result of the very low payments provided by the state (a maximum of \$492/month for a family of three). Michigan provides a one-time payment of \$156 for all school-age children in families receiving FIP so children can start school with at least a decent set of clothes, but with current prices this doesn't carry children far into the school year.

Would you support an increase in the annual school clothing allowance to ensure that children can purchase the clothes, shoes and overcoats needed for school?

Addressing child poverty, education, and abuse and neglect

11 More than half (55.9%) of Michigan third-graders did not demonstrate proficiency in English Language Arts (reading and writing) in 2017. There are significant disparities in outcomes by income, race and ethnicity with higher rates of children of color and children in families with low incomes scoring “not proficient.” Beginning in school year 2019-2020, state law will require that third-graders who are not proficient in English Language Arts, as measured by the state test, could be required to repeat the grade; however, if the student is proficient in other subjects, then instruction for those may be given in a fourth-grade classroom. Alternate tests and portfolios may be used to document reading skills and some good cause exemptions are provided; however, the school superintendent would make the final decision. The law also outlines interventions and steps that schools must take to improve third-grade reading proficiency.

Would you support adequate funding to support implementation of the law with targeted efforts in areas with the most need?

12 Child poverty in Michigan has escalated by almost 60% over the last 15 years. More than 1 of every 5 children in the state lives in a family with income below the poverty level: \$19,000 for a family of three and \$24,000 for a family of four. Several policy initiatives to alleviate child poverty have been suggested, such as reinstating the state Earned Income Tax Credit to 20% of the federal EITC, expanding adult education and other workforce development

opportunities, and raising the child care subsidy and eligibility so parents earning low wages can have access to child care.

Would you support any of these initiatives?

13 Michigan has been a leader in investments in preschool programs for 4-year-olds, but funding for families with infants and toddlers living in poverty or near poverty has declined—despite scientific evidence that the first three years of life are when children’s brains are growing most rapidly, affecting their lifelong development, learning and achievement.

Would you support additional state funds for proven programs for parents of very young children, including home visiting, parenting programs and Early On?

14 The rate of children confirmed as victims of abuse and neglect has steadily risen over recent years with a rate increase of over 30% between 2010 and 2016. Children of color and young children are at higher risk of being confirmed as victims and being placed in out-of-home care due to abuse or neglect. The trauma experienced can impact child development and health outcomes.

Would you support state investment to prevent child abuse and neglect and comprehensive strategies that have shown to reduce abuse and neglect, including an expansion of home visiting programs?

Flint water crisis

15 In April 2014, Flint switched its drinking water source to the highly corrosive Flint River, and a decision to not properly treat the water caused lead to be leached from the pipes into the water. This resulted in thousands of Flint residents, including children, being poisoned by the water they drink daily. Unfortunately, lead poisoning has no cure and all Flint residents, especially children, will require lifelong services to help detect and treat developmental and educational delays and health problems caused by lead.

Furthermore, lead continues to be a problem in almost all of our communities, either through lead pipes or lead in paint in older homes, and it needs to be remedied statewide.

Would you support continuing to provide long-term funding to help residents affected by the Flint water crisis? Would you also support looking at a statewide solution to abate existing lead, prevent future poisoning and provide services to those already affected?

Jobs and the economy

16 Workers who are laid off, or who work in low-paying jobs, can often improve their financial situation by building skills and getting recognized credentials. This is especially important for those raising children. However, Michigan's financial aid grants are not available to workers who have been out of high school more than 10 years who wish to get a degree from a community college or public university. The Part-Time Independent Student Grant, which was discontinued in 2009, helped these workers go back to school and get a degree. There is support for this grant in both parties, and there have been recent bipartisan attempts to reinstate it in the budget at a cost affordable to the state (\$2-4 million).

Would you support the reinstatement of the Part-Time Independent Student Grant to help older workers get the skills they need for family-supporting jobs?

17 Although Michigan's economy and unemployment rate have improved, there are many workers still seeking work, and there continue to be businesses that for some reason or another face difficulty and need to lay off workers. Yet, Michigan is one of a very few states that allows unemployed workers to receive up to only 20 weeks of Unemployment Insurance (UI) while they look for jobs—nearly all other states have a maximum of 26 allowable

weeks of UI. While many or most unemployed workers find another job within 20 weeks of becoming unemployed, it is important that they have additional weeks if they do not, to prevent further family disruption.

Would you support reinstating the 26-week maximum for unemployed workers to receive UI while they look for work?

18 More than 1.7 million (44%) Michigan workers cannot take time off with pay when they or one of their children are ill. Becoming sick puts these workers in the difficult position of having to either stay home and lose wages, or go to work and risk becoming sicker and exposing coworkers (and sometimes the public) to illness. Parents feel pressure to forgo needed medical care for themselves and their children and to send their child to school sick because they cannot miss work to care for them. An earned sick leave law similar to what several other states and cities have would help Michigan workers by requiring most employers to bank sick time for their workers based on the number of hours they have worked.

Would you support a Michigan earned sick leave law to help hardworking employees and their families recuperate and get the medical care they need without losing needed wages?

Healthcare

19 The Trump administration has announced that it will strongly consider—and has already approved—some waivers that would allow states to implement Medicaid work requirements. Michigan is currently considering a proposal to do this. We have also seen states request waivers related to drug testing Medicaid enrollees and stricter time limits.

Would you oppose proposals that limit the ability of our most vulnerable residents to receive healthcare?

20 Under the Affordable Care Act, states were allowed to expand Medicaid coverage to working people with low incomes, many of whom may not previously have had healthcare coverage. Michigan chose to expand coverage in 2014, resulting in over 650,000 people gaining coverage. The Healthy Michigan Plan can be credited with drops in uncompensated care in our hospitals, the creation of jobs, additional tax revenue and saving the state money. Most importantly, it has allowed people to see a doctor and has improved their health and their ability to get and keep a job.

Will you continue to support the Healthy Michigan Plan?

Immigration

21 The Children’s Health Insurance Program Reauthorization Act (CHIPRA) allows states to provide CHIP (MICHild) and Medicaid coverage to eligible lawful resident children and pregnant women (generally, green card holders who would otherwise face a five-year wait for coverage). Michigan does currently cover pregnant women for maternity and labor and delivery services regardless of status through its Maternity Outpatient Medical Services (MOMS) program, so the CHIPRA option would primarily benefit children currently excluded from Medicaid and MICHild. The state could choose to exercise this option by amendment to its state Medicaid plan.

Would you support exercising the state’s CHIPRA option to provide MICHild and Medicaid coverage to eligible lawful resident children and explore legislation to cover all children regardless of status?

22 Naturalization is an important step in immigrant integration and is a process that thousands of our foreign-born neighbors take part in each year. U.S. citizenship presents an abundance of opportunities for aspiring Americans and has a positive ripple effect on our economy. As of 2015, approximately 300,000 immigrants in Michigan were potentially eligible for U.S. citizenship, yet almost half (48.9%) were not yet naturalized citizens. And despite the high volume of potentially eligible immigrants, there is a shortage of affordable citizenship preparation courses in communities across the state.

Would you support funding for community-based citizenship classes through a \$5 million per year immigrant fund?

23 For immigrants and refugees, English language proficiency is a key to economic mobility and access to opportunities and resources within communities. According to the latest data available, approximately 40% of immigrants 5 years of age and older residing in Michigan speak English “less than ‘very well’” compared to just 3.3% of the native-born population. Community-based English as a Second Language (ESL) programs are an effective strategy for addressing low levels of English language proficiency among immigrants and refugees and are a powerful tool for social and economic integration for these communities.

Would you support funding for community-based ESL programs through a \$5 million per year immigrant fund?

24 Current Michigan law requires all applicants for driver’s licenses and state identification to provide proof of “legal presence” that must be verified by the Department of State. Lack of access to driver’s licenses means that many immigrants and citizens who cannot prove citizenship cannot obtain insurance or properly register their vehicles. Many immigrants who are long-term residents and heads of household are deported when they are stopped while driving to work, school or the grocery store and are arrested for driving without a license. U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement then places a “hold” on these residents and detains them. Access to driver’s licenses would have a major positive impact on the social and economic life of immigrant communities and other Michigan residents who are currently excluded from legal driving.

Would you support state IDs and driver’s licenses for all, regardless of immigration status?

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Criminal justice reform

25 Michigan is one of five states that automatically charges 17-year-olds as adults in the criminal justice system. In nearly every other aspect of the law, including voting, buying a lottery ticket or signing a contract, 18 years of age is the legal requirement, yet 17-year-old youth must be prosecuted, convicted and sentenced as adults in criminal courts in Michigan. Research on development shows that 17-year-olds are not adults and are better served in juvenile justice systems.

Would you support raising the age of juvenile jurisdiction to age 18?

26 People of color are arrested, detained and incarcerated at higher rates in Michigan, as well as around the country, though national statistics demonstrate that higher crime rates do not account for this disparity. While only comprising 14% of Michigan's population, African Americans comprise over half, or 53%, of the state's prison population, and they are detained at a rate more than six times higher than white people.

Do you support training for police, judges and others in the criminal justice system, along with the use of a race equity policy tool, to expand understanding of the disparate impact of the system and its policies on communities of color?

27 An estimated 20-25% of prisoners have been diagnosed with severe mental illness and many more with mental health problems. Nine of every 10 prisoners with severe mental illness also suffer from substance use disorders, and upwards of 65% of those with mental health symptoms do not receive treatment. Michigan has recognized the need for alternatives to incarceration for those suffering from behavioral health issues by implementing mental health courts and substance abuse programs for those serving time and on probation and parole.

Do you support diversion programs and improved mental health and substance abuse treatment programs within prison facilities to expand access for incarcerated people?