

# 2024 ANNUAL REPORT

## ALLIANCE TAKES ACTION AGAINST HARMFUL IMPACTS OF EARNED SICK TIME & WAGE LAWS

Following a Michigan Supreme Court ruling earlier in the year, business leaders across the state are sounding the alarm on a series of proposed bills that could significantly disrupt small businesses and economic growth. The Alliance has remained laser-focused on advocating for amendments to the Michigan Earned Sick Time Act (ESTA) and preserving the tipped wage credit.

The Northern Michigan Chamber Alliance’s Director of Government Relations, Haley Bennett, voiced the concerns of Alliance members and the businesses they represent to UpNorthLive. “We’re hearing overwhelmingly from our hospitality industry, including the restaurant owners and the workers themselves, that they don’t want this change.”

“Our business owners agree that this is not a partisan issue – without action, there will be devastating effects on the sustainability and growth of their businesses, which will cascade to the individuals and families dependent on their success,” added Caitlyn Stark, president of Cadillac Chamber.

The Alliance demands legislative amendments to safeguard Michigan’s small rural businesses, seasonal employers, and tipped workers including these actions:

1. **Address The Actual Need:** Most of our regional employers already provide paid time off (PTO) and should not be penalized or forced to reduce their employee benefits to comply with this legislation, which cause an enormous administrative burden. A simple solution that addresses the actual issue would be a mandate that employers provide their employees with a minimum number of hours of paid time off to be used as they wish and exempt those who meet the requirements. Provide a clear, minimum threshold that employers can meet or exceed.
2. **Exempt Seasonal Employees:** Given their unique operational model, businesses using seasonal employees should be exempt from paid sick leave mandates
3. **Preserve the Tip Credit:** Essential for the sustainability of the service industry, the tip credit should be maintained to prevent increased labor costs that could lead to job losses or closures. Recent surveys show that 83% of servers do not want this change.

Alliance Partners have also been hard at work educating their members about the changes that are scheduled to take effect early this year. In addition to compiling a list of helpful resources, the Alliance hosted a webinar in partnership with Rehmann featuring an in-depth exploration of the Michigan Earned Sick Time Act and its implications for employers in Michigan. In this session, Elizabeth Williams, Principal of HR Solutions at Rehmann discussed the key aspects of the law, highlighted essential policy adjustments that Michigan employers should consider, and examined the potential repercussions of non-compliance.

“Northern Michigan’s small businesses are disproportionately affected by the implementation of these changes,” stated Alliance Chair and president and CEO of the Petoskey Regional Chamber of Commerce, Nikki Devitt, in a press release. “Our small businesses, especially those in the hospitality industry, call on our legislators to take action to ensure these businesses can compete for talent and thrive in our regional economies.”



Caitlyn Stark, Alliance Vice-Chair, joined Acuitas’ Anthony Antonelli at the Michigan House Select Committee for Protecting Michigan Employees and Small Businesses.



# YEAR IN REVIEW

## DELIVERING ON AFFORDABLE HOUSING PRIORITIES

Governor Whitmer joined Senator Damoose, Rep. Coffia, Rep. Roth, local education leaders, and Alliance partners at Blair Elementary School in Traverse City in August. The event was in celebration of a new housing development for school employees, the first of its kind in Michigan, that received \$5 million in the state's 2025 budget. The state funding will contribute to the first phase of the project, which will include 72 affordable housing units with tenant priority for K-12 school employees.



The Northern Michigan Chamber Alliance joined elected officials and educators for the announcement near Traverse City.

The Alliance also applauds the opening of Annika Place, a new 53-unit affordable housing community located in Traverse City. The \$14.7 million investment was made possible in part by the Michigan State Housing Development Authority. Traverse Connect President Warren Call is proud to represent the Alliance on the Michigan State Housing Development Authority board where he advocates for the policy and funding needs of northern Michigan. The successful debut of Annika Place exemplifies the strength of the Alliance's unified voice in Lansing on the issues critical to northern Michiganders.



Annika Place

## BULLY PULPIT PREVIEWS ELECTION SEASON

Once again, the Alliance invited two of the state's leading political experts to size up some of the top state and national political races for the annual Bully Pulpit event in Traverse City. More than 100 attendees attended the City Opera House event to hear campaign background and election projections from consultants John Sellek, the founder and CEO of Harbor Strategic, and Adrian Hemond, head of Grassroots Midwest. The forum was moderated by Kyle Melinn, editor and vice president of Michigan Information & Research Service (MIRS). All three panelists noted several significant changes in this year's race compared to historical trends, including fundraising efforts and voter demographics.



Alliance partners joined Kyle Melinn, Adrian Hemond, and John Sellek and sponsors, Comfort Keepers, DTE and ITC Holdings Corp.



Alliance Chair, Nikki Devitt; Alliance Vice Chair, Caitlyn Stark; Traverse Connect's Warren Call; Charlevoix Chamber's Sarah Van Horn; and Alliance Director of Government Relations; Haley Bennett at the Bully Pulpit event.

## CHIEF GROWTH OFFICER VISITS TRAVERSE CITY

Michigan's Chief Growth Officer, Hilary Doe, was hosted by Alliance partners in Traverse City in July to learn about northern Michigan's blue tech economy. During the visit, she met with local company Lilypad Solar Boats, which are designed, engineered, and manufactured in Michigan, and enjoyed seeing the EV technology in action. Afterward, local stakeholders gathered for a roundtable discussion focused on the freshwater economy, entrepreneurship, innovation, and strategies to attract and attain talent.

WaveLumina, a northern Michigan-based startup, demonstrates their PFAS technology for Hillary Doe, chief growth officer for the State of Michigan.



## ALLIANCE WELCOMES NEW MEMBERS NLEA AND DEVELOP IOSCO



The Alliance is proud to welcome our newest Partner, Develop Iosco, and Supporting Partner, Northern Lakes Economic Alliance. After joining the Alliance earlier in the year, Develop Iosco leveled up to Partner in the fourth quarter. Develop Iosco serves as a convener and facilitator for economic development activities within Iosco County related to business development to improve the quality of life for current and new residents. The Northern Lakes Economic Alliance (NLEA) is a public/private non-profit organization serving Antrim, Charlevoix, Cheboygan, and Emmet Counties. The NLEA works directly with local units of government on infrastructure projects, facilitates local company growth and expansion, and assists many local companies on a wide range of issues that help retain existing jobs and create new jobs. The Alliance is pleased to integrate both NLEA and Develop Iosco into our footprint and to extend our advocacy service into these new communities.



## ALLIANCE ENGAGES IN ELECTION YEAR

Members were busy during election season, engaging in events, hosting candidate forums, and building resources to give voters the opportunity to learn straight from their local candidates on issues most important to them. Moderated by the Alliance's Director of Government Relations, Haley Bennett, the Manistee Area Chamber of Commerce hosted the first forum on September 12. Traverse Connect hosted a Candidate forum for House Districts 103 and 104 in Traverse City on September 24, followed closely by the Benzie Area Chamber of Commerce Candidates' Breakfast on September 27. The Petoskey Regional Chamber of Commerce and Charlevoix Area Chamber of Commerce co-hosted a General Election Candidate Forum on September 30. These forums provide a nonpartisan opportunity to engage with candidates and discuss key challenges facing our region. The Alliance also compiled a Voter Education Guide featuring questionnaires from the candidates for state House of Representatives and U.S. House and Senate that align with our key policy priorities.

Following several competitive races across the state, these are some key takeaways from the 2024 election impacting northern Michigan. In the federal race, Elissa Slotkin defeated Mike Rogers to become Michigan's next United States Senator. Notably, all Northern Caucus incumbents were re-elected except Jenn Hill and Neil Friske. The Alliance welcomes Representative Parker Fairbairn (107th House District) and Representative Karl Bohnak (109th House District). As a result of the election, Michigan Republicans now have a 58-52 majority in the House.

## ALLIANCE BUDGET WINS FOR FY25

After a year of diligent advocacy, the Alliance was pleased to see many of the budget priorities for rural northern Michigan receive significant funding in the fiscal year 2025 budget. This budget brings transformative opportunities for businesses across the state with substantial investments in infrastructure, education, and workforce development.



- \$5M for Educator Housing in Grand Traverse County to support a mixed-income development of at least 144 units for school personnel
- \$500 million for the Strategic Outreach and

Reserve (SOAR) Fund to continue attracting transformational investments in clean energy, semiconductors, mobility, and other industries

- \$100 million for affordable housing projects
- \$2.5 million for the Office of Rural Prosperity
- \$60 million for the Innovation Fund, designed to invest in scalable startups and help launch hundreds of new Michigan-based companies
- \$50 million continued funding for the Revitalization and Placemaking Program
- \$15 million additional funding for the Pure Michigan Campaign with up to \$10 million in potential additional local and private revenue
- \$45 million for the Going PRO Talent Fund
- \$45.5 million for Talent and Growth to address workforce needs and population growth including economic assistance for businesses locating or expanding in Michigan
- \$30 million additional investment for the ongoing costs of the Michigan Achievement Scholarship to provide a pathway to community college with tuition guaranteed
- \$52 million continued support for Michigan Reconnect
- \$20M Increase for the Tuition Incentive Program

# ALLIANCE WELCOMES NEW DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENT RELATIONS



In early February, the Northern Michigan Chamber Alliance welcomed Haley Bennett to the organization as its Director of Government Relations. Haley also serves in the same role for Traverse Connect. Haley has spent her career in advocacy and policy work in Hawaii and Michigan. “Haley’s addition to Alliance brings a deep understanding of the pivotal issues facing northern Michigan businesses,” stated Nikki Devitt, chair of the Northern Michigan Chamber Alliance. “From attracting a talented workforce to ensuring the ongoing success of our regional businesses and maximizing competitiveness on local, state, and national stages, Haley’s expertise will undoubtedly bolster our efforts.” Haley obtained a Bachelor’s and Master’s in Social Work from Michigan State University and has been living in Traverse City since 2019.

# PARTNERS REPRESENT NORTHERN MICHIGAN AT MACKINAC POLICY CONFERENCE

The NMCA once again joined business and government leaders from across the state at the Detroit Regional Chamber’s Annual Mackinac Policy Conference. Partners had opportunities to engage with business and policy leaders on key items, including the state budget, new legislation designed to improve economic development, and state housing initiatives. Alliance Partner, Warren Call, joined Chief Executive Officer and Executive Director of MSHDA, Amy Hovey, alongside other MSHDA partners for the Governor’s announcement of her new housing goals. While attending the conference, Partners engaged in productive discussions with U.S. Rep. and Senate Candidate Elissa Slotkin, U.S. Senator Gary Peters, Dr. Timothy Boring with Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, Michigan State University President Kevin Guskiewicz, and Northern Michigan University President Tessman.



Photo courtesy of Bridge Michigan.

## ALLIANCE CONTINUES STATE OF THE STATE TRADITION



Alliance Partners traveled to Lansing in January to host a lunch with Gov. Whitmer, Lt. Gov. Gilchrist, and Executive Office staff before the annual State of the State Address. Partners also hosted a Northern Caucus Legislative Kickoff Reception and met with legislators to

discuss key 2024 policy priorities.

## INVEST UP’S MARTY FITTANTE APPOINTED TO MACKINAC BRIDGE AUTHORITY

The Alliance applauds Supporting Partner and CEO of InvestUP Marty Fittante for his appointment to the Mackinac Bridge Authority by the Governor. The mission of the Mackinac Bridge Authority is to preserve and maintain the State of Michigan’s single largest asset and one of the world’s leading suspension bridges to provide safe, pleasurable, and expedient passage over the Straits of Mackinac for economic benefit and improved quality of life. Marty’s term began in 2024 and will last for six years.

# ALLIANCE MEMBERS

## PARTNERS



## SUPPORTING PARTNERS



## ASSOCIATE PARTNERS



# PROUD PARTNERS OF THE NORTHERN MICHIGAN CHAMBER ALLIANCE

