

## POLICY CONFERENCE BREAKS ATTENDANCE RECORD

The 2025 Northern Michigan Policy Conference gathered key business leaders and policymakers from across the state and maxed out registration at 500 attendees. With Governor Whitmer as the keynote speaker, the event also included special remarks from Lt. Governor Garlin Gilchrist and Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan in addition to virtual remarks from Speaker of the House Matt Hall, Senator Peters, and Senator Slotkin.

The three panel discussions covered statewide economic development strategy, the talent continuum, rural development, and state department updates and included the following special guests: CEO of the Michigan Economic Development Corporation Quentin Messer; CEO of Networks Northwest Janie McNabb; Senior Chief Deputy Director of the Department of Labor and Opportunity Jonathan Smith; CEO of Invest UP Marty Fittante; Acting State Director of USDA Rural Development Val Handy; Director of the Office of Rural Prosperity Sarah Lucas; Director of MDARD Tim Boring; State Budget Director Jen Flood; CEO & Executive Director of MSHDA Amy Hovey; Senators Mallory McMorro and John Damoose; and Representatives Betsy Coffia, Curt Vanderwall, Parker Fairbairn, and John Roth.

The Alliance was pleased to present the Lifetime Achievement Award in person to U.S. Senator Debbie Stabenow for her leadership and transformative work supporting small businesses, farmers, and the economy of northern Michigan.

Other legislators in attendance included State Senator Michelle Hoytenga; and State Representatives Joseph Fox, and Tom Kunse.



Governor Whitmer announced the new Employer-Assisted Housing Fund at the Northern Michigan Policy Conference.

### GOVERNOR SIGNS INNOVATION FUND BILLS

Governor Whitmer signed the bipartisan Michigan Innovation Fund bills on January 13, creating a \$60 million investment designed to provide long-term investments in the state's startup companies and entrepreneurial ecosystem.

"The Michigan Innovation Fund will bring historic support to Michigan's startup economy, including northwest Michigan's nationally recognized startup and entrepreneurial community," said Warren Call, president and CEO of Traverse Connect. "Innovative startups in Michigan are developing scalable businesses that will thrive and grow thanks to this important investment."

This marks the first major program for entrepreneurs, founders, and funds in over a decade.

# ESTA TESTIMONY ON BEHALF OF NORTHERN MICHIGAN BUSINESS

Director of Government Relations for the Alliance, Haley Bennett, testified on February 11 to the Senate Regulatory Affairs Committee regarding ESTA SB 15. She urged the committee to consider common-sense reforms, continue negotiations with the House, and find a bipartisan solution that would limit the bill's burden on the business community.

"Small businesses are the backbone of our community. We're representing nonprofits, hospitals, and many different industries that are very concerned at this time," she stated. "We're encouraged to hear the negotiations are ongoing and just encourage you to consider working with your colleagues in the House and both Chambers to come up with a bipartisan solution in a way that will serve residents of this state."



Watch Haley's testimony to the committee via the Michigan Senate recording [here](#).

## CONGRATULATIONS TO CARMEN KOTT & CHRISTOPHER GERMAIN

The Alliance welcomed a new partner as the Manistee Area Chamber of Commerce named Carmen Kott as its new President and CEO. Kott contributes her deep familiarity with the Chamber's operations and mission, and the Alliance is pleased to welcome her unique experience, energy, and vision into the group.

The Alliance is also pleased to acknowledge the CEO of Lake Superior Community Partnership, Christopher Germain, as the new Vice Chair of the Northern Michigan Chamber Alliance. With his proven leadership, dedication to the region, and deep understanding of northern Michigan's needs, Christopher is poised to make significant contributions in advancing the Alliance's mission.



Michigan Earned Sick Time & Wage Laws Webinar

**Michigan Earned Sick Time & Wage Laws Webinar**

JANUARY 22  
10 - 11 AM

Presented by  
**Rehmann**

**PREPARING THE  
BUSINESS COMMUNITY  
FOR IMPACTS OF THE  
EARNED SICK TIME ACT**

The first quarter was dominated by a flurry of legislative action surrounding the Earned Sick Time Act (ESTA) that went into effect on February 21. Leading up to that deadline, the Alliance was hard at work advocating for much-needed adjustments to the law. They also worked to educate members across the Alliance footprint by partnering with Rehmann to present the upcoming changes and the key differences between HB 4002 and SB 15. The webinar is published on the Alliance website. The Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity also has a webinar and FAQ [here](#).



# ECONOMIC COMPETITIVENESS TESTIMONY

Alliance partners Nikki Devitt, Christopher Germain, Chris Martin, and Haley Bennett testified on behalf of all members of the Northern Michigan Chamber Alliance at the Michigan House of Representatives Economic Competitiveness Committee hearing. The compelling testimony was well received by legislators.

The presentation focused on the regional impact of Revitalization and Placemaking funding, the Office of Rural Prosperity Rural Readiness Grant, employer-assisted housing, and workforce development programs like GoingPro. The Alliance shared why year-round economies in rural and northern communities are essential



Watch the partners' testimony via [Michigan House TV here.](#)

# UP200

Alliance partners traveled to Marquette for a weekend of networking with state legislators, regional leaders, and policymakers. After two years of race cancellations, the partners were pleased to attend the UP200 race while also having meaningful conversations with the Lieutenant Governor, Jeremy Hosking, the Governor's Upper Peninsula Director, and one of our newest legislators, Representative Karl Bohnak.



# STATE OF THE STATE ADVOCACY DAYS

Alliance partners had a packed two days during the State of the State festivities. They met with regional legislators and key leaders—including Speaker Matt Hall and House Floor Leader Bryan Posthumus—to advocate for critical appropriations that will benefit northern Michigan. They also continued the annual tradition of providing lunch to the Executive Office of the Governor, a meaningful opportunity to connect and share how our Alliance is working to build a thriving economy and vibrant rural communities.

## ALLIANCE MEMBERS



## PARTNERS

## SUPPORTING PARTNERS



## ASSOCIATE PARTNERS



## PROUD PARTNERS OF THE NORTHERN MICHIGAN CHAMBER ALLIANCE



**N★RTHERN  
MICHIGAN  
CHAMBER  
ALLIANCE**

# Q1 PARTNER UPDATE

