

**2026**

# **Thriving Michigan**

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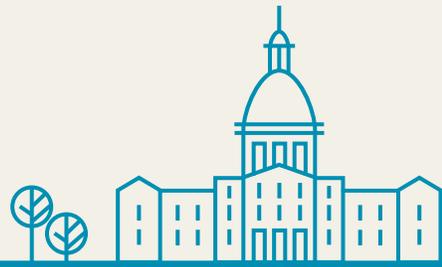
## About the League

The Michigan Municipal League is the premier statewide association representing more than 500 full-service cities, villages, and urban townships. Our members expect us to educate, advocate, and inspire their work as public servants building community wealth for their residents and stakeholders. We accomplish this by providing unmatched services in everything from professional development to executive recruitment to insurance and risk mitigation.

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**Richard Murphy, Senior Program Manager**

**Shanna Draheim, Director, Policy Research Labs**



## Benchmarking Michigan's Progress in Building Stronger Communities

*Thriving Michigan* is a series of reports that evaluates how well Michigan is fostering thriving, inclusive communities—places where people want to live, work, and build their futures. The series benchmarks the state's performance across key indicators that interconnect to drive long-term prosperity.

Each report presents a clear, data-driven snapshot of how state policies and investments are impacting one of the key indicators in Michigan communities.

### Key Indicator Actions for a Thriving Community

- Provide strong **public health and safety** systems that ensure the well-being of people living and working there.
- Prioritize **economic and financial security** for all: families, entrepreneurs, and the institutions that provide them with critical services.
- Responsibly steward **natural resources**, protecting our outdoor recreation, agriculture, and natural beauty for future generations.
- Invest in reliable, high-quality virtual and physical **infrastructure** that meets the needs of many different people in the community.
- Foster abundant **arts and cultural amenities** that entertain and enrich people's lives.
- Offer first-rate **lifelong learning** opportunities, including quality primary and secondary education institutions and informal skill and social enrichment programs.

This path to thriving communities requires a strong partnership between the State of Michigan, local governments and organizations that are in tune with local needs, and organizations that can muster the resources and policy changes needed to support the work. It also requires connections made in the minds of local leaders between parts of the whole. This publication of the compiled *Thriving Michigan* reports endeavors to facilitate those connections.

Digital versions of this report and the individual topic briefs can be found at [mml.org/thriving-communities](https://mml.org/thriving-communities)

# Thriving Michigan: Public Health and Safety



## High Quality Of Life, Lower Life Expectancy?

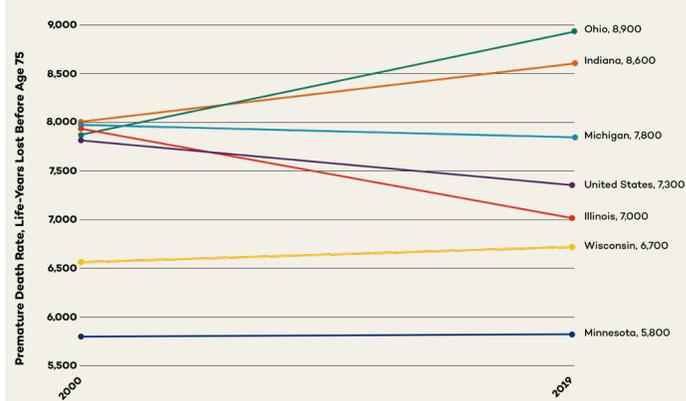
Michigan must provide strong public health and safety systems that measure up to our quality of life potential. Currently, we suffer a gap between the amenities we have to offer and the opportunity to enjoy them. The life expectancy of Michiganders at birth has consistently lagged behind the national average and that of many of our neighbors since 2000. Gains made since that year have been lost since the onset of the COVID pandemic, leaving Michiganders with a lower life expectancy in 2021 than in 2000 and nearly a full year less than the national average—76.2 years vs. 77.1. Additionally, our premature death rate is about five percent higher than the national rate.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps ironically, the AARP has noted Michigan as ranking in the top five destination states for retirement moves,<sup>2</sup> identifying our high-quality health care system, opportunities for outdoor activities, and access to fresh food as highlights—alongside our cost of living and the great sense of place in our small towns. Bringing health and life expectancy measures for Michigan at least up to the national average would support our residents in enjoying those same amenities to the fullest, and our communities in thriving.

Local government plays a front-line role in this work: Local police, fire, and EMS departments respond to emergencies, while municipalities support long-term health outcomes through construction codes, parks and recreation programs, and safe street networks.

While many communities have implemented community policing, non-police crisis response teams, crime prevention through environmental design, and other techniques to try to address crime rates, both prevention and response are hindered by Michigan’s municipal finance straitjacket. Public safety is the largest slice of municipal budgets, so reduced funding has led both to smaller departments and reduced pay and benefits. From 2002 to 2022, Michigan’s local public safety staffing numbers fell by 17 percent,<sup>4</sup> and nearly three-quarters of local law enforcement departments report recruiting challenges even to fill that reduced headcount.<sup>5</sup>

### Premature Death Rate, 2000–2019



## Violent Crime in Long-term Decline, but Still High

Michigan resumed a long-term trend of declining crime rates after a brief jump in 2020, with violent crime rates down almost 20 percent since the year 2000. However, our violent crime rate remains significantly higher than both the national average and in our neighboring states, and our rate of improvement has been slower. On property crime, Michigan fares better: FBI stats show our rates are lower than the national average and most neighboring states, and have declined faster, dropping by more than half since 2000, despite an uptick in recent years.<sup>3</sup>

### Violent Crime Rates

20%

In Michigan since 2000

50%

Higher than neighboring states

### Property Crime Rates

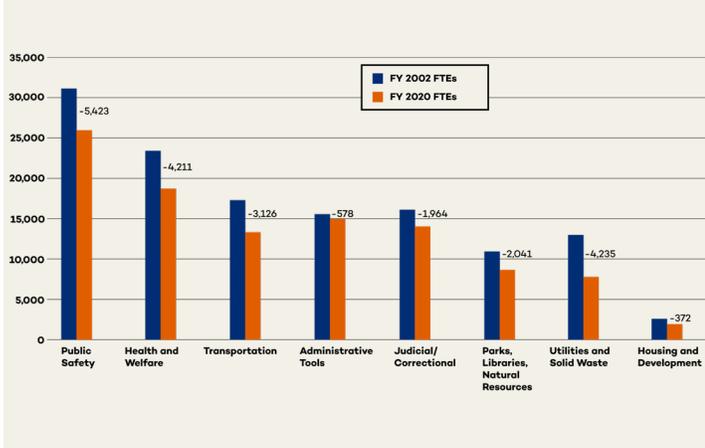
57%

In Michigan since 2000

4%

Lower than neighboring states

## Local (Municipal and County) FTEs



## Road Safety Improvements Have Stalled Out

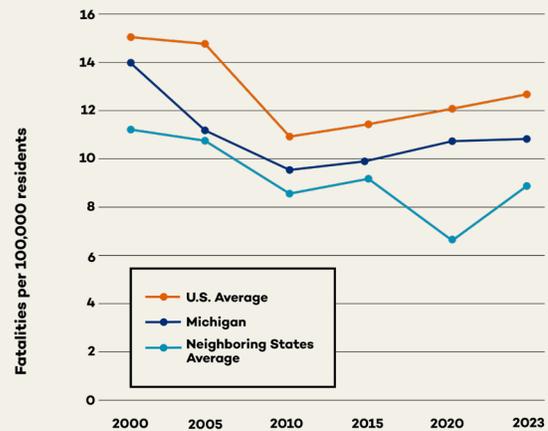
After successfully reducing traffic fatalities throughout the 2000s, Michigan began to see its fatal crash rate tick up again through the 2010s: Michigan residents' rate of death in car crashes—1,095 traffic deaths in 2023—is now twice the rate of death by violent crime, and eleven times the rate of death in structure fires.<sup>6</sup> One (limited) bright spot is that Michigan has managed to keep pedestrian traffic death rates flat, even as pedestrian traffic fatalities nationally have risen 75 percent since 2010. Where Metro Detroit was the 17th most dangerous metropolitan area for pedestrians before 2014, it is now in the middle of the pack at the 53rd most dangerous of the 100 largest metro areas.<sup>7</sup>

The best tool Michigan has to reduce traffic deaths is street design features that discourage speeding and other unsafe driving behaviors, supported by education and enforcement. As with addressing crime, creating safe streets requires ensuring adequate funding for both the street infrastructure and the supporting education and enforcement. State policies also must be aligned with these goals. For example, road funding formulas should not penalize a community that improves safety by converting a four-lane street to a three-lane configuration with a center turn lane.

## Creating Healthy Neighborhoods

Michiganders' long-term health and safety is affected by a range of factors, e.g., air quality, diet, physical activity, exposure to toxins, and social engagement.

## Traffic Fatalities



Just as fixing the roads should be an opportunity to improve safety and expand opportunities for walking and biking as healthy transportation, many of our priorities overlap with health and safety. Michigan's housing strategy should include addressing lead paint and pipes, asbestos, mold, and other challenges with our aging housing stock—the eighth oldest in the nation.<sup>8</sup> Economic development work around food-based businesses and outdoor recreation access can support health alongside major economic sectors. Prioritizing brownfield redevelopment over greenfield expansion can reduce communities' exposure to toxins. And, of course, our placemaking efforts can support the growth of “third spaces,” where people can come together, helping to combat loneliness.

## The Path to Thriving

A thriving Michigan means state policies must commit to strong public health and safety systems that ensure the well-being of people living and working here:

- Invest in the local public safety systems—police, fire, and EMS—to provide needed capacity for both prevention of and appropriate response to emergencies.
- Prioritize safety and active transportation in our street design and road funding approaches.
- Leverage our amazing outdoor recreation opportunities, diverse agricultural sector, world-class “eds and meds” research institutions, and deep placemaking expertise to support health for all.

1 University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute. County Health Rankings & Roadmaps. [www.countyhealthrankings.org](http://www.countyhealthrankings.org). 2 “Six Great Reasons to Retire to Michigan,” Patrick Kiger, AARP website, November 8, 2023. Accessed July 12, 2025 at [www.aarp.org/money/retirement/michigan-relocation-advantages](http://www.aarp.org/money/retirement/michigan-relocation-advantages). 3 “Crime in the United States,” FBI, accessed Feb 2024 via FBI Crime Data Explorer, [cde.ucr.cjis.gov/LATEST/webapp/#Years](http://cde.ucr.cjis.gov/LATEST/webapp/#Years) of life before age 75, per 100,000 residents. 4 Analysis by League staff of data from US Census Bureau, Census of Governments, Survey of Public Employment & Payroll. 5 “Michigan local governments report increased challenges with law enforcement recruitment and retention,” Natalie Fitzpatrick and Debra Horner, Michigan Public Policy Survey, University of Michigan, September 2024. [closump.unimich.edu/sites/closump/files/2024-09/MPPS-Spring-2024-Personnel-Recruitment-Retention-Final.pdf](https://closump.unimich.edu/sites/closump/files/2024-09/MPPS-Spring-2024-Personnel-Recruitment-Retention-Final.pdf) & FBI, *ibid.*; “Fatality Facts,” Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, accessed July 8, 2025 at [www.iihs.org/research-areas/fatality-statistics](http://www.iihs.org/research-areas/fatality-statistics); and “Michigan Fatal Fire Stats,” Michigan Fire Inspectors’ Society, accessed July 8 at [mfis.org/fire-stats-17](http://mfis.org/fire-stats-17). 6 “Dangerous by Design 2024: State of the States,” Smart Growth America and National Complete Streets Coalition, June 2024, accessed online July 8, 2025 at [www.smartgrowthamerica.org/knowledge-hub/resources/dangerous-by-design-2024-state-of-the-states](http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/knowledge-hub/resources/dangerous-by-design-2024-state-of-the-states) 8 U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce. “Median Year Structure Built.” American Community Survey, ACS 1-Year Estimates Detailed Tables, Table B25035, [data.census.gov/table/ACSDT1Y2023.B25035?\\_lang=en&\\_allgeo=state&\\_allvars=&\\_alldecades=&\\_allseries=&\\_allyears=&\\_allstructure=&\\_alltype=&\\_allunit=&\\_allunittype=&\\_allunittype2=&\\_allunittype3=&\\_allunittype4=&\\_allunittype5=&\\_allunittype6=&\\_allunittype7=&\\_allunittype8=&\\_allunittype9=&\\_allunittype10=&\\_allunittype11=&\\_allunittype12=&\\_allunittype13=&\\_allunittype14=&\\_allunittype15=&\\_allunittype16=&\\_allunittype17=&\\_allunittype18=&\\_allunittype19=&\\_allunittype20=&\\_allunittype21=&\\_allunittype22=&\\_allunittype23=&\\_allunittype24=&\\_allunittype25=&\\_allunittype26=&\\_allunittype27=&\\_allunittype28=&\\_allunittype29=&\\_allunittype30=&\\_allunittype31=&\\_allunittype32=&\\_allunittype33=&\\_allunittype34=&\\_allunittype35=&\\_allunittype36=&\\_allunittype37=&\\_allunittype38=&\\_allunittype39=&\\_allunittype40=&\\_allunittype41=&\\_allunittype42=&\\_allunittype43=&\\_allunittype44=&\\_allunittype45=&\\_allunittype46=&\\_allunittype47=&\\_allunittype48=&\\_allunittype49=&\\_allunittype50=&\\_allunittype51=&\\_allunittype52=&\\_allunittype53=&\\_allunittype54=&\\_allunittype55=&\\_allunittype56=&\\_allunittype57=&\\_allunittype58=&\\_allunittype59=&\\_allunittype60=&\\_allunittype61=&\\_allunittype62=&\\_allunittype63=&\\_allunittype64=&\\_allunittype65=&\\_allunittype66=&\\_allunittype67=&\\_allunittype68=&\\_allunittype69=&\\_allunittype70=&\\_allunittype71=&\\_allunittype72=&\\_allunittype73=&\\_allunittype74=&\\_allunittype75=&\\_allunittype76=&\\_allunittype77=&\\_allunittype78=&\\_allunittype79=&\\_allunittype80=&\\_allunittype81=&\\_allunittype82=&\\_allunittype83=&\\_allunittype84=&\\_allunittype85=&\\_allunittype86=&\\_allunittype87=&\\_allunittype88=&\\_allunittype89=&\\_allunittype90=&\\_allunittype91=&\\_allunittype92=&\\_allunittype93=&\\_allunittype94=&\\_allunittype95=&\\_allunittype96=&\\_allunittype97=&\\_allunittype98=&\\_allunittype99=&\\_allunittype100](https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDT1Y2023.B25035?_lang=en&_allgeo=state&_allvars=&_alldecades=&_allseries=&_allyears=&_allstructure=&_alltype=&_allunit=&_allunittype=&_allunittype2=&_allunittype3=&_allunittype4=&_allunittype5=&_allunittype6=&_allunittype7=&_allunittype8=&_allunittype9=&_allunittype10=&_allunittype11=&_allunittype12=&_allunittype13=&_allunittype14=&_allunittype15=&_allunittype16=&_allunittype17=&_allunittype18=&_allunittype19=&_allunittype20=&_allunittype21=&_allunittype22=&_allunittype23=&_allunittype24=&_allunittype25=&_allunittype26=&_allunittype27=&_allunittype28=&_allunittype29=&_allunittype30=&_allunittype31=&_allunittype32=&_allunittype33=&_allunittype34=&_allunittype35=&_allunittype36=&_allunittype37=&_allunittype38=&_allunittype39=&_allunittype40=&_allunittype41=&_allunittype42=&_allunittype43=&_allunittype44=&_allunittype45=&_allunittype46=&_allunittype47=&_allunittype48=&_allunittype49=&_allunittype50=&_allunittype51=&_allunittype52=&_allunittype53=&_allunittype54=&_allunittype55=&_allunittype56=&_allunittype57=&_allunittype58=&_allunittype59=&_allunittype60=&_allunittype61=&_allunittype62=&_allunittype63=&_allunittype64=&_allunittype65=&_allunittype66=&_allunittype67=&_allunittype68=&_allunittype69=&_allunittype70=&_allunittype71=&_allunittype72=&_allunittype73=&_allunittype74=&_allunittype75=&_allunittype76=&_allunittype77=&_allunittype78=&_allunittype79=&_allunittype80=&_allunittype81=&_allunittype82=&_allunittype83=&_allunittype84=&_allunittype85=&_allunittype86=&_allunittype87=&_allunittype88=&_allunittype89=&_allunittype90=&_allunittype91=&_allunittype92=&_allunittype93=&_allunittype94=&_allunittype95=&_allunittype96=&_allunittype97=&_allunittype98=&_allunittype99=&_allunittype100). Accessed on 11 Jul 2025.

# Thriving Michigan: Economic Security



## Decades of Decline, but Opportunities Remain

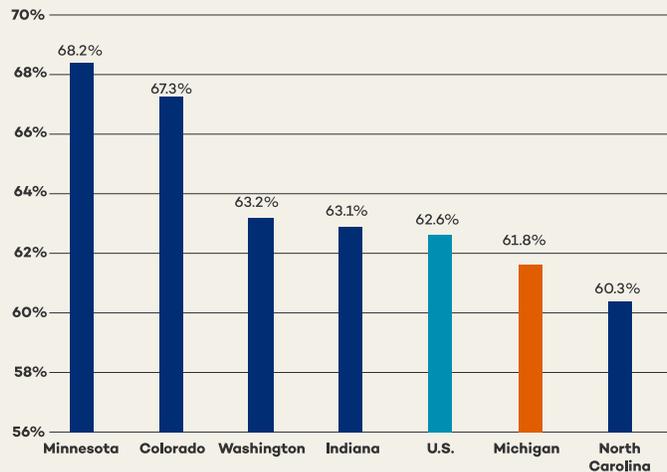
If Michigan is to grow and thrive in the coming decades, economic and financial security for residents, businesses, and the municipalities that serve them is critical. Our once robust manufacturing and innovation economy has declined since the late 1990s, and Michigan was hit particularly hard during the 2008–2010 recession. We've slipped from 11th in per capita income in 1950 to 38th in 2022.<sup>1</sup> While there have been both growth and bright spots in recent years, Michigan has not fully rebounded to a pre-recession economy, and our population growth has lagged well behind the U.S. (8.8 versus 46.3 percent between 1980 and 2021).<sup>2</sup>

Despite these poor economic trends, there are opportunities for growth the state could capitalize on—particularly among young people. A survey of young Michiganders found more than 80 percent of respondents said they would choose a job in Michigan over Texas, California, or Chicago if it had a comparable position and salary. But only 64 percent of survey respondents said they saw themselves living in Michigan in 10 years—a sign that there is a mismatch between desire and opportunity. Of those considering leaving, lack of jobs and opportunities in their fields and the desire for welcoming and walkable communities were the most cited factors.<sup>3</sup>

## Michiganders Need More Opportunities for Income and Wealth-Building

Michigan is suffering from both low labor force participation rates and high unemployment,

### Peer High Growth State Comparison: Labor Force Participation Rate 2024



a negative sign for our economy and communities. Michigan ranks 46th out of 50 states and the District of Columbia on unemployment, and 36th on labor force participation—worse than the U.S. average and below most of our higher-growth peer states.<sup>4,5</sup>

These employment patterns, combined with wage growth not keeping up with costs, mean an estimated 41 percent of households in Michigan were living below the Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed (ALICE) threshold (a basic needs budget) in 2023, and 14 percent of those were below the federal poverty line, worse than four out of five high-growth peer states.<sup>6</sup>

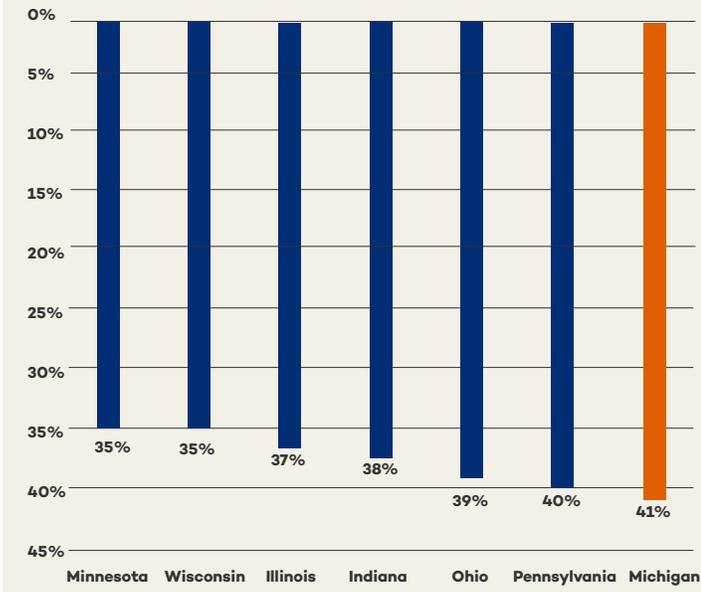
This also impacts longer-term wealth creation. Michigan households are in the bottom half of states (ranked 28th of 44 states reporting data) in terms of median value of assets held (including equity in homes, bank accounts, vehicles, retirement accounts).<sup>7</sup> When households cannot meet basic needs, it leads to social stresses and challenges in buying homes, building assets, or becoming an entrepreneur. Without action, Michigan will continue our vicious cycle of stunted economic growth, shrinking tax base, lost productivity, and higher dependency on social services.

<sup>1</sup> Growing Michigan Together Council, December 2023. Growing Michigan Together Council Report. [chrome-extension://jfhaidmnmnmbpocjgglefndmka/https://growingmichigan.org/wp-content/uploads/2023-12-14-GMTC-Final-Report-2.pdf](https://growingmichigan.org/wp-content/uploads/2023-12-14-GMTC-Final-Report-2.pdf). <sup>2</sup> Lupton, Eric, Robert Schneider, and Eric Paul Dennis. Citizens Research Council. 2023. Michigan's Path to a Prosperous Future. Economic, Workforce, and Talent Challenges and Opportunities Paper 2 in a Five-Part Series. <sup>3</sup> Detroit Regional Chamber. September 30, 2025. [New Statewide Priorities for Michigan Residents: Ages 18-29: Set the Fundamentals Right, Diversify the Economy, Create a Welcoming State](https://www.detroitregionalchamber.com/under-30-poll/). <sup>4</sup> Detroit Regional Chamber. Accessed August 10, 2025. [www.detroitregionalchamber.com/under-30-poll/](https://www.detroitregionalchamber.com/under-30-poll/). <sup>5</sup> United For ALICE. (2025). "The State of ALICE in Michigan: 2025 Update on Financial Hardship." [www.unitedforalice.org/state-data-for-michigan](https://www.unitedforalice.org/state-data-for-michigan). <sup>6</sup> United For ALICE. (2025). "ALICE Economic Viability Dashboard." [www.unitedforalice.org/maps-and-data](https://www.unitedforalice.org/maps-and-data). <sup>7</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics. Local Area Unemployment Statistics. Unemployment Rates for States, 2024. [www.bls.gov/lau/last24.htm](https://www.bls.gov/lau/last24.htm). <sup>8</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2024. Geographic Profile of Employment and Unemployment, 2024, Table 14. <sup>9</sup> Duncan G.J, Magnuson K, Votruba-Drazal E. Moving Beyond Correlations in Assessing the Consequences of Poverty. *Annu Rev Psychol*. 2017 Jan 3;68:413-434. Accessed 8/19/2025 at: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5108837/>. <sup>10</sup> French, Ron. "Studies raise warnings about Michigan child care access, cost." *Bridge Magazine*. April 21, 2025. [www.bridgemag.com/talent-education/studies-raise-warnings-about-michigan-child-care-access-cost/#:~:text=MEZ%20%26%20the%20state%20has%20the%20lowest%20rate%20of%20tableau%20server%20administrator](https://www.bridgemag.com/talent-education/studies-raise-warnings-about-michigan-child-care-access-cost/#:~:text=MEZ%20%26%20the%20state%20has%20the%20lowest%20rate%20of%20tableau%20server%20administrator). <sup>11</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation, Survey Year 2024, Public Use Data. <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2023/demog/wealth/state-wealth-asset-ownership.html>. Accessed 8/24/2025. <sup>12</sup> Small Business Association of Michigan. 2025. 21st Annual Scorecard 2025. Accessed 8/19/2025. [www.sbam.org/michigan-entrepreneurship-score-card](https://www.sbam.org/michigan-entrepreneurship-score-card). <sup>13</sup> Experian Small Business Index. Accessed 8/24/2025. [www.experian.com/business-information/journal-business-index](https://www.experian.com/business-information/journal-business-index). <sup>14</sup> U.S. Census Annual Business Survey and Nonemployer Statistics by Demographics (NES-D) series. 2023 (for 2022 data). Accessed September 12, 2025. [www.census.gov/data/tables/2023/econ/jobs/2023-aba-company-summary.html](https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2023/econ/jobs/2023-aba-company-summary.html). <sup>15</sup> Total state taxable values from Michigan Department of Treasury annual reports for these years. [www.michigan.gov/treasury/annual-reports](https://www.michigan.gov/treasury/annual-reports). <sup>16</sup> Calculated based on revenue sharing amounts provided by the Michigan Department of Treasury. <https://www.michigan.gov/treasury/local-share>.

**“In 1980, of the ten U.S. communities with the highest average earnings, five were in Michigan. Today, no Michigan city finds itself on the list.”**

- Michigan Growing Together Council Final Report, pg. 16

### Percent Households Below ALICE Threshold



## Strong Municipal Budgets Make It All Work

Robust service offerings like public safety, recreation, infrastructure, and placemaking are the cornerstone of a great community. Too often, we fail to recognize that those services rely on strong municipal budgets. In Michigan, property taxes are the primary revenue source for local governments, and they are tightly limited by the Headlee Amendment and Proposal A’s caps, which have hindered municipalities’ abilities to keep pace with inflation or recover lost revenue. During the Great Recession, aggregate taxable value dropped by over \$50 billion statewide and did not return to 2008 levels until 2019. Many Michigan communities have only recently returned to 2008 taxable values.

Additionally, state revenue sharing has drastically reduced over the past two decades, with local governments losing roughly \$13 billion in purchasing power. As a result, municipalities have been significantly limited in their ability to provide the services and infrastructure that make thriving communities that attract and retain both residents and businesses.

## Small Businesses Equal Big Impacts

While attention often focuses on large company attraction or development projects, creation and growth of Michigan’s small businesses are critical for our long-term economic security. Michigan’s small businesses make up 99.6 percent of all businesses in the state and employ 47.9 percent of Michigan’s workforce. Entrepreneurship in Michigan is relatively strong compared to neighboring states,<sup>8</sup> and Michigan is among top-performing states on the Experian Small Business Index, pointing to “easier credit access, lower delinquencies, and solid financial stability.”<sup>9</sup>

However, while Michigan has seen an increase in the number of businesses in all stages, the rate of growth over the last two decades is well below the national average. And that growth has not been realized equally—the share of minority-owned small businesses in Michigan continues to lag.<sup>10</sup>

## The Path to Thriving

For a thriving Michigan, the state must commit to strong economic and financial policies that ensure the well-being of people living and working here.

- Grow multi-sector job opportunities in all regions of the state, including opportunities for higher wages in both small and large businesses.
- Create more opportunities for people to build wealth and financial security by removing barriers keeping people out of the labor force (lack of regional opportunities, childcare, transportation).
- Invest in the entrepreneur and innovation economy, providing better access to capital at all stages (and for minority, underserved, and immigrant communities) to boost entrepreneurship.
- Restore municipal service capacity with a resilient mix of funding.

# Thriving Michigan: Sustainability



## Growing a Greener Michigan

Michigan is blessed with abundant, high quality natural resources that contribute about \$85 million a year to our state economy through forestry, fishing, mining, and recreation.<sup>1</sup> Responsibly stewarding these resources is critical for Michigan to thrive and be a place where people choose to live, work, and visit.

However, Michigan's industrial history, sprawling land use, and lack of investment in mass transit have put many of these resources at risk of degradation and loss. Climate change and shifting demands for natural resources pose added challenges that must be addressed. For example, in a recent survey, two-thirds of U.S. youth aged 16–25 said that climate change would influence where they choose to live.<sup>2</sup>

Both Lansing and local communities play a role in protecting Michigan's natural resources and environment by managing waste, reducing climate and air quality emissions, protecting our waterbodies, and managing public and private lands.



MICHIGAN  
**GREEN**  
COMMUNITIES

The Michigan Green Communities (MGC) program provides assistance to communities to take actions and benchmark their progress across nine environmental sustainability categories.

Participating communities annually track their progress and are certified as bronze, silver, gold, or platinum level MGC communities.

## Waste Not, Want Not

“Reduce, reuse, and recycle” is the classic slogan for managing waste to protect our environment. For years, Michigan's performance in this area was poor. While we are one of only 10 states with a bottle deposit law and have had extremely high rates of recycling those containers, our overall recycling rate for all materials was less than 15 percent until 2019.<sup>3</sup>

Recently, the State has invested in helping communities develop recycling programs and infrastructure, supported research and business development on product reuse, and increased public education efforts. In 2025, Michigan's recycling rate grew to approximately 25 percent. While more progress is needed (the national average for recycling is about 30 percent, according to the EPA), the 11 percent increase over the past six years shows a healthy growth trajectory for Michigan.

## How Michigan Powers Up

Energy use is a major contributor to air pollutants and greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) that affect human health and natural resources. In 2020, Michigan adopted the MI Healthy Climate Plan, which sets a goal for reaching carbon neutrality by 2050 and an interim target of 60 percent renewable energy by 2035. As of 2023, Michigan still has a ways to go in meeting those goals.

According to the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy, Michigan ranks 17th among states on efforts to advance energy efficiency and reduce climate emissions. Our utility low-income and public benefits programs are bright spots in the study. We ranked second on these metrics—a testament to Michigan's commitment to a just and fair clean energy future. However, Michigan ranked only 24th in our transportation energy efforts (e.g., EV programs and transit) and 26th for our building energy policies (e.g., stringency of energy codes).<sup>5</sup>

1 Michigan Department of Natural Resources. Our Economic Impact. [www.michigan.gov/dnr/about/economic-impact](http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/about/economic-impact) 2 Lancet Planet Health 2024; 8: e879–93 Published Online October 17, 2024. doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196(24)00229-8. 3 [www.michigan.gov/egle/newsroom/press-releases/2025/04/23/record-high-recycling-rate?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](http://www.michigan.gov/egle/newsroom/press-releases/2025/04/23/record-high-recycling-rate?utm_source=chatgpt.com) 4 U.S. Energy Information System. Michigan State Profile and Energy Estimates. [www.eia.gov/state/analysis.php?sid=MI](http://www.eia.gov/state/analysis.php?sid=MI). Accessed 10/13/2025. 5 Kresowik, Mark, et al. 2025. The 2025 State Energy Efficiency Scorecard. Washington, DC: ACEEE. [www.aceee.org/research-report/2025/02](http://www.aceee.org/research-report/2025/02). 6 [www.michigan.gov/egle/-/media/Project/Websites/egle/Documents/Programs/WRD/GLWARM/IR/Integrated-Report-2024.pdf?rev=0f3b59b062da435ea11a4cf895f0b927&hash=BFOE4582AA6C3AB990EE81D3E8997953](http://www.michigan.gov/egle/-/media/Project/Websites/egle/Documents/Programs/WRD/GLWARM/IR/Integrated-Report-2024.pdf?rev=0f3b59b062da435ea11a4cf895f0b927&hash=BFOE4582AA6C3AB990EE81D3E8997953) 7 Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy. 2024. Water Quality and Pollution Control in Michigan 2024 Sections 303(d), 305(b), and 314 Integrated Report. [www.michigan.gov/egle/-/media/Project/Websites/egle/Documents/Programs/WRD/GLWARM/IR/Integrated-Report-2024.pdf?rev=0f3b59b062da435ea11a4cf895f0b927&hash=BFOE4582AA6C3AB990EE81D3E8997953](http://www.michigan.gov/egle/-/media/Project/Websites/egle/Documents/Programs/WRD/GLWARM/IR/Integrated-Report-2024.pdf?rev=0f3b59b062da435ea11a4cf895f0b927&hash=BFOE4582AA6C3AB990EE81D3E8997953). Accessed October 2, 2025. 9 Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. 2024. Annual MDARD Report. [www.michigan.gov/mdard/-/media/Project/Websites/mdard/documents/annual-reports/2024/MDARD2024AnnualReports.pdf?rev=d9e19ce298e14339894363d1fc854392&hash=5C96BEA650FCC7629A6E12C57E3D6D1](http://www.michigan.gov/mdard/-/media/Project/Websites/mdard/documents/annual-reports/2024/MDARD2024AnnualReports.pdf?rev=d9e19ce298e14339894363d1fc854392&hash=5C96BEA650FCC7629A6E12C57E3D6D1). Accessed 10/4/2025. 10 Based on data from the Michigan House Fiscal Agency.

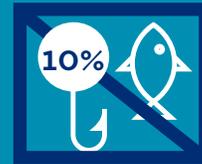
# Michigan waterbodies that are **not** supporting designated uses<sup>7</sup>



Recreation



Fish Consumption



Warm/Cold Water Fishery

11%

Michigan's in-state electricity net generation via renewable energy.

25th

Michigan's rank on renewable energy consumption as a share of state total

## Water, Water Everywhere

Michigan is surrounded by four of the five Great Lakes and has over 870,000 acres of inland lakes, over 76,000 miles of rivers and streams, almost 6.5 million acres of wetlands, and a significant groundwater supply.<sup>6</sup> Water is central to our identity, economic well-being, and quality of life. Michigan's abundant water resources are a huge asset—but only if they are responsibly managed.

The State monitors waterways to ensure they are clean and safe for recreation, fishing, drinking and industrial water supply, navigation, and aquatic ecosystems. Michigan has many waterways in excellent condition, particularly in the Upper and northern Lower Peninsulas. Nevertheless, there are significant threats from contaminants like nutrients, sediments, and chemicals (e.g., PCBs, PFAS, mercury, lead, etc.) that impair designated uses.

Michigan gained national attention for its drinking water quality during the Flint Water Crisis in 2015. In response, the State passed the most stringent Lead and Copper Rule in the U.S., which requires community water systems to replace all lead service lines by 2041. About 26 percent of Michigan's 1,395 community water systems report having possible lead service lines, affecting more than five million people. As of 2024, 15 of these systems had “action level exceedances” for the lead and copper rule.<sup>8</sup>

## Huge Tracts of Land

Michigan boasts enormous public land and open space. The State manages 4.6 million acres of parks, forests, trails, boat access sites, and wildlife areas. Michigan municipalities and regional entities also provide thousands of acres of convenient local parks and open spaces. In addition, about 30 percent of Michigan's private farmland is protected from development as non-agricultural uses, maintaining these resources as valuable food production and habitat spaces.<sup>9</sup>

These resources offer opportunities for recreation, food generation, and business, and space for quiet contemplation. They are also critical habitats for the health of thousands of aquatic and terrestrial species that call Michigan home.

Budget challenges threaten our ability to support and improve these crucial spaces. Between 2000 and 2020, Michigan's General Fund support for the Department of Natural Resources decreased by 39.5 percent.<sup>10</sup> Municipal budgets have also declined during this period (for more on this, see the Economic Security Thriving Communities brief), and parks and recreation projects are often the first items cut under budget reductions.

1 in 3

U.S. residents in do not have a park or green space within a 10-minute walk of home.

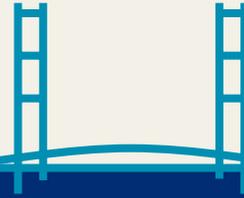


## The Path to Thriving

For a thriving Michigan, the state must continue to responsibly steward our natural resources for the enjoyment and economic benefit of all.

- Ensure that state and local policies focus on developing areas that are already built out in order to avoid the high costs of new infrastructure and to prevent the loss of valuable natural resources.
- Dedicate funding and leverage partnerships to expand networks of both state and local parks, trails, and preserves, and restore wilderness areas throughout the state.
- Address legacy and emerging contaminants in our waterways that threaten public health and natural ecosystems.
- Invest in energy efficiency, renewable energy, and clean transportation technology to improve quality of life and reduce climate impacts.

# Thriving Michigan: Infrastructure

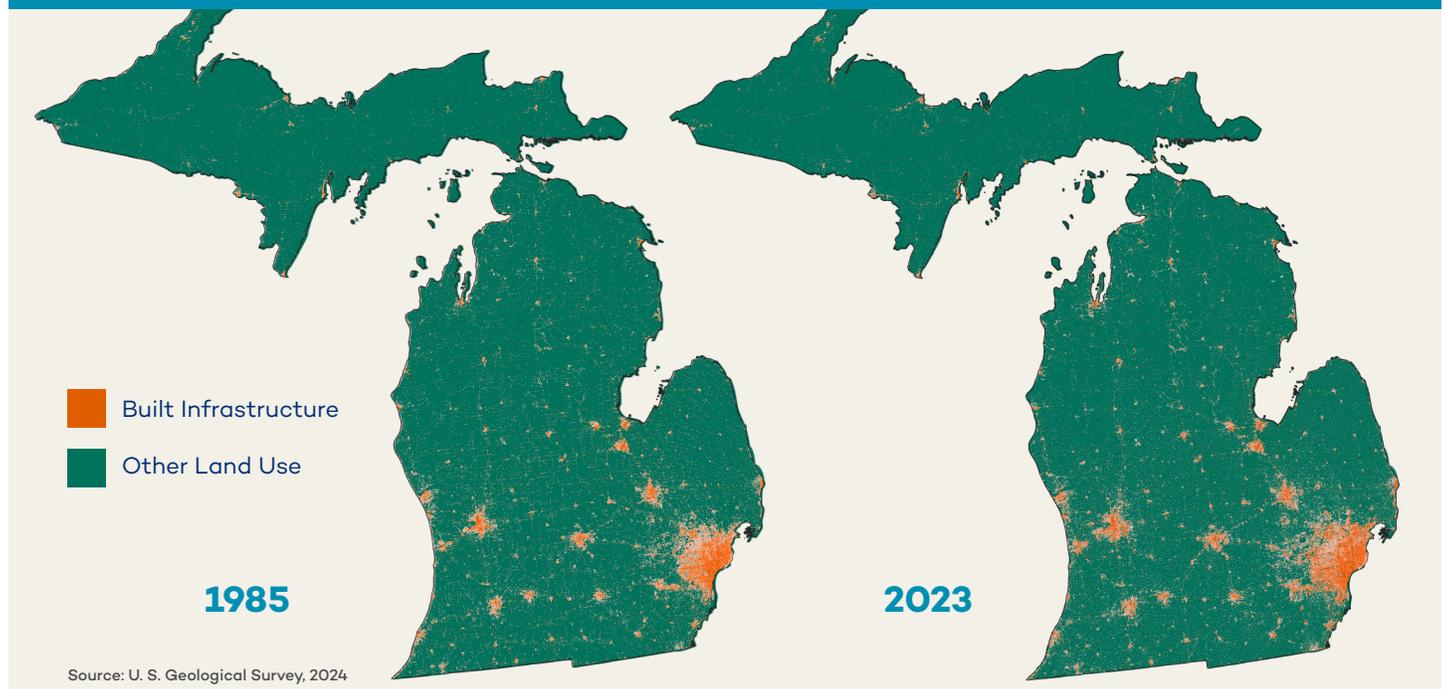


## A Generation of Expansion Without Growth

For decades, Michigan's population has remained nearly flat—yet we continue to build outwards from our traditional neighborhoods and town centers. The footprints of our 15 largest urbanized areas grew 40 percent from 1980 to 2020, adding 747 square miles of developed area,<sup>1</sup> while their populations grew only eight percent. As a result, each Michigander is shouldering the cost of 30 percent more infrastructure.

When we can't pay for that infrastructure, the results are potholes, power outages, pipe breaks, and public safety services stretched too thin. Michigan must invest in reliable and high-quality infrastructure, prioritizing reinvestment in existing system repair and meeting the needs of the many different people in our communities.

### 1985–2023: +11% Population, +45% Developed Land Area



## Our Road Funding Gap Hurts Local Streets

Michigan must ensure the full transportation network is maintained. State road funding has long favored highways and trunklines, neglecting the local streets where every trip begins and ends. MDOT receives 40 percent of road maintenance funding, but only maintains eight percent of Michigan's road network.<sup>2</sup>

As a result, our local streets are in significantly worse condition than state-managed roads.<sup>3</sup> The justification given for this funding mismatch is based on vehicle miles traveled, not on how well the system meets people's daily needs.

Fixing the damn roads means ensuring people and goods are connected to their destinations, not just maximizing movement of vehicles in the middle of the journey.

Full Citations: 1 U.S. Census Bureau 2 "2023 Michigan Roadway Statewide Statistics," Michigan Department of Transportation, Accessed May 20, 2025 from [www.michigan.gov/mdot/-/media/Project/Websites/MDOT/Programs/Planning/Asset-Management/HPMS/Statewide-Statistics-LS-County.pdf](http://www.michigan.gov/mdot/-/media/Project/Websites/MDOT/Programs/Planning/Asset-Management/HPMS/Statewide-Statistics-LS-County.pdf) 3 "A Data-Driven Assessment of Michigan's Road Program," Citizen's Research Council of Michigan Report 420, March 2025. Accessed April 18, 2025 from [www.crcmich.org/PUBLICATIONS/2025/rpt420-Michigan\\_Road\\_Funding\\_Condition.pdf](http://www.crcmich.org/PUBLICATIONS/2025/rpt420-Michigan_Road_Funding_Condition.pdf) 4 Michigan State Police - "Michigan Hazard Analysis (Natural Hazards)", 2024. 5 Center for Neighborhood Technology 2024, AllTransit™, [alltransit.org](http://alltransit.org) 6 FCC Broadband Data Collection, June 2024 data update, [broadbandmap.fcc.gov](http://broadbandmap.fcc.gov), "U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), 2024, Annual NLCD Collection 1 Science Products: U.S. Geological Survey data release, [doi.org/10.5066/P94UXN2S](https://doi.org/10.5066/P94UXN2S).

## Weathering Storms Requires Resilient Infrastructure

Flooding caused \$3.1 billion in property damage in Michigan from 1996 to 2021.<sup>4</sup> Insurance industry source First Street forecasts an additional 10,500 Michigan homes and 608 miles of roadway will come under new flood risk in the next 30 years.

Flooding brings cascading dangers: washouts, electrical hazards, contaminated floodwaters. Effective flood and stormwater management prevents greater harm.

Municipalities can help reduce flooding through green and traditional stormwater infrastructure, but Michigan lacks strong funding for local systems. State support and clear legal guidance are critical to mitigating rising flood risks.



Number of stormwater utilities in Michigan compared to neighboring states.

## High-speed Broadband Is Essential to Our Livelihoods

Michigan is trailing its neighbors in high-speed broadband.<sup>6</sup> While most have basic access, only 35 percent of addresses can get 1Gb speeds—ranking us behind 40 states.

High-speed access is notably poor in our largest counties. Of the United States’ fifty largest counties, Oakland ranks 39th and Wayne 45th in gigabit availability. With fast, affordable broadband becoming not just an amenity but fundamental to accessing jobs, schooling, and other opportunities, Michigan needs to catch up.

## Michiganders Have Limited Options for Getting Around

Michigan ranks 26th in transit access, behind most of our regional neighbors. While transit riders can reach an average of 32,000 jobs in 30 minutes, access is limited to major metro areas—residents in 44 counties have no job access without a car.<sup>5</sup>

While several local agencies have recently passed millages to expand service, Michigan still needs to invest in transit networks to connect metro areas and link smaller towns.

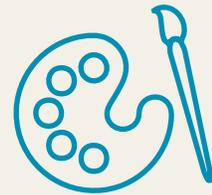
Regional Peer States	Jobs Within 30-minute Transit Commute
Illinois	157,954
Pennsylvania	86,482
Minnesota	66,683
Wisconsin	41,632
Ohio	38,480
Michigan	32,020
Indiana	17,138

## The Path to Thriving

A thriving Michigan means state policies must commit to resilient, efficient, and effective infrastructure:

- Prioritize the state of good repair of existing systems—local streets, our electrical grid, water and sewer networks—over system expansion.
- Increase connectivity and expand access via broadband, transit, and non-motorized transport—give Michiganders a range of ways to access opportunities and get where they need to go.
- Boost existing infrastructure use by directing housing and business growth where there is capacity already, avoiding costly new development.

# Thriving Michigan: Abundant Arts and Cultural Amenities



## Creating Connection Through Culture

We value cultural amenities because they entertain, provide opportunities to make sense of the world, help us heal, and create spaces to connect with each other. Three-quarters of Americans say they “consider arts and culture personally important to them,” and 86 percent believe “arts and culture improve my community’s quality of life and livability.” Most Americans also believe all students should have access to quality arts education (92 percent) and that government plays an important part in funding for the arts (83 percent).<sup>1</sup>

Arts and cultural institutions—including theater, music, libraries, education and community centers—are also strong drivers of community connectivity. The Urban Institute and Knight Foundation’s 2020 study on community ties found that people who say their neighborhood “has easy access to arts and cultural amenities are more satisfied with their city as a place to live, identify more with the local lifestyle and culture, and invest more time and resources in their communities.”<sup>2</sup> Arts and cultural education programs in K–12 schools are also shown to increase test scores and lower dropout rates.

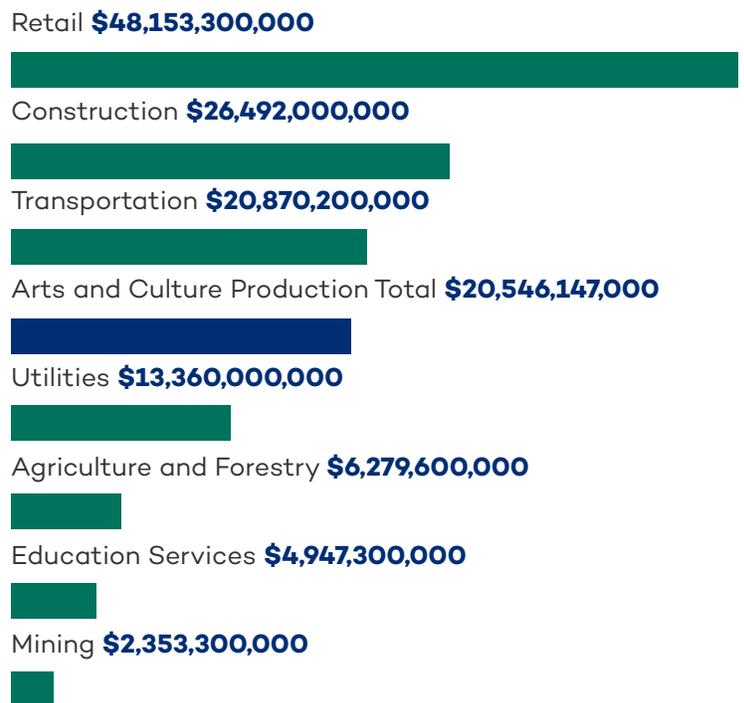
## Arts, Culture, and Michigan’s Economy

Michigan is home to a robust arts and cultural industry that employs almost 150,000 people as creators or in organizations that support the arts. The U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis reports that arts and cultural activities contribute about three percent of the Michigan economy, more than three times as much as the state’s agriculture sector.<sup>3</sup>

Several Michigan cities have developed strong arts and culture economies and built national reputations for their programs and offerings.

Grand Rapids’ Art Prize draws over 800,000 people to the city every year and generates over \$70 million in economic activity.<sup>4</sup> The Detroit Institute of Arts is an internationally renowned gallery and is among the top six collections in the United States, with more than 65,000 works.<sup>5</sup> Smaller places like Marquette, Saugatuck, Traverse City, Lowell, and East Lansing have invested in public arts and their cultural economy.

In addition to significant funding support from philanthropic organizations, the Michigan Arts and Culture Council (the state’s government arts organization) funds almost 1,000 grants each year, with over \$12 million invested in 2023.<sup>6</sup> These investments are critical for supporting and growing a vibrant arts and culture economy in Michigan.



# State Spending on Arts and Culture: How Michigan Stacks Up

\$0.81

Per capita spending by  
state arts agencies

29th

rank nationally

4th of 8

Midwest states

## A Stage Set for Growth

While Michigan has seen significant growth and investment in its creative economy and cultural amenities, we still lag behind some of our peers on important indicators. Michigan ranks 26th among states for overall vibrancy in the SMU Data Arts Vibrancy Index. On its measure of “Arts Provider” (a gauge of supply that includes the number of independent artists, arts and culture employees, nonprofit arts and cultural organizations, and related firms), Michigan ranks 47th out of 50 states.<sup>7</sup> Taking both these measures together, it suggests there may be a concentration of arts providers at larger institutions and communities, and opportunities for expanding support of arts and cultural production in more Michigan communities.<sup>8</sup>

Michigan has strong employment in the arts and cultural sector and ranks third in the Midwest for our location quotient (our state’s employment concentration relative to other states). But our employment in these industries is still 28 percent below the national rate.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, while the Michigan Arts and Culture Council awards substantial grants for arts and cultural activities each year, Michigan is not a top performer on state spending on the arts nationally or among Midwest peers. Our neighbors Minnesota and Ohio were both in the top 10 (Minnesota ranks first with a per capita spend of \$9.62/year) while Iowa and Wisconsin were ranked almost dead last.<sup>10</sup>

## The Path to Thriving

A thriving Michigan means state policies must commit to strong arts and cultural systems that ensure the well-being of people living and working here.

- Increase Michigan’s per capita state spending on arts and culture to be a top performing state nationally and in the Midwest.
- Expand arts and cultural education programming for K–12 students, and encourage schools to take advantage of resources like the Michigan Arts Education Instruction and Assessment Project.
- Ensure that cultural identities, traditions, and creative outputs are respected, celebrated, and recognized as critical social and economic assets in Michigan communities.

1 Americans for the Arts. Americans Speak Out: About the Arts in 2023, a national public opinion survey. 2023. [www.americansforthearts.org/by-program/reports-and-data/research-studies-publications/public-opinion-poll](http://www.americansforthearts.org/by-program/reports-and-data/research-studies-publications/public-opinion-poll). Accessed 11/12/25. 2 Urban Institute (with funding from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation). Community Ties: Understanding What Attaches People to the Place Where They Live. 2020. [knightfoundation.org/press/releases/landmark-study-reveals-value-of-the-arts-in-communities-nationwide/#--text=Out%20of%20a%20dozen%20urban.to%20arts%20and%20cultural%20activities](https://www.knightfoundation.org/press/releases/landmark-study-reveals-value-of-the-arts-in-communities-nationwide/#--text=Out%20of%20a%20dozen%20urban.to%20arts%20and%20cultural%20activities). Accessed 11/18/25. 3 National Assembly of State Arts Agencies. Creative Economy State Profiles. 2023. [nasaa-arts.org/nasaa\\_research/creative-economy-state-profiles](https://www.nasaa-arts.org/nasaa_research/creative-economy-state-profiles). Accessed 11/18/25. 4 Grand Valley State University. Economic Impact of Art Prize 2024. [chrome-extension://efaidnbmninnbpcapjcgglefndmkaj/https://a-us.storyblok.com/f/1015523/x/58f751265c/2024-economic-impact-report-final-12-26-24.pdf](https://a-us.storyblok.com/f/1015523/x/58f751265c/2024-economic-impact-report-final-12-26-24.pdf). Accessed 11/16/25. 5 Detroit Institute of Arts. [dia.org/about](http://dia.org/about). Accessed 11/20/25. 6 Michigan Arts and Culture Council. Annual Report 2023. [chrome-extension://efaidnbmninnbpcapjcgglefndmkaj/www.michiganbusiness.org/globalassets/documents/macc/macc-2023-annual-report.pdf](https://www.macc-arts.org/documents/macc/macc-2023-annual-report.pdf). Accessed 11/14/25. 7 SMU DataArts. of the Arts: Arts Vibrancy Rankings. 2024. [culturaldata.org/state-of-the-arts-2024/overview](https://culturaldata.org/state-of-the-arts-2024/overview). Accessed 11/14/25. 9 National Assembly of State Arts Agencies. Creative Economy State Profiles. 2023. [nasaa-arts.org/nasaa\\_research/creative-economy-state-profiles](https://www.nasaa-arts.org/nasaa_research/creative-economy-state-profiles). Accessed 11/18/25. 10 Romens, Anne. Public Funding for the Arts in the Midwest: 2024 by the Numbers. [artsmidwest.org/about/updates/public-funding-for-the-arts-in-the-midwest-2024-by-the-numbers](https://artsmidwest.org/about/updates/public-funding-for-the-arts-in-the-midwest-2024-by-the-numbers). Accessed 11/17/25.



## Learning for Adaptation and Connection

Michigan's long-term economic slide, low post-secondary attainment, and declining K–12 rankings are well known and widely understood to be interconnected. We won't repeat that story here. However, with the explosion of A.I.-based tools creating new economic uncertainties for many, Michigan must anticipate and navigate another wave of automation and economic transition—despite never having fully adapted to the last one.

We must ensure that our knowledge economy and educational systems are focused on the human skills that allow for repeated learning and adaptation, and opportunities for this repeated learning must be available and accessible to all Michiganders. An educational agenda for Michigan should emphasize communication, creative problem-solving, and collaboration over a narrow focus on automatable skills. It should be paired with an economic strategy of making many small investments and cultivating the entrepreneurship that arises from them—rather than large bets on single industries or firms.

### Maximizing Access to Opportunity in Place

This moment of economic transition also emphasizes the importance of placemaking and of “places” as the vital unit of economic development. Innovation and the creation of new work occur largely through the interaction of people across firms and hierarchies.<sup>1</sup> Even in a highly connected era, the social infrastructure of third spaces like cafés, parks, libraries, and coworking spaces are vital to Michigan's economic future.

Further, place-based strategies—such as business-specific job training for workers, or technical assistance and advice for small businesses—can move people skills directly into entrepreneurial or employment opportunities. Upjohn Institute research shows that these place-based customized programs are about five times as cost-effective as business tax incentives at creating jobs in distressed places.<sup>2</sup>

Michigan's evaluation of its economic development approach must reinforce what works: a combination of places where learning, connection, and innovation happen; programs that support small businesses, entrepreneurs, and workers; and removing barriers to accessing education and retraining opportunities (such as lack of stable housing, reliable transportation, and childcare).

### Childcare: Investing in Human Infrastructure

Childcare is both part of the lifelong learning ecosystem and one of the barriers preventing Michiganders from realizing opportunities. Over 1.4 million Michigan children—including 284,000 infants and toddlers—are living in zip codes with inadequate childcare. As Michigan parents know all too well, nearly the entire state is classified as a childcare desert, with three or more pre-K children competing for every spot in a licensed childcare facility.<sup>3</sup> Parents of school-aged children are not exempt either, as spaces in before- and after-school care and summer camps are similarly tight.

1 The Economy of Cities, Jane Jacobs, 1969. 2 “Federal and State Governments Can Help Solve the Employment Problems of People in Distressed Places to Spur Equitable Growth.” Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, Policy Paper No. 2025-035. 3 “Michigan's Licensed Child Care Deserts.” Michigan State University Child Care Mapping Project. Accessed Nov. 20, 2025 at [cep.msu.edu/projects/child-care-mapping-project/maps-and-charts/child-care-desert-map](http://cep.msu.edu/projects/child-care-mapping-project/maps-and-charts/child-care-desert-map) 4 “Child Care in America: 2024 Price & Supply Report.” Child Care Aware of America, May 2025. Accessed Nov. 20, 2025 at [www.childcareaware.org/price-landscape#24](http://www.childcareaware.org/price-landscape#24) 5 “New Mexico is first state in nation to offer free child care,” Office of the Governor, State of New Mexico, Sept. 8, 2025. Accessed Nov. 20, 2025 at [www.governor.state.nm.us/2025/09/08/new-mexico-is-first-state-in-nation-to-offer-universal-child-care-6](http://www.governor.state.nm.us/2025/09/08/new-mexico-is-first-state-in-nation-to-offer-universal-child-care-6) “Michigan local government leaders report increased problems with workforce recruitment, retention, and other issues.” Michigan Public Policy Survey, February 2023. Accessed Nov. 24, 2025 at [clousup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/110/michigan-local-government-leaders-report-increased-problems-workforce-recruitment-7](http://clousup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/110/michigan-local-government-leaders-report-increased-problems-workforce-recruitment-7) “Michigan local governments report increased challenges with law enforcement recruitment and retention.” Michigan Public Policy Survey, September 2024. Accessed Nov. 24, 2025 at [clousup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/126/michigan-local-governments-report-increased-challenges-law-enforcement-recruitment-retention](http://clousup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/126/michigan-local-governments-report-increased-challenges-law-enforcement-recruitment-retention)

Childcare is also expensive, with a Michigan family of four paying 40 percent more for childcare than for housing in 2024<sup>4</sup>—even as providers struggle to make ends meet, and caregivers often earn too little to put their own children in the programs where they work.

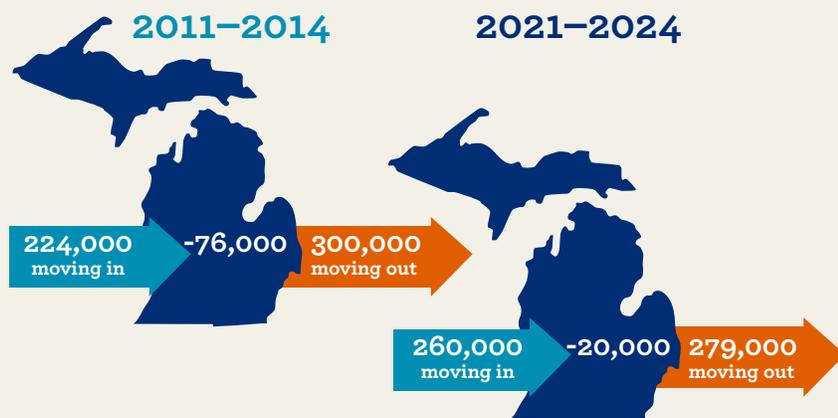
This system stresses families—both financially and emotionally—which in turn impacts Michigan’s economy, public health, and the rest of the educational system. While the state has launched new partnerships to mitigate these costs, more could be done. At the extreme, New Mexico’s recent commitment to universal free childcare, including a substantial caregiver workforce development push, will be a case to learn from.<sup>5</sup>

## Public Sector Recruitment Struggles

Employers in many sectors cite skills mismatches or other challenges in workforce recruitment. Whether it’s utility linesmen and water plant operators, public safety personnel, or building inspectors, staffing shortages risk deterioration or failure of critical systems that Michiganders’ daily lives rely on, and require special attention. Sixty percent of local governments report difficulty attracting employees,<sup>6</sup> and the crunch is especially acute in law enforcement, with 80 percent of police chiefs and county sheriffs reporting problems finding officers.<sup>7</sup>

These issues are a symptom of a broader need for trades and similar career education pipelines—municipal finance restrictions make it difficult to match private pay scales in the public sector, so these positions suffer in a tight labor market. There is also another, more unique challenge: Nearly half of local leaders note that their personnel have been subject to harassment, threats, or violence due to their roles as public employees, and that this harms recruitment and retention efforts—a dramatic shift from traditional views of public service as a noble calling.

## Still Draining Brains, but More Slowly



Adults with at least some college education are still moving out of Michigan faster than they move in.<sup>1</sup>

## The Path to Thriving

A thriving Michigan requires the state commit to lifelong learning opportunities that support our communities at all life and career stages:

- Treat childcare as critical human infrastructure.
- Support the creation of third spaces that combine educational offerings with a sense of community to drive economic success.
- Focus economic development strategies on small business and worker support programs over grants to attract large-scale corporate development.



## Prepared by the Michigan Municipal League

**Shanna Draheim**  
Director,  
Policy Research Labs  
1675 Green Road  
Ann Arbor, MI 48105  
517-908-0307  
sdraheim@mml.org

**Richard Murphy**  
Senior Program Manager,  
Policy Research Labs  
1675 Green Road  
Ann Arbor, MI 48105  
734-669-6329  
murph@mml.org