Improving healthy birth outcomes in the Midwest

MSC Chair: Make this the best region for healthy start to life
by Jon Davis (jodavis@csg.org)

State policymakers are increasingly realizing that beyond the importance of early childhood development lies its foundation, a healthy birth outcome for parents and their newborns. The phrase “healthy birth outcome” can encompass numerous initiatives — safe-sleep education to reduce incidents of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, mentoring and support for new and expectant mothers to combat child and infant mortality, and even the somber task of collecting child and infant mortality data.

It can also include public education campaigns to raise awareness of not-always-apparent health hazards (such as congenital cytomegalovirus) and to reduce stress on new parents and parents-to-be.

This year, Iowa Sen. Janet Petersen, chair of the Midwestern Legislative Conference, aims to put a yearlong spotlight on the role of states in ensuring healthy birth outcomes. That issue is her MLC chair’s initiative for 2017. (CSG Midwest provides staff support for the MLC, a nonpartisan association of all state legislators from 11 states and four affiliate provinces.)

“I’m hoping for dialogue where legislators can learn from each other and get some best practices going, ” Petersen says. “So I think I carry Grace in my heart as a way to try and prevent other families from experiencing the heartache of having something go wrong with their pregnancy.”

She led an effort to make Iowa the first state to expand its birth-defects registry to include stillbirths. And in 2009, she and four other Iowa women founded Healthy Birth Day, a nonprofit that launched the “Count the Kicks” public awareness campaign encouraging expectant mothers to monitor their baby’s in utero kicks, because decreased fetal movement could indicate a problem.

Since then, Iowa has gone from 33rd worst in the country for the number of stillbirths to third-best.

Simple steps to big gains

Another unheralded threat to fetal health that concerns Sen. Petersen is congenital cytomegalovirus. Per the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, CMV is a common virus that infects almost a third of children by the time they hit 5 years of age, and half of adults by age 40. It’s transmitted via direct contact with bodily fluids including saliva, breast milk and urine.

Most people show no symptoms, but it can hurt people with weakened immune systems or babies in utero, who can get it via the mother’s blood passing through the placenta. For those babies, congenital CMV can cause premature births or even a pregnancy loss, as well as lung, liver and spleen problems, seizures or small head or birth sizes.

So, Peterson asks, why not educate pregnant women now about CMV and simple techniques to prevent its transmission, to prevent higher health costs later?

“Very simple things, like when a baby drops a pacifier, don’t just pick it up and wipe it off and put it back in your baby’s mouth because she may have just picked up the virus,” she says. “Don’t kiss your child on the mouth — little things like that. Be very vigilant in how you wash...
Midwest-Canada Relations

Trump-Trudeau summit promises more cooperation on trade, border efficiency

Within a month of President Donald Trump’s taking office, he and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau met for a White House visit in which they jointly agreed to strengthen cooperation on a range of issues, from regulatory reform and cooperation, to border efficiency and security.

“IT was important for building a foundation,” Stephen Brereton, Canada’s consul general in Chicago, says of this early meeting of the two federal leaders, “and the government ministers will move much of this forward.”

In part, the February summit between Trudeau and Trump simply reaffirmed a commitment to some ongoing initiatives between Canada and the United States — for example, giving preclearance to cross the border for people who meet certain requirements and better integrating cross-border law enforcement. In order to simplify the movement of goods across the border, the leaders also pledged to expand preclearance for freight. And they made special note of their support for the new Gordie Howe Bridge, which, once constructed and open to traffic, will add capacity along the Detroit-Windsor border, the busiest commercial crossing in North America.

In the Midwest, 1.7 million jobs are dependent on trade with and investments from Canada (see map). Canada is the largest market for goods in 35 U.S. states, including all 11 Midwestern states.

In Ohio, for example, autos and motor vehicle parts accounted for nearly $4 billion in exports to Canada in 2016. Overall, Ohio companies sent a total of $19.1 billion in exports to Canada last year, and imported $11.5 billion in Canadian goods. Some of this trade is between firms in supply chains that send components across the border as they make things together. Canadian companies have invested heavily in Ohio as well, and directly employ more than 26,000 Ohioans.

This close trade relationship occurs throughout the region. Last year, Iowa’s $3.4 billion in exports to Canada included more than $815 million worth of tractors and farm machinery, while Iowa purchased $2.5 billion in goods from Canadian companies. Iowa’s insurance service sector benefited as well, with Canadians purchasing $67 million in insurance-related products.

The bilateral trading relationship extends to agriculture as well. The 11 Midwestern states accounted for one-third of all agricultural exports to Canada in 2015 — $8.4 billion in exports from the region, out of a total of $25 billion in U.S. farm exports. Wisconsin led the way, with $1.4 billion in agricultural exports, followed by Illinois, Ohio and Michigan.

Brereton says he is “very encouraged” about the cooperative tone set by Trudeau and Trump. He adds that continuing advances toward a smooth and efficient border will help all traders, particularly farmers and manufacturers in the Midwest.

Michigan eyes new mix of incentives to bring investments in hard-to-develop brownfields

Brownfields — former industrial and commercial sites that have been abandoned and are contaminated by pollutants or other hazardous materials — are among the hardest sites to redevelop for other business or residential purposes. This is mainly because of the costs associated with cleaning up the land for new development.

Lawmakers in Michigan, however, are hopeful that a package of bills under consideration will help turn sites across the state into vibrant, productive locations for new businesses and residents.

Last month, the Michigan Senate approved legislation that is part of a package of bills (SB 111–115) known as the Transformational Brownfield Development Plan, which would provide financial assistance to developers who take on the job cleaning up these difficult-to-develop brownfield sites.

“Because these properties are so much more expensive to develop, we’re seeing a pattern of outward expansion in our urban areas versus redeveloping areas that are already available,” says Sen. Ken Horn, chair of the Economic Development and International Investment Committee and sponsor of one of the bills.

Unlike programs in several other states, which largely rely on giving tax credits to developers to help defray the cost of cleanup (the federal Brownfield Tax Credit program ended in 2011), the Michigan proposal would require developers to pay for the cleanup and would spend no state funds until after the property is redeveloped and new industrial, commercial or residential activity is established.

Under the legislative package, developers would keep part of the future taxes generated from businesses and residents who occupy the site after cleanup. They would be eligible to receive up to 50 percent of the revenue generated from income and sales and use taxes for up to 20 years. The bill caps the annual amount that developers could be reimbursed at $40 million.

According to Horn, qualifying projects would have to receive approval from local and state government authorities, meet a minimum investment threshold and have a net fiscal benefit to the state (as determined by an analysis by the state’s Michigan Strategic Fund). Similar legislation passed the Senate last year, but died in the House. Recently, a coalition of Michigan economic development organizations, cities and chambers of commerce formed to support the legislation.

“Local governments around the state are asking for more tools to assist with redevelopment of these sites,” says Horn. “These vacant, crumbling properties are negatively affecting their ability to generate tax and tourism revenue. When that happens, local and state government pay one way or another — whether it is lost tax revenue, property maintenance, demolition and so on.”

Economic Development

Examples of tax credits in Midwest for brownfield development

- Illinois Environmental Remediation Tax Credit — The tax credit is worth up to 25% of site assessment and remediation costs in excess of $100,000. The annual limit on the tax credit is $40,000 per site, with a maximum total credit of $150,000 per site (credit not available to individuals or entities that contaminated the site).
- Indiana Voluntary Remediation Tax Credit — The tax credit is for up to 10 percent of the total cost of remediation or $100,000, whichever is less. Participants are typically current or past property owners, current or past lessees, and prospective purchasers.
- Iowa Brownfield and Grayfield Tax Credit — Tax credits are available for up to 24% of qualifying costs of a brownfield project (30% if the project meets green building requirements). Up to $1 million in state tax credits is available every fiscal year (maximum of $1 million per project); that amount also includes tax credits for the redevelopment of “grayfields.”

Source: Redevelopment Economics and CSG Midwest

Midwest jobs dependent on trade/investment from Canada

Source: 2014 Report (using 2013 data) commissioned by government of Canada

Michigan——

- 158,000------
- 174,000------
- 259,000------
- 212,000------
- 118,000------
- 241,000------
- 205,000------
- 100,000------
- 344,000------
- 101,000------
- 110,000------
- 290,000------
- 250,000------
- 90,000------

Illinois——

- 29,000------
- 57,000------
- 84,000------
- 25,000------

Indiana——

- 14,000------
- 8,000------

Wisconsin——

- 22,000------
- 13,000------

Ohio——

- 28,000------
- 19,000------

Iowa——

- 15,000------
- 5,000------

Source written by Ilene Grossman, staff liaison to the Midwestern Legislative Conference Midwest-Canada Relations Committee. She can be reached at igrossman@csg.org.

Economic Development

Michigan eyes new mix of incentives to bring investments in hard-to-develop brownfields

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Brief written by Rene Grossman, staff liaison to the Midwestern Legislative Conference Midwest-Canada Relations Committee. She can be reached at agrossman@csg.org.

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Brief written by Laura Tomaka, staff liaison to the Midwestern Legislative Conference Economic Development Committee. She can be reached at ltomaka@csg.org.
Agriculture & Natural Resources

Tax relief, certainty for farmers are goals of Nebraska measure changing how ag land is assessed

The majority of Midwestern states determine farm property taxes through a system that assesses the land based on "use value" — how much income it can generate from agricultural production.

One of the few exceptions is Nebraska, where a percentage of the land's actual market value (currently set at 75 percent in statute) is used to determine what a farmer or rancher will pay in taxes.

With the value of agricultural land rising rapidly in recent years (see table), Nebraska's agricultural producers have faced big increases in their tax bills, and over the past two years alone, the state's legislators have intervened by putting more than $400 million into a Property Tax Credit Relief Fund, which will for 2016 will provide $89.57 per $100,000 of property valuation. Beginning in tax year 2017, LB 958 provides $20 million in additional funding for property tax relief.

This legislative year, Sen. Lydia Brasch hopes she and other Nebraska legislators are able to find a more permanent solution.

LB 338 would overhaul agricultural tax valuation in Nebraska, incorporating "use value" into the system for the first time while also instituting new controls on how much the value of agricultural land (for property tax purposes) can increase from one year to the next.

"This is a sound, long-term, stable solution that will bring farming into the future," Brasch believes.

According to Brasch, farmland valuations in her home state have been driven up artificially through recreational and speculative purchases of adjoining lands in scenic areas such as the Wildcat Hills. She adds that limited sales in some areas make it difficult to establish accurate assessments.

The goal of LB 338 is to provide Nebraska's farmers and ranchers with more certainty on what they can expect to pay in property taxes every year. Under the legislation's proposed formula for calculating "agricultural use value," federal price and yield data would be used to determine a farmland's income potential; U.S. Department of Agriculture and University of Nebraska surveys would be used to calculate expenses. (A 10-year average would be used in determining the land's use value.)

This alone does not prevent dramatic changes in taxes from one year to the next, as other states using the income-based model have found. But LB 338 also calls for Nebraska's property tax administrator to modify the capitalization rate (interest rate) to ensure that the agricultural-use value falls somewhere between 60 percent and 75 percent of the actual value. In addition, the aggregate value of agricultural land throughout Nebraska could not increase annually by more than 3.5 percent.

Illinois relaxes rules on out-of-state licenses as part of efforts to address teacher shortage

With the passage of a new law, Illinois has made it easier for educators with an out-of-state license to teach in the state. Legislators hope this change will get more teachers in classrooms and address a shortage in this profession.

"We need to make it as easy as possible to recruit the most qualified teachers, whether they're from Illinois or elsewhere," says Sen. Karen McConnaughay, who cosponsored SB 2912, which was signed into law in January.

According to McConnaughay, Illinois' rural school districts have had a particularly difficult time with teacher recruitment. In a recent survey by the Illinois Association of Regional Superintendents of Schools, 83 percent of rural districts reported having fewer qualified teacher candidates than in previous years. And 76 percent of all districts that responded to the survey reported having the same problem.

Under SB 2912, the Illinois State Board of Education has been given the authority to grant a license to teachers who hold a comparable license or certificate from another state. The state is also able to accept tests of content — which are required to teach specific subjects, such as foreign languages or technology — from other states. For subject areas such as special education, reading, and English as a second language, teaching candidates still must complete the coursework previously required by the state.

Another provision allows individuals who have completed an approved teacher education program at an Illinois college or university, but have not yet passed an evidence-based assessment of teacher effectiveness, to obtain a provisional license that's good for one year.

SB 2912 also made it easier for Illinois teachers to renew existing licenses, by removing a require- ment that educators pass a performance-based assessment every 10 years.

Districts in Illinois are struggling with a shortage not only of full-time teachers, but of substitutes as well. In response, state lawmakers reduced the cost of substitute teaching licenses to $50 (from $100) and removed a requirement that substitute-teaching candidates pass a basic skills test.

In at least two other Midwestern states this year, members of the executive and legislative branches have introduced proposals to streamline the teacher licensing process. Under pending legislation in Minnesota (HF 140), the state would consolidate its two existing licensing authorities into one and adopt a four-tiered licensing system. Each tier would have a different set of requirements, such as work experience, education level or completion of field-specific training.

In Wisconsin, Gov. Scott Walker's biennial budget contains a proposal that would grant teachers lifetime teaching licenses with no continuing education requirements — an attempt to attract candidates to the profession. According to a state budget document, such a lifetime license would reduce the cost of teaching in Wisconsin by more than $750 over 30 years. According to the U.S. Department of Education, fewer individuals completed teacher licensure programs in the 2013-14 school year than in 2011-12 in every Midwestern state but North Dakota.

Sources of state real-estate data for the Midwest:

- Wisconsin, Department of Revenue, Local Tax Analysis and Research
- Michigan, Michigan Department of Revenue, Fiscal Data
- Minnesota, Minnesota Department of Revenue, Real Property Tax
- Nebraska, Nebraska Department of Revenue, Statistics
- Indiana, Indiana State Department of Revenue, Fiscal Data
- Iowa, Iowa Department of Revenue, Fiscal Data
- Kansas, Kansas Department of Revenue, Fiscal Data
- North Dakota, North Dakota Department of Finance, Fiscal Data
- Ohio, Ohio Department of Taxation, Fiscal Data
- South Dakota, South Dakota Department of Revenue, Fiscal Data

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture
Protests are on the rise in the Midwest, and so are the number of bills to deal with this activity

From demonstrations trying to stop proposed pipelines to rallies denouncing deadly police encounters with civilians, the number of protests in the Midwest has been unusually high over the past year.

The region's legislators have taken notice, revisiting their states' laws on criminal trespassing, loitering, picketing, blocking roadways and disorderly conduct. As of early March, protest-related legislation had been introduced in 2017 in at least five of the region's 11 states (see map).

In North Dakota, Sen. Kelly Armstrong says, thousands of people came to his home state to demonstrate against the Dakota Access Pipeline, and that activity included instances of vandalism and threats against police.

“Most of the protesters were peaceful, but law enforcement didn't have the tools to deal with the individuals who were turning peaceful protests into riots,” he says. “And in the legislature, we realized that our statutes just weren't sufficient to deal with the conduct that occurred here.”

The recently signed bills in North Dakota:

• stiffen penalties for “inciting a riot,” which was enhanced to a Class B felony punishable by up to 10 years in prison and a $20,000 fine for incidents involving 100 or more people (HB 1426);
• make it a Class A misdemeanor (it had been a Class B misdemeanor) for disobeying public safety orders under riot conditions, punishable by up to one year in prison (HB 1426);
• give law enforcement new options to enforce the state’s criminal trespassing statute, with a provision that allows police to cite violators with a $250 fine rather than filing criminal charges (HB 1293);
• expand the state attorney general’s authority to appoint ad hoc “special agents,” defined as law enforcement officers from other jurisdictions (SB 3201); and
• make the “wearing of masks during commission of criminal offense” a Class A misdemeanor (HB 1304).

Some of the legislative actions in North Dakota came from a review of old state laws that hadn’t been touched in years (criminal trespass, for example), Armstrong says, while others were new: The “mask” law was based on statutory language in other states and Washington, D.C.

All of the measures were a response in one way or another to recent protests over the Dakota Access Pipeline, which will transport oil through four Midwestern states (North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa and Illinois). The recent demonstrations centered on environmental concerns and the pipeline’s impact on the drinking water and sacred sites of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe.

In South Dakota, legislators passed SB 176 in anticipation of protests over construction of the Keystone XL Pipeline. With this new law in place, the South Dakota governor and a local county sheriff have the authority to “prohibit any group larger than 20 persons from congregating” on public land if they believe such a ban is necessary to keep the land from being damaged. SB 176 also creates new penalties, or enhances existing ones, for criminal trespass and blocking roadways.

Free speech vs. ‘time, place, manner’ limits

With these recently passed measures, and others introduced this year in the Midwest, lawmakers face the question of how far to go in dealing with what they say is unlawful behavior by protesters.

Individuals have the constitutional right to free speech and freedom of assembly (in the U.S. constitution and many state constitutions), but governments also have the authority to enforce reasonable “time, place and manner restrictions.”

“We have been careful in our legislative response to the protests,” Armstrong says, “and I think you see that in the fact that we had some bills that got passed, but others that were killed or that we’re at least taking more time on.”

He cites, for example, a proposed loitering bill (HB 1383) that stalled because it was overly broad and would stifle free speech and assembly.

The protest-related bills in states such as Indiana, Iowa and Minnesota target demonstrations or rallies that obstruct highways, airports and/or rail lines. That activity already is illegal in many states, but this year’s proposals stiffen the penalties.

“I have no issue with people protesting; House File 390 does not limit a person’s First Amendment rights,” Rep. Nick Zerwas said as his legislative proposal made its way through the Minnesota House in February. Protests on the state’s freeways occurred in 2016 in the wake of the police shooting death of a 32-year-old African-American man and after the presidential election.

HF 390 would make it a gross misdemeanor to block highway, transit and airport access. This type of demonstrating, Zerwas said, “is not only disrespectful of people’s time, it’s a matter of public safety.”

Article written by Tim Anderson, CSG publications manager, who can be reached at tanderson@csg.org.

Legislation introduced, signed into law
Legislation introduced
No legislation

Source: ACLU and CSG Midwest research

Protest-related bills introduced this year in Midwestern states (as of March 1)

Minneapolis recognized for advances in evidence-based policymaking

In a national assessment released earlier this year by the Pew Charitable Trusts and MacArthur Foundation, Minnesota is one of five U.S. states singled out as a leader in the use of evidence-based policymaking.

Generally speaking, this approach looks to ensure that state resources are going to public services and programs that have shown positive results. The two organizations’ 2017 report, “How States Engage in Evidence-Based Policymaking,” was limited to an evaluation of four areas of state policy: behavioral health, child welfare, criminal justice and juvenile justice.

Researchers focused on how each state uses program evaluations and evidence to guide government policy and funding decisions. In Minnesota, for example:

• The state’s Department of Human Services oversees an Evidence-Based Practices Database that tracks the effectiveness of various services related to children’s mental health. It incorporates data collected from rigorous reviews of scientific literature on techniques or strategies for treating various mental health disorders.
• State and local officials use a checklist tool (developed at the University of Cincinnati) to assess their intervention programs for individuals in Minnesota’s criminal and juvenile justice systems and whether those programs follow evidence-based practices.
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QUESTION: Do any laws in the Midwest restrict state agencies from adopting environmental rules more stringent than federal regulations?

Federal laws and regulations on the environment often serve only as a “floor,” with states having the leeway to enact tougher rules or statutes of their own. However, some state legislatures and governors have adopted measures (either state laws or executive orders) designed to rein in the actions of their own environmental agencies. Most recently, in February, Indiana’s HB 1082 became law. It applies to any Department of Environmental Management rule that is “more stringent than a restriction or requirement imposed under federal law” or “applies in a subject area in which federal law does not impose a restriction or requirement.”

For any new state environmental rule that meets one of these two criteria, Indiana legislative branch must be provided notice. The rule then cannot take effect until adjournment of a regular session of the General Assembly, thus giving lawmakers the chance to stop it via legislation.

HB 1082 was vetoed last year, but lawmakers overrode that gubernatorial action in February. (The General Assembly was able to act this year on the 2016 bill because the veto occurred after legislators had adjourned for the year.)

Indiana’s new statutory language still allows for more-stringent state level environmental rules. In contrast, state statute in South Dakota is much more restrictive: “No rule that has been promulgated [on environmental protection, mining, oil, gas and water] may be more stringent than any corresponding federal law, rule or regulation.”

In a 2013 national study, the Environmental Law Institute concluded that “South Dakota’s stringency prohibition provision is arguably the most sweeping in the nation.” The focus of the institute’s study was on laws that prohibit state agency rules more stringent than federal regulations under the U.S. Clean Water Act. For example, under Wisconsin statute, the Department of Natural Resources “shall not exceed” federal requirements.

But more common than outright prohibitions, the Environmental Law Institute found, are “qualified restrictions” on the actions of state environmental agencies. This means a state agency can adopt more-stringent rules, but it must first meet specific criteria and/or take some additional steps.

For example, Iowa environmental regulators must provide reasons for the more-stringent rules and detail the financial impact. Ohio’s “qualified restriction” requires state agencies to provide the rationale for a more stringent environmental rule, as well as document its environmental benefits and technological feasibility. State regulators in North Dakota must show that “corresponding federal regulations are not adequate to protect public health and the environment of the state.”

In at least two states outside the Midwest, the “no more stringent than” statutory language applies generally to all regulations (not just environmental). Under Kentucky law, “administrative regulations shall be no more stringent than the federal law or regulations,” and the Arizona Governor’s Regulatory Review Council (established by the Legislature) must reject any rule “more stringent than a federal law unless there is [state] statutory authority to exceed the requirements.”

Legislative oversight is another means of controlling the rules set by state agencies. In the Midwest, every state legislature has a process for reviewing proposed and/or existing administrative regulations. This oversight is typically done by a joint, bipartisan legislative committee. In states such as Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, South Dakota and Wisconsin, these committees have the power to suspend agency rules, according to The Council of State Governments’ “Book of the States.” In Illinois, the Joint Committee on Administrative Rules can block agency rules from ever taking effect.

Article written by Tim Anderson (tanderso@csg.org), CSG publications manager. Question of the Month highlights an inquiry sent to the CSG Midwest Information Help Line: csgm@csg.org or 630.925.1922.

The story behind a distinctive statue’s long journey to the top of the Kansas Capitol

by Laura Klieuser (lklieuser@csg.org)

One of the longest-running disputes in Kansas history had nothing to do with the policy being debated inside the state’s Capitol, but rather the statue that now — and finally — sits on top of the historic building’s dome.

The story dates back to 1889, when plans began being made for the finishing touches at the Kansas Capitol. Seven sculptors competed to have their work selected to crown the dome. The winning design was a bronze sculpture of Ceres, the Roman goddess of agriculture. But it never made it to the top of the Capitol building.

“In the early 1900s, people were a bit of the Victorian era, and not too keen on a pagan goddess,” notes Joe Brentano, coordinator of Capitol tours for the Kansas Historical Society.

“But more to the point was the cost to finish that statue; it was almost $7,000. After 37 years of building the Capitol, people had had enough.” (Construction on the building began in 1866 and was completed in 1903.)

So for many years, only a light bulb rested on top of the Kansas Capitol dome.

Interest in reviving the idea of placing a statue on top of the building waxed and waned over the years, and a small, 2-foot version of the original Ceres statue would sometimes circulate around the Capitol.

“Secretaries would find it and put it on display,” Brentano says, “and it would revive talk of putting something on top.”

But it took until 1984 for the necessary enabling legislation to pass. That legislative measure did not determine what the statue would be, but lawmakers stipulated that it could not be a god or goddess.

Late in 1988, three designs were selected as finalists — a pioneer woman holding a bread basket, a pioneer farmer holding a shaft of wheat, and a Kansas warrior holding a bow and arrow to the sky. (The Kansas, or Kaw, Nation is one of the four recognized American Indian tribes in the state.)

The final decision was left to a vote of Kansas schoolchildren, who chose Richard Bergeron’s bronze sculpture of the Kansa warrior. The title of the statue, “Ad Astra,” is taken from the state motto, Ad astra per aspera: “To the stars through difficulties.” It took another dozen years to raise the money needed to have the sculpture cast.

Once completed in 2002, “Ad Astra” was taken on a 3,000-mile tour around the state on a flatbed truck so Kansans could see it up close.

“One in a while, we have people that come on a Capitol tour and say, ‘I got to be up close and touch the statue when it toured.’” Brentano says.

Finally, the 4,420-pound, 22-foot, 2-inch statue was hoisted up to the top of the Capitol dome and secured in place on Oct. 10, 2002. The formal dedication took place less than a month later, with then-Gov. Bill Graves officiating and the four American Indian tribes participating.

Today, visitors to Topeka can see the unique and distinct profile of “Ad Astra” from miles around or up close from the Capitol grounds, or even by climbing to the top of the dome and standing on the copper-railed balcony 23 feet below the statue.

Either way, Joe Brentano likes to say, you are a witness to the resolution of one of the lengthiest battles in Kansas history.
Home visit programs help babies, families achieve healthy birth outcomes

**State visit programs help families achieve healthy birth outcomes**

Higher-than-average Medicaid costs associated with poor birth outcomes, and higher-than-average numbers of women delivering premature infants. Michigan has four targeted programs:

- The Maternal Infant Health Program, which is for Medicaid-eligible pregnant women and infants and includes services from a licensed social worker and a registered nurse, as well as mental health specialists and dietitians in some instances;
- The Nurse Family Partnership, in which expectant “vulnerable” mothers are partnered early in their pregnancy with a registered nurse and receive ongoing nurse visits through the child’s second birthday;
- Parents as Teachers, in which trained professionals go into the homes during the child’s early years to help a family have their child “develop optimally” during these crucial years of life; and
- Infant Mental Health, which focuses on social, emotional, behavioral and cognitive development.

Illinois has programs aimed at specific groups:

- Family Case Management, which provides income-eligible clients access to medical care, pediatric health education and counseling, developmental screening, and referrals to other community services as needed; and
- Better Birth Outcomes, an intensive prenatal case management program in communities with higher-than-average Medicaid costs associated with poor birth outcomes and higher-than-average numbers of women delivering premature infants.

Pregnancy Maintenance Initiative, which awards grants to not-for-profit organizations that provide services for women that enable them to carry their pregnancies to term.

**Impact, implications of the ACA**

Currently, the Affordable Care Act mandates health insurance coverage of maternity care for all plans created since the law was signed by President Obama (“grandfathered” plans), those in existence before the ACA was signed into law, don’t necessarily have the same coverage.

On March 6, the American Health Care Act was introduced in the U.S. Congress. It retains maternity care as an essential health benefit. But for women covered by Medicaid, the essential health benefit requirement would disappear after

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**Q&A with Sen. Janet Petersen on her MLC chair’s initiative: State policies to promote child well-being**

**Q:** How do you attempt to draw attention to this subject in your own legislature?

**A:** I try to sponsor a number of bills that would help improve birth outcomes to try and elevate the conversation, to get people to talk about it.

If you don’t sponsor legislation and don’t have the conversation going, then [it behooves us] to step back and realize that when we are spending a lot of money on pregnancies and poor birth outcomes, then maybe we need to … ask what could we be doing differently.

That’s one of the reasons I selected my Chair’s Initiative — because the United States is not doing well in terms of maternal health care compared to other countries. We should up our game. You’ve got to start the conversation somewhere.

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**Q:** How do your personal experiences help amplify your voice on the issue of healthy birth outcomes?

**A:** I think it’s certainly made me a more passionate advocate because I have experienced the best of maternal health care and the worst of maternal health care in our country. And I believe that our daughter Grace would have been here if I had known more about stillbirth and stillbirth prevention when I was pregnant with her.

It’s not an issue I’m willing to give up on, and if one should experience the heart-wrenching loss of delivering a full-term baby who was otherwise healthy but has died, you just wouldn’t wish that on anyone. So I think I carry Grace in my heart as a way to try and prevent other families from experiencing the heartache of having something go wrong with their pregnancy.
Every child or infant death is a personal tragedy. But tuberculosis testing, and screenings for various infections; inpatient services including hospitalization and physician fees; and newborn baby care and lactation consulting, including breast pump rentals. Additionally, all plans must let women see an obstetrician/gynecologist without referral from another doctor and cover the following:

- For pregnant women: Folic acid supplements and screenings for Rh incompatibility, iron deficiency anemia and various infections.
- For newborns and young children: Immunizations, vision and hearing screenings, iron supplements for those at risk of anemia, oral health risk assessments, tuberculosis testing, and screenings for various infections and diseases, autism and lead poisoning.

When the worst happens

Every child or infant death is a personal tragedy. But if patterns can be found in those deaths that can be remedied by public policy or education campaigns, then that information can be used to fix problems, whether they are local environmental conditions or gaps in medical and/or public health systems.

All states have established Child Death Review (CDR) programs to examine deaths of children age 18 and younger; 26 states — including Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Nebraska, South Dakota and Wisconsin — also have Fetal and Infant Mortality Review (FIMR) programs to track data specific to perinatal babies and infants under the age of 1, according to the National Center for the Review and Prevention of Child Deaths. CDR and FIMR teams identify the causes of, and ways to prevent, such fatalities; improve communication between relevant state and local agencies and the medical community; improve agencies’ responses to child deaths; and provide information for policymakers to consider legislation for mitigating the number of such deaths, according to the national center.

While all CDR programs are state-level, most FIMR programs are local, says Rosemary Fournier, the center’s FIMR director.

Only Michigan, Indiana, Ohio and Wisconsin provide state-level coordination or financial and/or technical support (including training). At a minimum, states should help facilitate regular meetings of local teams to exchange data and ideas, she says.

“It’s a really great surveillance system. It is core public health surveillance,” Fournier says.

Over time, the work of these state and local research teams has led to legislative action, including increased CDR programs, improved mandatory reporting laws (and training requirements) regarding child abuse, and pass “Safe Haven” laws, which allow parents to leave newborn infants in designated safe places.

Minnesota may soon join these states. In 2015, its Maternal & Child Health Advisory Task Force released part one of its “Infant Mortality Reduction Plan for Minnesota.” Among its recommendations: assuring “a comprehensive statewide system that monitors infant mortality.”

Program aims to promote safe sleep, healthy starts for newborns by putting babies in boxes

On March 10, Ohio became the first Midwestern state (and the second overall, behind New Jersey) to begin providing a safe place for newborns to sleep by offering “baby boxes” to all new parents.

Baby boxes are made of sturdy cardboard and filled with items including clothing, diapers, food, bathing supplies, medical and parenting information, children’s books and anything else the boxes’ providers care to add, along with a blanket and firm mattress. Once emptied, it’s a ready-to-go bed for newborns to use until they can roll over.

The idea originated in Finland in the late 1930s and was made universal in 1949. Boxes are provided to all expectant mothers, but to get one they must get a prenatal exam during the first four months of pregnancy. They’re credited with helping drop the infant mortality rate from 65 deaths per 1,000 births to 2.5.

New Jersey and Ohio offer them to parents-to-be, who must first complete an online education course at baby-boxuniversity.com. The program isn’t about the boxes per se, but about educating new and first-time parents, says Dr. Kathryn McCans, chair of New Jersey’s Child Fatality and Near Fatality Review Board, which identifies causes of deaths and near-deaths, their relations to governmental support systems, and ways to prevent them.

McCans says the idea to start a universal baby box program in New Jersey came from a member of the Review Board’s “Sudden Unexpected Infant Death” subcommittee who brought it to the full board’s attention, and “that story got people thinking.”

The program quickly became a public-private partnership of sorts: In November 2016, the Los Angeles-based Baby Box Co. told the board that with seed money, it could find funding to take universal baby box distribution statewide for 2017. The board then decided to tap $40,000 from a Safe Sleep grant it had gotten from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to get started.

“Ideally, every baby born in New Jersey this year (105,000 births, based on historic data) would get their own box,” McCans says. “If we see a downturn (in Sudden Unexplained Infant Death Syndrome fatalities), I’ll consider it a success.”

Jennifer Clary, CEO of the Baby Box Co., says more than 12,000 people in New Jersey have completed the online education course since the program launched there on Jan. 25. About 30 states, including some in the Midwest, have inquired about launching similar programs, she says. The company also runs a similar program in Canada, in all provinces except Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

The company works with local hospitals and health care providers to produce short informational videos for the website. Expectant or new parents log in and get a syllabus tailored to their location. Upon completing the program, parents get a certificate they can use to get a baby box at a designated pickup site or have it delivered directly to their home. (In New Jersey, so far, it’s about $50-50 between pickups and deliveries, Clary says.)

Part of the program’s success, she adds, is that Baby Box University is a platform designed to reach millennial parents who primarily use cell phones or tablets to get information; anyone can access it from any browser-equipped platform.

The Children’s Health Alliance of Wisconsin is taking a more targeted approach with a statewide pilot project launched in 2016 to put baby boxes (which they call “newborn nests”) in homes. Trained volunteers provide the educational component, and conduct home visits to help parents pick a location for the “nest,” and ensure sleep safety. Follow-up visits are paid two weeks and two months after nest placement for evaluation.

Although this approach is slower than a statewide, universal program, project coordinator Amanda Bagin says the alliance prefers doing things this way because the efficacy and safety of the boxes and education can be better understood as the program grows.

There’s not yet a lot of solid evidence about baby boxes in the United States, and “if we can evaluate the program as it goes, we can provide that evidence,” she adds.

Partly because the training had to be done first, only 25 to 30 nests have been distributed since the summer of 2016, Bagin says, adding that at least five local health departments are now getting the training for their own staffs so the program should grow faster through 2017.

In Alberta, the nexus of parental education and baby boxes is also the focus of a province-wide study led by Karen Benzies, a professor and associate dean of research for the Faculty of Nursing at the University of Calgary, examining how supporting first-time mothers can help children get off to a better start. A total of 563 mothers who were about six months to 32 weeks along in their pregnancies, as well as their “mentors” (a friend or family member), were recruited from late October 2015 through 2016. Questionnaires were given at the start and after two months and six months.

The study concludes in June, with results to be announced at the end of July.

% of births that are financed by Medicaid in the Midwest

| State | Medicaid FIMR | Medicaid CDR | Total Medicaid
|-------|--------------|--------------|----------------|
| Illinois | 43% | 56% | 49%
| Indiana | 42% | 58% | 50%
| Michigan | 40% | 60% | 50%
| Minnesota | 41% | 59% | 50%

*States were asked to report the share of all births financed by Medicaid in the most recently available 12-month period, 2014 in Ohio, Minnesota, Ohio and Wisconsin, 2015 in Iowa, Michigan, Nebraska and South Dakota, and 2016 in Indiana and Kansas. North Dakota provided an estimated average across recent years.

Source: Mercer & Mayer Family Foundation.
Minnesota Rep. Melissa Hortman
House minority leader had her eye on a life in public service since childhood, and found the right fit inside the Legislature

by Jon Davis (jdavis@csg.org)

From an early age, Melissa Hortman knew she wanted to lead a life of public service. As an elementary school student, she was inspired by a line of Girl Scout Law: "Make the world a better place." And from her Catholic upbringing, she took to heart that "to whomever much is given, of him much will be required." In middle school, she learned about the U.S. Congress and the presidents, and she saw the impact elected leaders had on the positive development of the country, and decided that is how she wanted to give back.

"To me it was always about public service, never about politics," she says.

Hortman was first elected to the Minnesota House in 2004, and since then has advocated for issues ranging from equity in the education system, to renewable energy, to transportation infrastructure.

She took on a new role late last year, when her Democratic-Farmer-Labor legislative colleagues chose her as minority leader. (Control of the House has been rather fluid of late: Republicans regained the chamber last year, in 2014 and 2010; the DFL won it in 2012 and 2008.)

"The way I define good policy is meaningful investments in K-12 and higher education, and through my 12 years of service, I've seen much better investment possible under DFL leadership," says Hortman.

When she attended Boston University as an undergraduate, Hortman would brag to fellow freshmen about how great Minnesota was because its students were always No. 1 or 2 in the country on education measures such as college attendance, SAT and ACT scores, and high school graduation rates.

She says state policymakers in the early 1990s began drafting legislation that was heavily influenced by past successes and the implications for education powerhouses.

"I always felt like Minnesota was the greatest in terms of education," she says, "and I'm motivated by a desire to get us as high as we can be."

In a recent interview with CSQ Midwest, Rep. Hortman reflected on her legislative career and priorities for the next two years. Here are excerpts:

**Q:** In your 12 years as a Minnesota state representative, what are some of the legislative accomplishments that stand out to you?

**A:** In 2009, I carried the child passenger restraint bill that opponents called the "Wrap Your Kid in Bubble Wrap" bill. It requires a child to use a booster seat until he or she is 8 years old. AAA [American Automobile Association] has told me there are children in Minnesota who are alive today because of that legislation.

When I was chair of the House Energy Committee in 2013 and 2014, I authored a bill that set a solar energy standard of 1.5 percent by 2020 and authorized community solar projects in Minnesota. By 2020, we'll have at least 35 times as much solar as we did before the bill passed. The very first contract Xcel Energy signed allowed [it] to avoid 7 million tons of carbon dioxide emissions.

**Q:** What are some of your legislative goals for this year and next?

**A:** My goal is to improve the lives of Minnesotans in whatever ways we can. Student debt is a huge problem, and the House DFL Caucus would love to work on making college more affordable. Higher education should be something that closes the gap between rich and poor, and right now some families can afford it and some can't. We're at a dangerous point that it could exacerbate the divide between higher- and lower-income people.

**Q:** What are some of your interests outside the Legislature?

**A:** I serve on the Uniform Law Commission, a volunteer job, with 350 lawyers from across the country working on proposed uniform acts for the states.

I'm also teaching my third course on climate change and renewable energy as an adjunct professor at the University of Minnesota. In the fall of 2015, I team-taught an undergrad climate-policy class with former [Minnesota] Sen. Ellen Anderson. The Paris climate talks were coming up, and I felt the world was finally converging on consensus that it was time to do something about climate change and it was important to convey to undergrads that they have a part in that future.

We discussed the science of climate change; private sector, political and defense-related issues; and moved into city, state, national and international actions. It turned out that I absolutely loved teaching.
Saskatchewan program brings civic education to higher level

Province’s teachers view legislative process, meet with local legislators

by Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly Speaker Corey Tochor (speaker@legassembly.sk.ca)

Now planning for its 19th year, the Saskatchewan Social Sciences Teachers’ Institute on Parliamentary Democracy has provided nearly 400 teachers from across the province an opportunity to gain a better understanding of the province’s unicameral legislative process by observing it in action.

The SSTI, an intensive five-day professional development program hosted by the Office of the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, is offered to all teachers across the province.

Started by Speaker Glenn Hagel in 1999, the program was modeled after the Federal Teachers Institute, launched in 1996 by the House of Commons in Ottawa.

Federal program inspires provinces

After the inaugural federal institute, the six Saskatchewan teacher participants contemplated the prospect of undertaking a similar process focusing on the provincial governance system. This group approached Speaker Hagel, who eagerly endorsed the idea and committed staff resources to making it a reality.

The SSTI was the very first provincial teacher’s institute in Canada. Most provinces now offer a similar program to their teachers, with some of these programs having been modeled upon Saskatchewan’s.

Teachers are invited to apply by submitting a letter of interest as well as a letter of support from their principal stating why they should be considered as a candidate. There is minimal cost to attend, as all accommodations, food and travel are supported by the speaker’s office.

Once the SSTI begins, the agenda proceeds at a rapid pace with a steady schedule of tours, briefings and seminars, including briefings with clerks, officers of the Legislative Assembly, and the lieutenant governor of Saskatchewan, the speaker presiding in his role. It is a unique experience that most say they will take back to their classroom.

The conference starts early in the morning and events take place on into the evening, depending on the sessional schedule. Upon their arrival, the institute provides teachers with a wide array of resources for their reference, including information about parliamentary democracy, law, legislation, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the various parliamentary offices and roles, and other subjects of interest.

Teachers are provided with an orientation binder of supplementary materials designed to be adapted to the classroom. In addition, the Ministry of Education gives a presentation on resources and curriculum connections, parliamentary democracy in the classroom, and citizenship.

Teacher participants also meet with representatives of other provincial offices such as Ombudsman and Elections Saskatchewan. They also have the opportunity to hear from the founder of CIVIX, a successful program in Canada designed to help teachers better engage their students in the parliamentary process. It provides teachers with resources, including poll questions and lesson plans for staging an exceptionally authentic and engaging mock election. Teachers report this to be a beneficial experience for their students.

On most evenings, the schedule concludes with a working dinner and an opportunity to debrief. Teachers are seated with the Legislative Assembly members of each of their respective constituencies (both for their residence and their school). This provides an opportunity for both the teacher and his or her MLA to discuss teachers’ schools, their communities, and any concerns they may have.

Comments from MLAs and teachers have been positive about the arrangement. Teachers appreciate the chance to have an informal discussion with their elected representatives, all the while discovering that they too are human and work hard for the citizens of the province.

The MLAs also feel that this institution is valuable to them. It allows them a connection to teachers and their classrooms that they may not have otherwise, a chance to hear their concerns and to garner their suggestions about improvements to the education system. They find that they receive many repeat invitations from schools that have had teachers participate in the program.

Teachers feel enthusiastic and revitalized about teaching civics after completing the program.

\'Mock parliament’ a highlight

The teacher’s learning experience is culminated in a mock parliament, following the exact proceedings that occur in the chamber, with the speaker presiding in his role. It is a unique experience that most say they will take back to their classroom.

The mock parliament is filmed as a genuine parliamentary debate, and a DVD is made available to the teachers as a classroom resource.

Each year the institute’s Steering Committee does an assessment after the program is completed. There have been tweaks and changes to the agenda over the years, but basically the program has been solid from its inception. Evaluation summaries from the participants include comments such as, “Don’t change a thing. It is the best professional development program in Saskatchewan and it should not be missed by anyone who wants to teach their students what it means to be an engaged citizen.” They feel enthusiastic and revitalized about teaching civics after completing the program.

Preparing for a program such as SSTI involves a lot of preparatory work and cooperation from the various bodies in the Legislative Assembly; however, the reward is great. The opportunity to share the behind-the-scenes workings and the valuable information about parliamentary democracy with our teachers, the leaders in our communities, is invaluable.

I am excited about being the Patron of the Saskatchewan Social Science Teachers Institute on Parliamentary Democracy. This program has become a Saskatchewan icon, and I hope to continue the tradition. I am looking forward to the institute’s 20th anniversary in 2018.

Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly Speaker Corey Tochor was first elected to the assembly in 2012, representing the Saskatoon Eastview district. He was elected speaker in 2016.

Submissions welcome

This page is designed to be a forum for legislators and constitutional officers. The opinions expressed on this page do not reflect those of The Council of State Governments or the Midwestern Legislative Conference. Responses to any FirstPerson article are welcome, as are pieces written on other topics. For more information, contact Tim Anderson at 630.925.1922 or tanderson@csg.org.

Achievement levels of U.S. eighth-grade students on civics portion of National Assessment of Educational Progress

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With help from CSG, North Dakota moves toward reforms in criminal justice policy

Justice Center provided technical assistance in advance of 2017 session

The latest Midwestern state to receive technical assistance from the CSG Justice Center is taking steps this year to enact policies that save taxpayer dollars and improve public safety. In February, the North Dakota House overwhelmingly approved HB 1041, a comprehensive bill that includes several policies related to “justice reinvestment”—for example, changes in the penalties for certain drug offenses, greater use of alcohol and substance abuse treatment programs, and creation of a pilot initiative for pretrial supervision.

HB 1041 is the result of the work of a special interim committee formed in 2015 by the North Dakota Legislative Assembly. Composed of legislators, local state’s attorneys, judges, law enforcement and the state’s attorney general, the Incarceration Issues Committee met several times over the interim. The Council of State Governments Justice Center provided the committee with a data-driven analysis on how to reduce North Dakota’s corrections population, contain spending, and reinvest a portion of the savings in strategies that can reduce recidivism and increase public safety.

In January, the CSG Justice Center issued a final report outlining policy recommendations and options (see below for details). Over the past decade, the number of people in North Dakota’s prisons and jails, on probation, and on parole has increased. To accommodate this growth, the state and its county governments have spent tens of millions of dollars expanding the capacity of existing correctional facilities and building new facilities. Minus legislative action, North Dakota’s prison population is projected to grow by 36 percent by fiscal year 2022, at a cost of $1.15 million. The CSG Justice Center’s proposed policy changes would avert a minimum of $63.8 million in costs by 2022.

North Dakota is the seventh Midwestern state to receive technical assistance on justice reinvestment from the CSG Justice Center.

CSG’s policy options for North Dakota policymakers on justice reinvestment

- **Option #1** — Use probation instead of prison to hold people who are convicted of nonviolent Class C felony offenses.
- **Option #2** — Limit to 90 days the time that individuals can be incarcerated as a sanction for a technical violation of their probation or parole; employ more-effective and less-costly sanctions that can reduce further violations.
- **Option #3** — Target resources so that the most intensive supervision of individuals in the criminal justice system can occur at the beginning of a person’s probation term, when the risk of reoffending is highest.
- **Option #4** — Expand access to community-based behavioral health services for people in the criminal justice system.
- **Option #5** — Establish a pretrial supervision pilot program and adopt a pretrial risk assessment tool. This option would help reduce unnecessary detentions, prioritize jail beds for people who are at a high risk of reoffending, and connect people with services in the community.
- **Option #6** — Apply the state’s existing good-time policy to time served in jail as well as prison.
- **Option #7** — Improve the quality of and access to court-ordered programs for people convicted of domestic violence offenses.
- **Option #8** — Better collect and analyze outcome and demographic data for individuals in the criminal justice system.
- **Option #9** — Assess, track and ensure the sustainability of recidivism-reduction strategies and increase statewide data collection and analysis efforts.

April 5 is deadline to apply for BILLD, top leadership program for Midwest’s legislators

April 5 is the last day to apply for the only leadership program designed to meet the needs of newer state legislators from the Midwest.

Now in its 33rd year, the Bowhay Institute for Legislative Leadership Development counts close to 800 people as graduates. Many BILLD alumni have gone on to hold key leadership positions in their legislatures; others are now serving in the U.S. Congress and in other state government positions.

This year’s BILLD program will be held Aug. 11-15 in Minneapolis. Applications are available at csgmidwest.org.

Details on the BILLD program

BILLD is designed to advance the leadership skills of legislators in their first four years of service. It includes a mix of sessions on public policy, professional development and leadership skills.

These sessions are led by nationally renowned policy experts; legislative leaders from the Midwest; and specialists in areas such as media training, consensus building and time management.

The highly interactive curriculum also gives participants the chance to meet, learn from and work with lawmakers from across the region. The BILLD program includes legislators from all 11 Midwestern states as well as some of the region’s Canadian provinces.

Each BILLD fellowship covers the cost of tuition, lodging and meals to attend the five-day institute. In addition, BILLD fellows receive a nominal travel stipend, which helps cover a portion of the cost of traveling to the Twin Cities.

BILLD is conducted by CSG Midwest’s Midwestern Legislative Conference in partnership with The Center for the Study of Politics and Governance at the University of Minnesota’s Humphrey School of Public Affairs. Faculty at the Humphrey School will lead the institute’s policy sessions. The BILLD Steering Committee, a bipartisan group of the Midwest’s legislators, oversees the program, including the annual selection of BILLD Fellows. Indiana Rep. Ed Clere and Ohio Sen. Cliff Hite serve as co-chairs of the BILLD Steering Committee; Iowa Rep. Rob Taylor is the vice chair.

The Council of State Governments was founded in 1933 as a national, nonpartisan organization to assist and advance state government. The headquarters office, in Lexington, Ky., is responsible for a variety of national programs and services, including research, reference publications, innovations transfer, suggested state legislation and interstate consulting services. The Midwestern Office supports several groups of state officials, including the Midwestern Legislative Conference, an association of all legislators in 11 states: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota and Wisconsin. The Canadian provinces of Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario and Saskatchewan are MLC affiliate members.
About The Council of State Governments’ Policy Academy Series

- designed for legislators and other leaders in state government
- provide customized training and a “deeper dig” on critical issues in state government
- for more information, and to inquire about participating, visit the CSG events page at csg.org/events/PolicyAcademies.aspx.

About the CSG Policy Academy Series

- 10 different CSG policy academies held between now and the end of the year, legislators and other state leaders will have the chance to take a “deeper dig” into critical issues in government, from health and education policy, to the future of public pensions and cybersecurity. The first of these policy academies will be held June 12-14 in Detroit, where legislators will have the chance to assess the legal and regulatory landscape on issues related to autonomous and connected vehicles. It is designed for legislators who are members of their state transportation, insurance, economic development, governance and/or commerce committees.

Here are dates for the nine other academies being offered by The Council of State Governments in 2017.

- June 23-25 in Lexington, Ky. — Part of a broader CSG initiative to foster cross-branch collaboration in state government, this policy academy will focus on legislator-regulator relations in the areas of environmental and energy policy.
- June 28-30 in Washington, D.C. — The Medicaid 101 policy academy introduces legislators to the intricacies of the state-federal health insurance program for low-income people.
- Aug. 21-23 (location to be determined) — Attendees will examine emerging cybersecurity threats in state government and their privacy implications.
- Sept. 20-22 in Washington, D.C. — Two policy academies will be held over this three-day period. One is a Medicaid academy for legislators who serve in leadership positions on health committees. The second is an academy on global affairs; it is open to graduates of the CSG Henry Toll Fellowship Program.
- Oct. 4-6 in Lexington, Ky. — Two academies will be held over this three-day period: “Workforce Investment: Funding and Trends” and “Public Pensions and Retirement Security.”
- Dec. 14 in Las Vegas — Two policy academies will be held in conjunction with CSG’s 2017 National Conference: “The Every Student Succeeds Act: What States Need to Know” and “Fundamentals of Water.”

SAVE THE DATE!

PREMIER EVENT FOR MIDWEST’S LEGISLATORS BEGINS JULY 9

Join us at CSG’s 72nd Annual Meeting. Not only is the Midwestern Legislative Conference Annual Meeting other unparalleled opportunity to network, share ideas, and gain practical knowledge, but it also offers a chance to see what other states are doing, specifically for legislators. You’ll also get a chance to see why Des Moines ranks #1!

HOT SPOTS IN DOWNTOWN DES MOINES
- OPENING NIGHT CELEBRATION AT THE DES MOINES ART CENTER & GARDENS
- MIDWEST NIGHT OF LIVING HERITAGE DINNER
- DES MOINES NIGHT AT THE DOWNTOWN CAMPUS

MIC ANNUAL MEETING EVENING SOCIAL EVENTS

MIC ANNUAL MEETING FEATURED SPEAKERS

- Small businesses, under political pressure, need more allies
- Tax and revenue, under political pressure, need more allies
- Support young leaders, under political pressure, need more allies
Michigan joins states with laws to compensate wrongfully imprisoned

Individuals put in prison for a crime they did not commit are now eligible for compensation in Michigan.

For every year in which a person was wrongfully incarcerated, he or she will be eligible for $50,000 from the state. Individuals have 18 months upon being released from custody to seek compensation via the Michigan Court of Claims. SB 291, signed into law in late 2016, directs Michigan's treasurer to establish a wrongful-imprisonment compensation fund.

Two thousand people in the United States have been exonerated over the past 28 years, according to the University of Michigan's National Registry of Exonerations. That total includes 431 individuals in the 11-state Midwest — with the number of exonerations ranging from a low of two in North Dakota to a high of 185 in Illinois. Michigan has the second-highest total, 68.

This year, bills to compensate the wrongfully imprisoned have been introduced in at least two Midwestern states: Indiana (HB 1062 and HB 1067) and Kansas (SB 125). Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, Ohio and Wisconsin already have these laws in place.

Several Midwest states get high rankings for budget management

Indiana, Wisconsin, North Dakota and Iowa have made the top-10 list in a recent U.S. News & World Report study that explores how well state governments are being administered across the country. Four metrics were used to evaluate all 50 states: fiscal stability, government digitalization, budget transparency and state integrity.

- Indiana ranked No. 1 overall, thanks to a high credit rating from Moody’s and strong policies on budget transparency.
- Wisconsin’s fourth-place ranking was due in part to the state having a fully funded pension system.
- North Dakota ranked No. 7 and got high marks for budget management.
- Ranked No. 10, Iowa has a high credit rating from Moody’s and finished near the top in the study’s evaluation of “state integrity.”

U.S. News & World Report also explored state economies, education and health care systems, crime rates and infrastructure to come up with an overall ranking for “how well states are performing for their citizens.” Minnesota ranked third overall (highest in the Midwest), the result of factors such as low poverty and incarceration rates, a strong education system, and widespread health care access.

Minnesota legislators remove prohibition on Sunday alcohol sales

Starting in July, Minnesotans will have the option of buying alcohol on Sunday, the result of legislation (HF 30) signed into law in March.

Minnesota and Indiana have been the only two states in the Midwest with Sunday-sales bans. Indiana’s SB 83, introduced in January, would allow the state’s grocery and drug stores to get a supplemental dealer’s permit and sell alcoholic beverages on Sunday. Liquor store dealers would not need this permit.

Under Minnesota’s new law, the (Minneapolis) Star Tribune reports, local governments still have the authority to prevent Sunday sales. This “local option” is a common statutory provision in Midwestern states’ laws governing alcohol sales.

Less common is statutory language in Minnesota that prohibits grocery stores from selling many types of alcohol, regardless of the day of the week. According to the National Alcoholic Beverage Control Association, most states in the Midwest allow grocery and convenience stores to sell wine, beer and spirits. However, in Minnesota, these retailers can only sell beer with 3.2 percent alcohol or less; Kansas has a similar law in place. Indiana prevents grocery and convenience stores from selling spirits.

Law on public-sector collective bargaining overhauled in Iowa

Big changes in public-sector collective bargaining are coming to Iowa under one of the first bills signed into law during the 2017 session. According to The Des Moines Register, HF 291 got passed along mostly partisan lines and brought labor-union representatives from across Iowa to the Capitol to protest the rewrite of a 43-year-old state law.

Under HF 291, only base wages will be mandatory in negotiations between most public sector employers and workers. In addition, if the contracts for most public-employee bargaining units go to arbitration, the annual wage increase cannot exceed one of the following (whichever is less): 3 percent or a percentage equal to inflationary changes. The state also now prohibits negotiations in areas such as insurance, evaluation procedures, and the subcontracting of public services.

The law, however, exempts public safety workers from many of these provisions — for example, the limits on what can be collectively bargained and on wage increases from arbitration. In a lawsuit filed against HF 291, the American Federation of State, County & Municipal Employees contends that creating two classes of public employees (public safety vs. non-public safety) and treating them differently violates the Iowa Constitution.