

STATELINE MIDWEST



MIDWEST

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A PUSH FOR PROPERTY TAX RELIEF

‘Tax swaps,’ new assessment and levy limits, and higher homestead exemptions are among the proposals swirling in capitols as tax bills rise with jumps in property values

by Tim Anderson (tanderson@csg.org)

The property tax, Joan Youngman says, “will never have a quiet life.”

On the one hand, people are reminded every day of the critical amenities provided through this local revenue source — schools, roads, police, etc.

“Voters are aware of their property values and of the services, and that’s a good thing for [local] accountability and responsible decision making,” says Youngman, a senior fellow and chair of the Department of Valuation and Taxation at the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy.

On the other hand, they also are mindful of the costs.

How much did you pay last year in property taxes?

People are much more likely to know that answer compared to sales or income taxes, at least in part because the property tax typically is collected as a lump-sum payment and can total thousands of dollars.

In recent years, Rep. Mike Amyx says, he and other Kansas lawmakers have been hearing loud and clear from constituents about the impacts of rising property taxes.

“The values of properties are going up; people’s incomes have not [kept pace]. And, of course, you have folks on fixed income,” he says. “We’re seeing some fairly big hardships because of that.”

In his State of the State address in January, Nebraska Gov. Jim Pillen identified “out-of-control property taxes” as the state’s “most important economic issue.” His goal: sign new laws this session that result in a 40 percent reduction in property taxes.

Kansas and Nebraska are not alone. Youngman notes that in just about every state where legislatures are in session, bills have been filed to provide some kind of relief.

RIISING VALUES, RISING TAXES

U.S. home values reached an average of \$342,941 in January 2024, according to the Zillow Home Value Index; that is an increase of 68.3 percent since January 2017. The annual growth in home values was 3.1 percent between January 2023 and January 2024.

The value of agricultural land has been on the rise as well. Last year alone, it went up 7.4 percent. Between 2009 and 2023, the value of farmland

nearly doubled, from \$2,090 per acre, on average, to \$4,080, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

This kind of jump in property valuations often results in higher tax bills, putting more pressure on lawmakers to intervene.

VARYING TAX BURDENS

Most states in the Midwest fall somewhere in the middle of U.S. states on measures of property tax burdens and reliance (see maps on this page), but there are exceptions.

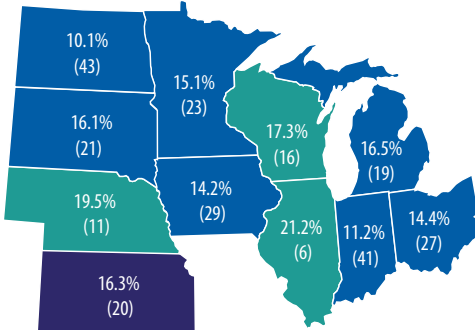
Indiana, for instance, ranks in the bottom one-fifth of states.

Statutory changes made there a decade-and-a-half ago allowed for a “tax swap” that reduced reliance on the property tax. The General Assembly raised the sales tax rate from 6 percent to 7 percent and had the state assume full funding responsibility for the costs associated with day-to-day student instruction in K-12 schools.

Around the same time, a legislative-initiated, voter-approved constitutional amendment established new property tax caps. For instance, the tax paid by an Indiana homeowner cannot exceed 1 percent of the property’s gross assessed value.

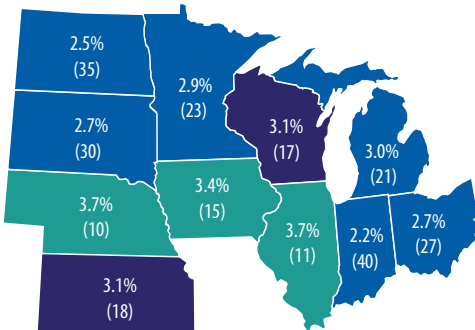
On the flip side, Nebraska is one of the Midwestern states (along with Illinois) with a higher-than-average reliance on the property tax.

PROPERTY TAX AS % OF TOTAL STATE-LOCAL REVENUE IN MIDWESTERN STATES (U.S. RANK IN PARENTHESES)



- Higher than U.S. average (16.6%)
- Same as U.S. average (16.6%)
- Lower than U.S. average (16.6%)

% OF PERSONAL INCOME PAID IN PROPERTY TAXES (U.S. RANK IN PARENTHESES)



- Higher than U.S. average (3.1%)
- Same as U.S. average (3.1%)
- Lower than U.S. average (3.1%)

Source: Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, “State-by-State Property Tax at a Glance, 2023” (using U.S. Census Bureau data for year 2020)



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Majority Leader
Matt Windschitl



Majority Leader
Robyn Gabel

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BACK TO THE DRAWING BOARD? RULINGS IMPACT FUTURE OF REDISTRICTING, LEGISLATIVE MAPS

Recent court decisions in three Midwestern states are requiring altered or completely new state legislative maps to be used for the 2024 elections. In a fourth state, **Ohio**, the state Supreme Court has ruled that the General Assembly maps can remain in place for the rest of the decade, but voters may have the chance later this year to upend the state’s redistricting process. Here is an overview of noteworthy redistricting developments in the Midwest and their potential impacts.




Michigan: Part of map ruled an unconstitutional racial gerrymander

In late 2023, a U.S. District Court ruled that elections could not be held in 13 Detroit-area state House and Senate districts without a fix to the lines drawn and approved by the **Michigan** Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission. Those districts were drawn predominantly on the basis of race, the court ruled, and the commission did not show that such racial gerrymandering was needed to meet a “compelling interest” such as compliance with the federal Voting Rights Act. The U.S. Supreme Court chose not to intervene in the case. As a result, a new map needs to be in place for the 2024 primary and general elections.




North Dakota: A legal victory for two Native American tribes

In **North Dakota**, the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians and Spirit Lake Tribe challenged the legislature-approved redistricting plan, arguing it violated the Voting Rights Act by diluting the voting strength of Native Americans. A U.S. District Court ruled in favor of the tribes in late 2023 and ordered that their preferred map be used instead. The decision only affects a few districts, but will give Native Americans a better opportunity to elect a second “representative of their choice.” The original map unlawfully packed Native American voters into a single district, the court ruled.



Wisconsin: Map fails to meet ‘contiguous territory’ rule for districts, state’s highest court rules

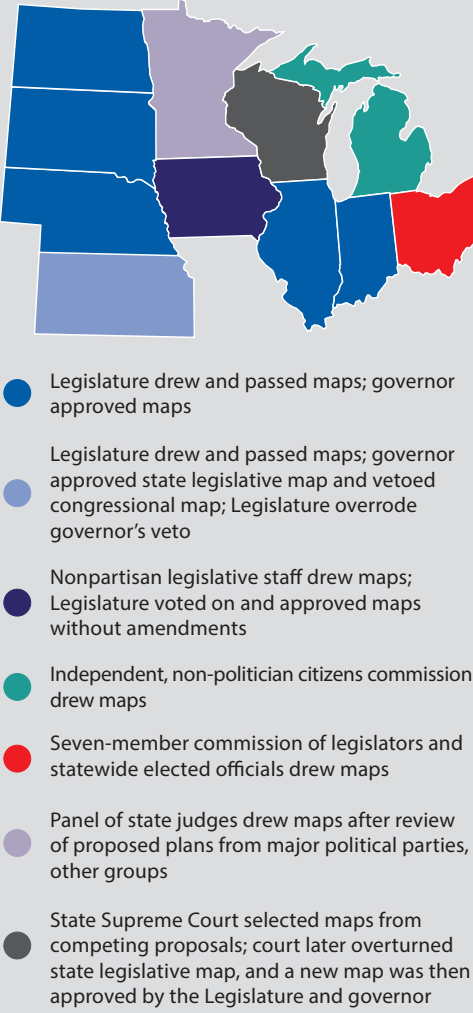
Rejection of the legislative map in **Wisconsin** centered on a state constitutional provision requiring each district to be a “contiguous territory.” Because of many instances in which different parts of a single district are not physically connected, the Wisconsin Supreme Court ruled, a new legislative map for the entire state is needed. In the wake of this December 2023 decision, several groups submitted proposed maps to the court for consideration. Then came a twist in February: The Republican-led Legislature approved a plan previously submitted to the court by Democratic Gov. Tony Evers. This move was made to prevent the state Supreme Court from selecting a proposal that might be more politically advantageous to Democrats, according to the *Madison Capital Journal*. Evers signed the bill (AB 488).



Ohio: Proposal to use indepenent, citizen-led redistricting commission may appear on November ballot

Since the redrawing of the nation’s political maps earlier this decade, few states have had more redistricting-related litigation than Ohio. However, recent court decisions are keeping the current state legislative and congressional maps in place. The big question in the year ahead: Will Ohio voters overhaul the redistricting process? A ballot initiative is in the works to hand over map-making duties to an independent, citizen-led commission (similar to the model now used in Michigan). Supporters of this proposed constitutional change want it on the November 2024 ballot. Last decade, Ohio voters approved separate amendments to alter the process for drawing legislative and congressional lines, but those changes still left redistricting responsibilities with elected officials (through the use of a seven-member commission or votes by the full General Assembly).

HOW STATE LEGISLATIVE, U.S. CONGRESSIONAL MAPS WERE DRAWN IN MIDWEST IN MOST RECENT ROUND OF REDISTRICTING



MIDWEST PROJECTED TO LOSE FOUR CONGRESSIONAL SEATS AS POPULATION CONTINUES TO MOVE SOUTH

Population trends have returned to pre-pandemic norms, the U.S. Census Bureau says, but most of the growth is concentrated in a single region: the South. That region added more than 1.4 million residents and accounted for 87 percent of the nation’s total growth in 2023.

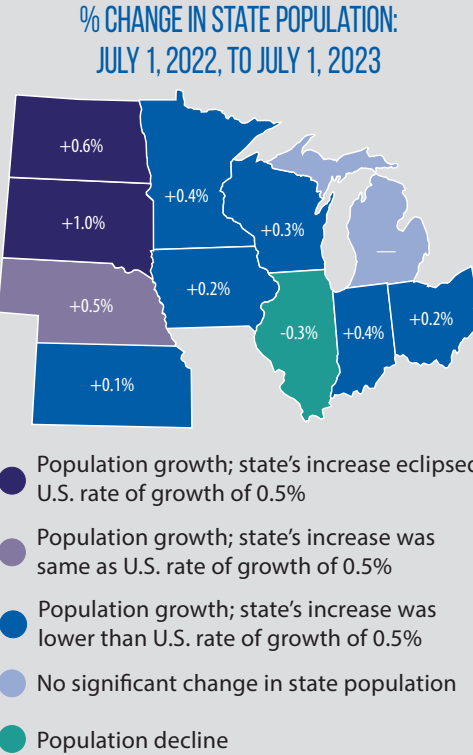
Over the course of this single year, southern states added 706,266 people due to patterns of domestic migration alone. Every other region was a net loser due to this movement of people within the United States: a loss of 85,729 in the Midwest (Missouri included), 323,300 in the East, and 297,327 in the West.

If these trends continue throughout the decade, “shifts in political power after the 2030 census could be among the most profound in the nation’s history,” the Brennan Center for Justice noted in a study late last year. It projects a loss of four U.S. House seats for the 11-state Midwest after the next congressional reapportionment: two in **Illinois** and one each in **Michigan** and **Minnesota**. The South would gain a total of 11 seats.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, nine of the 11 states in the Midwest experienced population growth in 2023, with the lone exceptions being Illinois (decline of 0.3%) and Michigan (no statistically significant change). **South Dakota** and **North Dakota** had the region’s fastest rate of population growth; Indiana added the largest number of people among the 11 Midwestern states (nearly 30,000).

Nationwide, the annual rate of growth was 0.5 percent, a figure higher than recent years but still historically low. In 2021 and 2022, annual rates of growth dipped to 0.2 percent and 0.4 percent, respectively, due to a rise in the number of deaths during the COVID-19 pandemic as well as decreases in immigration.

The number of live births continues to decline in the United States. A separate U.S. Census Bureau study estimates that starting in 2038, the number of U.S. deaths will begin to outpace births on a yearly basis due to an aging population and reduced fertility. This “natural decrease” will then continue throughout the rest of the century, with international immigration becoming the largest contributor to U.S. population growth.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

NEW LAWS IN MICHIGAN AND MINNESOTA REGULATE USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN ELECTIONS

Two states in the Midwest are among the first in the nation to have laws on the books that regulate the use of artificial intelligence in elections.

As part of the recently enacted **Michigan** bills (HB 5141 and HB 5143-5145), signed into law near the tail end of 2023, the use of AI must be acknowledged in any political advertisements that use it. AI is newly defined in the state’s campaign finance laws as “a machine-based system that can, for a given set of human-defined objectives, make predictions, recommendations or decisions influencing real or virtual environments.”

Michigan now explicitly bars political campaigns’ use of “materially deceptive media” generated by AI. This includes false depictions of candidates (things they didn’t say, actions they didn’t take) that intentionally harm their reputations or electoral chances. This new prohibition on “deep fakes” does not apply, however, if a “clearly visible” disclaimer alerts viewers that the image, audio or video “has been manipulated by technical means and depicts speech or conduct that did not occur.”

Minnesota was the first Midwestern state to criminalize the use of deep-fake technologies to influence elections with the passage of HF 1370. Signed into law in May 2023, this measure also cracks down on individuals who intentionally disseminate a deep fake that realistically (and falsely) depicts another person as naked or engaged in a sexual act.

Late last year, The Council of State Governments conducted a 50-state analysis of new laws designed to regulate the design, development and use of artificial intelligence. Seventeen U.S. states had adopted 29 bills as of December 2023, including measures to protect individuals’ data privacy, prevent abusive data practices and discrimination, and require disclosure from employers or businesses when AI is being used.



NEBRASKA PROPOSALS REFLECT GOVERNOR'S GOAL OF CUTTING PROPERTY TAXES BY 40 PERCENT

» CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Numerous legislative proposals this year would change that and add new revenue sources in exchange for the 40 percent reduction in property taxes envisioned by Gov. Pillen. For example:

- Raise Nebraska's sales tax rate from 5.5 percent to 6.5 percent.
- Broaden the sales tax base by imposing a tax on more services (for example, dry cleaning, digital advertising, accounting, storage and moving, and business legal services), on candy and soda, on lottery tickets and games of skill, and on certain agricultural-equipment parts.
- Raise the cigarette tax by \$2 a pack (from 64 cents to \$2.64).

Nebraska Sen. Lou Ann Linehan says a series of legislative changes are needed to bring a more balanced approach to government finance. She and others refer to it as the "three-legged stool": income, sales and property taxes accounting for roughly the same amount of revenue for state and local governments.

The stool is no longer level, Linehan says, with property tax collections in Nebraska now at \$5 billion, compared to \$3 billion in income taxes and \$2 billion in sales taxes.

She adds that additional revenue sources should only be part of the solution. Linehan also wants harder, state-level caps that limit annual growth in tax collections by local governments; under her proposed LB 1414, the total amount being collected would mostly have to remain the same from one year to the next. (There are exceptions to account for new construction or to pay off bonds, and allow voters to approve higher amounts.)

This harder cap, Linehan says, will keep

property taxes in check even as property values rise. LB 1414 does not apply to school districts, though a measure passed last year (LB 243) curbs districts' year-over-year increases to 3 percent, with exceptions to account for growth in overall enrollment or the number of higher-need students.

Outside the Legislature, advocates of eliminating all income, property and inheritance taxes in Nebraska are seeking to get their proposal on the November 2024 ballot. Their idea is to fund state and local government through a consumption tax. A petition to end property taxes in North Dakota, via a constitutional amendment, also has been circulating.

TRANSPARENCY IN TAXATION

In Kansas, any proposed constitutional amendments must first get legislative approval, and Democrats and Republicans have proposed separate property tax-related measures.

The Republican plan would limit counties from raising the valuation on any property by more than 4 percent in a single year; the Democratic proposal would reduce the rate at which residential property is assessed, from 11.5 percent to 9 percent. (Rates are set in the Constitution.)

Statutory-level changes also are under consideration this session.

One idea is to expand Kansas' existing homestead exemption, a policy lever common across the country.

According to Youngman, the universality of the homestead exemption (all property owners get relief) often makes it more politically popular than targeted, "circuit breaker" programs,

which provide assistance only once property taxes exceed a certain percentage of a homeowner's income.

Still, if set as a fixed-dollar amount (rather than a percentage of the home's worth), the homestead exemption can help counter-balance "the inherent regressivity in tax valuations," says Youngman, noting that "the lower end of the residential class tends to be over-assessed."

She suggests that state legislatures fund these exemptions, rather than leaving it to local governments to find ways of making up the lost revenue.

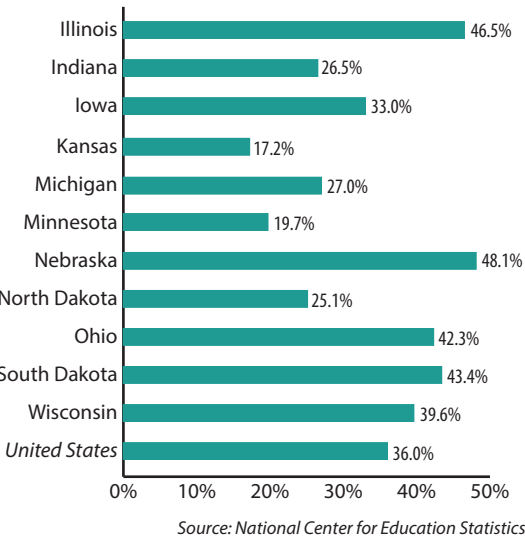
Proposals in Kansas would raise the homestead exemption on the statewide property tax to \$100,000 of valuation; it already was raised two years ago from \$20,000 to \$40,000 under HB 2239.

Homestead exemptions, circuit breaker programs, assessment and levy limits, and property tax rate caps are among the ways that states in the Midwest have sought to curb property taxes (see article below).

But Youngman also says there is value in increasing state-level transparency, while allowing for local control over budgeting decisions that impact local services.

In Kansas, a "truth in taxation" law (SB 13 of 2021) requires local taxing bodies to alert residents and hold public hearings prior to any vote that increases property tax collections.

% OF TOTAL REVENUE FOR STATES' K-12 PUBLIC SCHOOLS THAT CAME FROM LOCAL PROPERTY TAXES DURING 2020-21 SCHOOL YEAR



"It's an inhibiting step [to increasing taxes] because you no longer can have what you might call a 'silent tax increase,'" says Youngman, noting that property tax collections can rise simply because of rising assessment values.

"At the same time, you're not imposing [limits] from a higher level of government. You're not requiring a one-size-fits-all approach when areas of the state may have very different needs and resources."

She also recommends stronger state oversight of locally administered property tax systems to ensure accuracy, fairness and accountability. Options for that oversight could be a legislative committee or a state-level board or official.

PATHS TO PROPERTY TAX RELIEF: AN OVERVIEW OF STATE POLICY STRATEGIES AND EXAMPLES FROM THE 11-STATE MIDWEST

- ✓ Provide **homestead exemptions** that reduce the taxable value of a property owner's primary residence. The exemption is typically a fixed-dollar amount set in statute. Two years ago, Kansas legislators raised the exemption on the statewide property tax from \$20,000 of valuation to \$40,000; HB 2239 also included a trigger that automatically increases the exemption to coincide with statewide rises in property values. Various proposals in the 2024 session would raise the exemption to \$100,000.
- ✓ Establish **assessment limits** that cap how much a property's value (for tax purposes) can increase from year to year. Under the Michigan Constitution, the taxable value of property cannot grow by more than 5 percent or the rate of inflation (whichever is less) until ownership is transferred.
- ✓ Impose a **tax rate cap** that is tied to the value of the property. Constitutional language in Indiana guarantees that the tax paid by individuals on their primary residence will not exceed 1 percent of the property's gross assessed value. The cap is 2 percent for residential non-homesteads and 3 percent for other property.
- ✓ Institute **levy limits** that curb how much revenue can be collected by local governments, with year-over-year growth typically capped at a certain percentage. Iowa legislators established new tiered levy limits last year. Under HF 718, when overall property assessments in a taxing district rise between 3 percent and 6 percent, the levy limit is set at 2 percent. When assessments increase 6 percent or more, levy growth is capped at 3 percent.
- ✓ Increase **general aid to local governments**. This was among several property tax relief provisions included in Minnesota's omnibus tax bill from 2023. HF 1938 included an additional \$80 million each year in local government aid and county program aid. With this influx of state dollars, lawmakers say, local governments can deliver critical services and avoid property tax increases.
- ✓ Raise **state-based taxes**. The property tax limits and caps in Indiana and Michigan (see above) were implemented at the same time those states raised sales tax rates. One goal of these "tax swaps" was to reduce a reliance on the property tax to fund K-12 schools.
- ✓ Offer targeted relief when the property tax bill for a homeowner exceeds a certain percentage of income. Minnesota has one of the nation's furthest-reaching **circuit breaker programs**: a high maximum refund (compared to many states), with eligibility open to all income-qualifying homeowners and renters. In other states, eligibility may be limited to seniors or the disabled and not include renters.
- ✓ Provide **income tax credits** to homeowners and other property-tax payers. In Wisconsin, a school levy tax credit is applied to every taxable property. Recent laws in Nebraska made property owners eligible for a refundable income tax credit based on the amount they pay in property taxes to the local school district and community college.
- ✓ Allow for the postponed payment of taxes until the property is sold or the owner dies. Illinois is among the states with this kind of **property tax deferral** program, and a 2021 law (SB 2244) expanded eligibility for it. Illinois seniors with incomes of up to \$65,000 now qualify. The maximum amount that can be deferred every year also was raised to \$7,500.
- ✓ Adopt **"truth-in-taxation"** laws. One example of this approach is Kansas' SB 13, a law passed in 2021 that requires a local taxing body to alert residents and hold a public hearing prior to any vote that increases the amount of total property tax revenue it collects. This requirement includes sending a notice to each property-tax payer about the proposed increase and the public hearing. A similar law was enacted in Nebraska in 2022 (LB 644).

RURAL AFFAIRS & HEALTH

Telehealth, post-pandemic: States face decisions on what to reimburse through Medicaid, as well as what to require of private insurers

by Becky Leis (rleis@csg.org)

Nebraska Sen. Tom Brewer represents a legislative district in the north central part of the state that stretches 300 miles long and 200 miles wide.

“There are only four locations with a hospital,” he says.

Miles and miles also separate a patient from the nearest provider in all kinds of health care areas and specialties; it’s a geographic and health care reality that his district shares with other rural areas in the Midwest.

The problem is not new, and telehealth has long been identified as a way to help close gaps in health care access. However, it had failed to gain widespread use until the COVID-19 public health emergency, which necessitated a rapid implementation and related policy changes (either temporary or permanent).

Since then, Brewer and other lawmakers have been looking at ways to sustain and expand telehealth for rural and urban constituencies alike.

What is telehealth?

Mei Kwong, executive director of the Center for Connected Health Policy, says it should not be thought of as a “service in and of itself; rather, it is a mode of health care delivery.” Within the broad definition of telehealth, too, there are distinct applications or modalities, such as the use of live video, “store and forward” or remote monitoring (see table for definitions).

FAIR Health, a nonprofit organization that tracks privately billed health insurance claims, reports that in January 2020, only 0.24 percent of all privately itemized claims included a telehealth component. By 2021, that figure had spiked to 7 percent.

As of November 2023, the rate of claims including a telehealth component was 3.5 percent in the Midwest and 5.1 percent nationally.

‘DIDN’T SIT RIGHT WITH ME’

One factor impacting access to and the use of telehealth-based care: payment parity.

In Nebraska, Sen. Brewer began hearing from constituents who were paying more for telehealth visits than in-person visits. That is because insurers were not required to reimburse providers at the same rates for virtual visits as in-person visits. Patients were left paying the difference.

“That didn’t sit right with me,” Brewer says. People wanted access to telehealth-based care, he adds, and health care professionals were willing to provide it.

Brewer introduced a payment-parity law in 2023, and LB 296 ultimately passed the Legislature with unanimous approval.

Under this new Nebraska law, the reimbursement rate for any telehealth service must be the same as for a comparable in-person health care service. LB 296 applies to any licensed provider who also offers “in-person services at a physical location in Nebraska or is employed by or holds medical staff privileges at a licensed facility” in the state.

As of late 2023, Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota and Nebraska were among the 24 U.S. states with payment-parity laws, according to the Center for Connected Health Policy.

In testimony last year to the U.S. Senate Finance Committee, Dr. Chad Ellimoottil, the medical director of virtual care at the University of Michigan, identified payment parity as a key component to sustaining the availability of telehealth services, post-pandemic.

The American Medical Association has said, too, that if compensation rates are lower for telehealth services, physicians may choose to stop offering them.

Another important state policy decision involves Medicaid coverage of telehealth.

In the Midwest, all states provide Medicaid reimbursement for certain modes of telehealth, but not necessarily all of them. For example, the Center for Connected Health Policy says that as of fall 2023, Medicaid programs in Kansas and Nebraska were paying for live-video services, but not store and forward (see table).

EFFICACY OF TELEHEALTH

For policymakers, the continuation of state-based Medicaid reimbursement for telehealth or the adoption of payment parity will depend in part on assurances that telehealth works.

“Despite the extraordinary amount of research produced over a short amount of time, gaps in knowledge remain,” noted authors of a November 2023 study.

That study, “Telehealth Outcomes and Impact on Care Delivery,” was done for the nonprofit,

philanthropic California Health Care Foundation.

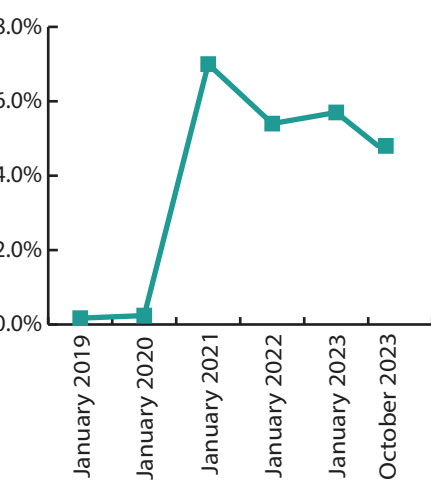
While acknowledging the many unknowns, the authors do point to promising outcomes in certain specialties where telehealth has been closely studied.

For example, a “preponderance of the evidence” shows that live-video services are just as

effective as in-person care in treating mental health conditions, including attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Additionally, hybrid care, a mix of telehealth and in-person services, appears to be just as effective as

TRENDS IN ESTIMATED % OF ALL MEDICAL CLAIM LINES THAT INVOLVED TELEHEALTH



Source: FAIR Health

in-person care alone for patients suffering from rheumatoid arthritis or in need of reproductive health or behavioral health services.

Researchers noted, too, that live video and in-person visits resulted in the same amount of utilization of other health care services after an initial treatment in areas such as urology, infectious disease, diabetes and postsurgical services.

With states largely making telehealth expansion permanent for Medicaid, Kwong says, it may place pressure on the federal government to do the same for Medicare. Several telehealth expansions in this program are set to expire by year’s end. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, one in three rural adults is enrolled in Medicare.

THE BROADBAND CONNECTION

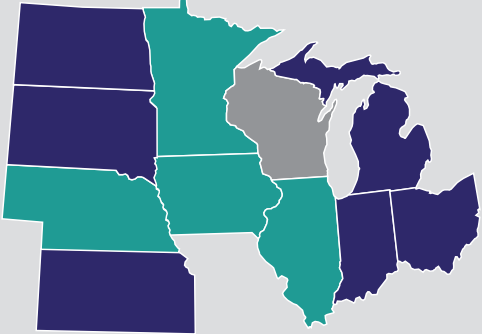
When the pandemic hit, Brewer says, his rural communities in Nebraska were ready for the shift to telehealth. His district had made good use of federal grants, as well as other public and private investments, to bring fiber optic cables and high-speed connectivity to its many small towns, farms and ranches.

In areas of the country or individual residences that still lack broadband, audio-only telehealth services remain an option.

Every state in the Midwest has modified its respective Medicaid plans to allow for the reimbursement of audio-only telehealth. Whether those changes are temporary or permanent, however, varies from state to state.

Becky Leis is CSG Midwest staff liaison to the Midwestern Legislative Conference Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee. Saskatchewan MLA Steven Bonk and Kansas Sen. Marci Francisco serve as committee co-chairs. North Dakota Rep. Paul Thomas is the vice chair. CSG Midwest also provides staff support to the MLC Health & Human Services Committee led by Kansas Rep. Susan Concannon and Illinois Sen. Julie Morrison (co-chairs) and South Dakota Rep. Taylor Rehfeldt (vice chair).

LAWS ON REIMBURSEMENT BY PRIVATE PAYERS FOR TELEHEALTH (AS OF FALL 2023)*



- State has explicit law for “payment parity” and “coverage parity” for at least one specialty
- State has explicit “coverage parity” law for at least one specialty
- No private payer law found

* Payment parity means a service delivered via telehealth must be reimbursed at the same rate as a service delivered in person; coverage parity means a service must be covered whether it is provided in person or via telehealth, but not necessarily at the same rate.

Source: Center for Connected Health Policy

MEDICAID REIMBURSEMENT FOR TELEHEALTH (AS OF FALL 2023)

State	Live video ¹	Store and forward ²	Remote patient monitoring ³	Audio only ⁴
Illinois	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Indiana	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Iowa	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Kansas	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Michigan	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Minnesota	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Nebraska	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
North Dakota	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ohio	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
South Dakota	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Wisconsin	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

¹ Use of live video that allows real-time interactions between the patient and provider.
² Provider evaluates images or videos recorded by the patient.
³ Use of digital technologies to collect patient data (vital signs, height, weight, blood pressure, etc.) and electronically transmit the information to providers.
⁴ Option that does not require broadband availability because video is not used.

Source: Center for Connected Health Policy

NUMBERS ON TELEHEALTH

4.8%	ESTIMATED % OF ALL MEDICAL CLAIMS LINES IN OCTOBER 2023 THAT INVOLVED TELEHEALTH
67.1%	ESTIMATED % OF ALL TELEHEALTH CLAIM LINES IN OCTOBER 2023 TIED TO THE DIAGNOSIS OF A MENTAL HEALTH CONDITION
5.6%	ESTIMATED % OF ALL TELEHEALTH CLAIMS IN RURAL AREAS THAT WERE AUDIO-ONLY VISITS; RATE IN URBAN AREAS WAS 4.7% (OCTOBER 2023)



Source for data: FAIR Health

ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT

Next-generation nuclear? Some Midwest states are taking initial steps to see if small modular reactors can be part of future electricity mix

by Jon Davis (jdavis@csg.org)

Recent legislation and regulatory changes are clearing a path to develop a new generation of “small modular” nuclear reactors that advocates say could play a role in Midwestern states’ efforts to decarbonize their electric-power sectors.

Small modular reactors (SMRs) are a category that includes many different designs and technologies, all with one thing in common — individual reactors are designed to generate 300 megawatts or less and can connect to other modules to boost overall output.

Nuclear power already produces 45.5 percent of the country’s carbon-free energy, says Christine Csizmadia, senior director of state governmental affairs and advocacy for the Nuclear Energy Institute.

No SMRs are currently operational, though the first ones are scheduled to be built and online by early next decade in Texas and Wyoming.

Across the Canada-U.S. border, Saskatchewan’s electric utility, SaskPower, signed an agreement with GE Hitachi Nuclear Energy in January 2024 to advance plans for possible SMR development in the province.

A few months earlier, too, the Canadian federal government committed up to \$74 million to the province to help pay for pre-engineering work, technical and environmental studies, and community engagement.

A final decision on whether to proceed with SMR construction in Saskatchewan is expected in 2029.

According to Csizmadia, compared to typical, larger reactors, SMRs are more economical and can be scaled to local needs. They also are less costly to build, take less time to complete, have fewer risks and provide more flexibility on siting, proponents say.

Given that many states — including Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin — have stated goals or statutory requirements for 100 percent carbon-free energy by 2040 or 2050, Csizmadia says lifting any moratoria on new nuclear plant construction is the most important policy step states can take today.

“How are we going to meet those goals without something that operates 24-7 and is completely carbon-free?” she says.

To date, Midwestern state actions range from lifting or modifying moratoria to studying the potential impacts on energy production, the economy and environment.

Some lawmakers also have proposed new SMR-related tax credits in hope of encouraging development.

Here is an overview of recent developments in the Midwest.

“It’s incredibly important for us to have [SMRs] online so we can achieve our carbon goals.”

Illinois Sen. Sue Rezin

DETAILS ON NEW ILLINOIS LAW

At one time, Illinois, Minnesota and Wisconsin had moratoria on new nuclear plants. Now, only Minnesota has a blanket ban in the Midwest, according to the U.S. Department of Energy.

Wisconsin lifted its moratorium in 2016 (AB 384), and at the end of 2023, Illinois partially ended its ban when legislators overwhelmingly approved HB 2473.

The new law allows for SMRs of up to 300 megawatts starting in January 2026. By that date, the state’s Emergency Management Agency and Office of Homeland Security must develop a regulatory framework for

SMRs. The law also authorizes the governor to commission a study on issues such as:

- existing SMR technology and the future of research and markets for these advanced reactors;
- a risk analysis of these reactors;
- federal permitting and rules;
- the storage and disposal of waste from SMR facilities.

Illinois already gets 54 percent of its electricity from large nuclear plants, says Illinois Sen. Sue Rezin, the Senate sponsor of HF 2473.

SMRs are a good alternative, she adds, because they can be built on the site of old coal or gas plants that already have power lines connecting them to the grid; there’s no need to build new power lines to a new site.

“It’s incredibly important for us to have them online so we can achieve our carbon goals [100 percent carbon-free] by 2045,” she says.

The new law is a revised version of a Rezin-sponsored bill that Gov J.B. Pritzker vetoed in August 2023. At the time of his veto, the governor had cited an “overly broad” definition of advanced reactors as well as the lack of a regulatory framework.

MIDWEST STATES STUDYING FUTURE OF NUCLEAR POWER

Indiana lawmakers passed SMR-related bills in both 2022 and 2023.

The first measure, SB 271 from 2022, defines small modular reactors as “clean energy projects” and makes them eligible for financial incentives. That law also required utility regulators to adopt new rules governing SMR projects. The second measure, SB 176 of 2023, raised the power rating definition for SMRs from 350 MW to 470 MW.

In Michigan and Ohio, recent new laws and legislative appropriations have those states taking a closer look at the potential next generation of nuclear energy. Whether SMRs are part of that future remains to be seen.

Ohio’s budget (HB 33) creates a new Nuclear Development Authority. This nine-member, governor-appointed authority is charged with improving nuclear research and development in Ohio, and making the state a “leader in the development and construction of new-type advanced nuclear-research reactors.”

In 2022, Michigan legislators directed the state’s Public Service Commission to hire an outside consultant to study the state’s nuclear energy generation and potential, including SMRs. (HB 6019 included \$250,000 for that study.)

A December 2023 draft report says nuclear energy is necessary to meet Michigan’s new goal of 100 percent carbon-free energy by 2040.

A final report is due to the Legislature in April.

Michigan Rep. Pauline Wendzel is proposing another policy option to advance SMRs: tax incentives. Under her bill, HB 4753, the state would provide a corporate tax credit equal to 15 percent of the costs related to SMR research, development or design.

“This has to be the future,” says Wendzel, who has two traditional nuclear power plants in her district.

“Michigan has the highest number of engineers per capita, and we’re always looking for ways to stay

ahead of the curve and attract that talent here. This just seemed to fit that perfectly.”

SMR measures also have been proposed this biennium in at least two other Midwestern states:

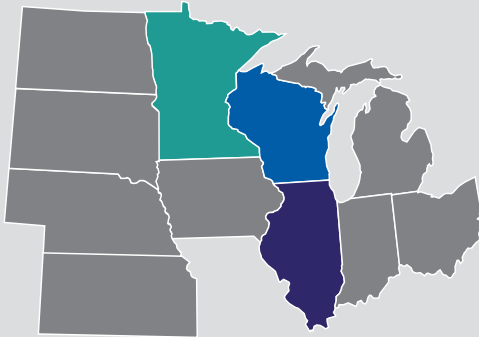
- Minnesota’s HF 3002/3120 calls for a study of various aspects of SMRs. For example,

what impact could they have on the state’s power grid, environment and economy? What laws or rules would need to be changed to allow for SMR construction and operation?

- Two Nebraska measures (LR 21 and LR 178) call for studies examining the feasibility of SMR projects.

Jon Davis is CSG Midwest staff liaison to the Midwestern Legislative Conference Energy & Environment Committee. Illinois Sen. Laura Ellman and Indiana Rep. Ethan Manning serve as committee co-chairs. Ohio Rep. Sharon Ray is the vice chair.

STATUS OF MORATORIA ON NEW NUCLEAR PLANT CONSTRUCTION IN MIDWEST (AS OF JANUARY 2024)*



- Moratorium on new nuclear plant construction in place since 1994
- Partial moratorium; prohibition lifted as of January 2026 for small modular reactors up to 300 megawatts
- Moratorium lifted in 2016
- No history of moratorium

Source: U.S. Department of Energy

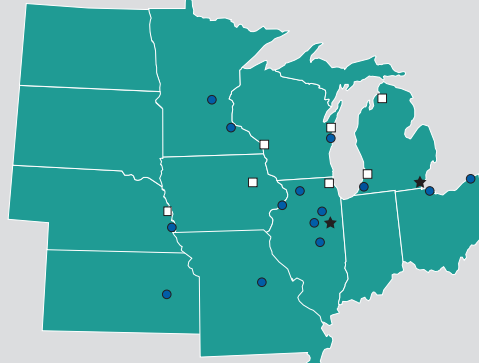
% OF ELECTRICITY GENERATION IN MIDWESTERN STATES FROM NUCLEAR POWER (2022)

State	% of total generation	# of operating reactors
Illinois	52.6%	11
Indiana	No nuclear power generation	
Iowa	No nuclear power generation	
Kansas	14.4%	1
Michigan	22.8%	2*
Minnesota	24.7%	3
Nebraska	14.0%	1
North Dakota	No nuclear power generation	
Ohio	12.5%	2
South Dakota	No nuclear power generation	
Wisconsin	16.8%	2
United States	18.2%	92

*The Palisades Nuclear Plant in Michigan was decommissioned in 2022, but is in the process of being re-commissioned.

Sources: U.S. Energy Information Administration and U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission

SITES OF NUCLEAR PLANTS AND STATUS OF REACTORS IN MIDWEST (AS OF JANUARY 2024)*



- Operating nuclear reactor(s) at plant
- Shut-down nuclear reactor(s) at plant
- ★ Mix of operating, shut-down reactor(s) at plant

*Missouri is included in the map because it is part of The Council of State Governments’ Midwestern Radioactive Materials Transportation Project. CSG Midwest provides staff support for this project and its interstate committee of state legislators and executive branch officials.

Sources: U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission and CSG Midwest

EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

More states are requiring instruction in financial literacy for graduation; among the challenges is building up a trained teacher workforce

by Derek Cantù (dcantu@csrg.org)

In recent years, most Midwestern states have legislatively revised their respective high school graduation requirements to include mandated instruction in financial literacy.

In 2023 alone, three states (Indiana, SB 35; Minnesota, HF 2497; and Wisconsin, AB 109) enacted laws requiring one semester of financial literacy education starting with the graduating class of 2028.

The Wisconsin measure, signed by the governor in December, marked the culmination of a multi-year journey.

Back in 2017, lawmakers approved AB 280, which tasked local school boards with adopting and incorporating financial literacy curriculum standards in all K-12 grades. The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, in turn, developed state standards to guide this coursework.

According to the state's latest standards, students are expected to understand, for example, the nuances of money management, financial risk assessment, how to save and invest, and how to achieve debt resolution.

Sen. Joan Ballweg, a co-sponsor of both the 2017 and 2023 legislation, says that despite the availability of state standards, many Wisconsin schools were still not offering the instruction to students.

"[In 2023], 34 percent of schools guaranteed students would have one semester of personal finance before graduating, and 59 percent [of students] had the option of taking an elective personal finance education course," Ballweg says.

That wasn't nearly good enough for her and other believers in the need to build students' financial literacy.

"The stand-alone class is going to be able to incorporate more of what financial literacy is," Ballweg says.

"Everything from talking about investments, talking about amortization schedules, talking about your own budgeting, the ramifications of what it takes to pay for college, [to] buying a vehicle on your own and the insurance that's going to come with it."

Chris Caltabiano, chief program officer of the nonprofit Council for Economic Education, says research

supports the taking of a designated financial literacy course.

"With a well-prepared, well-trained teacher [it] has positive downstream effects on [students'] financial behaviors and outcomes," he says.

"Students who have had that dedicated course tend to have higher credit scores; they tend to have lower debt default rates. If they choose to go to college, they tend to make decisions that are more financially advantageous, [such as] making the decision to take out a public loan versus a private loan."

Ballweg pursued legislation in 2022 (SB 841) requiring a full academic year of financial literacy starting with the class entering high school that fall. After getting feedback that one full year could be overly burdensome for some schools, she returned with AB 109 and its semester-long requirement. The bill also extends the implementation time frame (to the class of 2028).

Questions have been raised in Wisconsin about the actual teaching of the new requirement — both in terms of finding qualified educators in the midst of a national teacher shortage and how to fund professional development training for educators.

MORE FLEXIBILITY FOR SCHOOLS IN IOWA

Concern over finding enough teachers is one of the reasons that Iowa legislators last year modified their laws on financial literacy.

In 2018 and 2019, the Legislature adopted a series of bills making Iowa the first Midwestern state to require instruction in a stand-alone course.

SF 475 of 2018 spells out the type of instruction to be covered in this course: for example, wealth building and college planning, credit and debit, consumer awareness, insurance coverage, and the advantages and disadvantages of buying and renting real estate.

A second measure, SF 2415, allowed this financial literacy course to fulfill part of Iowa's existing graduation requirements for social studies. A third measure, SF 139 of 2019, called for the new requirement to take effect with the class of 2021.

As the 2023 legislative session began, however, constituent concerns led to the filing and eventual signing of SF 391. This measure allows personal finance literacy content to be delivered though either a dedicated unit of coursework or its integration into other courses.

"This [request for change] actually

came from the governor's office," says bill author Sen. Tim Kraayenbrink, who also sponsored SF 2415 in 2018.

"They were in contact with a lot of the smaller rural schools that were struggling not only to get teachers to teach the individual [financial] literacy courses — along with a lot of other courses — but also just the time ... to be able to do it."

Kraayenbrink stresses he is still a proponent of financial literacy education and that this change simply gives schools more flexibility.

FINDING OUTSIDE PARTNERS, SUSTAINABLE FUNDING

Public-private partnerships can help fill instructional needs for schools struggling to find teachers or training opportunities.

"Organizations like [ours] and others are out there providing professional development for educators so that they have the competency and the capability," Caltabiano says.

Ballweg notes that even before she filed AB 109, Milwaukee Public Schools was getting nearly \$500,000 from Next Gen Personal Finance to implement financial literacy instruction.

"It's not just that [Next Gen is] providing some funding for the schools to put this in their curriculum, but they're also supporting the educators that are going to be doing the curriculum," she says.

To some lawmakers, though, the real challenge is securing permanent funding.

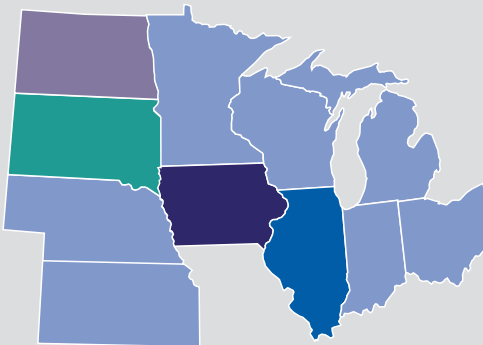
"I used to work for a national nonprofit that worked directly with public schools, and I also know what happens when those partners go away," Wisconsin Rep. Kristina Shelton said in a hearing on AB 109.

Early in the 2023-2025 state budget process, Gov. Tony Evers and the state superintendent of public instruction proposed allotting \$5 million for a "Do the Math" initiative.

Under this program, which was not included in the final budget, the state would have provided resources to local school districts "to start or improve financial literacy curriculum" and "to develop a regional support network that includes professional development for educators and a model curriculum/scope and sequence for districts to implement."

Derek Cantù is CSG Midwest staff liaison to the Midwestern Legislative Conference Education & Workforce Development Committee. Ohio Sen. Hearcel Craig and Wisconsin Rep. Joel Kitchens serve as committee co-chairs. Minnesota Sen. Heather Gustafson is the vice chair.

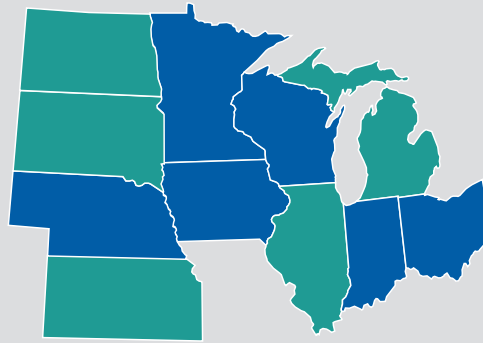
STATE HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS ON PERSONAL FINANCE/FINANCIAL LITERACY INSTRUCTION



- Requires or will require a stand-alone, semester-long course in personal finance/financial literacy
- Requires one half-unit (semester) of instruction in personal financial literacy, either as a stand-alone course or embedded in other courses
- Requires nine weeks of consumer education
- Requires several concepts of personal finance to be embedded within a course on economics or democracy
- Requires a semester-long course in economics or personal finance

Sources: Next Gen Personal Finance, Champlain College Center for Financial Literacy and CSG Midwest research

STATE-LEVEL ACADEMIC STANDARDS FOR INSTRUCTION ON PERSONAL FINANCE IN PRE-K THROUGH 8TH GRADE*



- Modest amount of content required to be taught
- Substantive amount of content required to be taught

* States were categorized based on an analysis of academic standards by the Champlain College Center for Financial Literacy. Some states, none in the Midwest, were categorized as not requiring any content on personal finance, according to the center.

% OF INDIVIDUALS WITH ANY DEBT IN COLLECTIONS*

State	All ages	Young adults
Illinois	26%	20%
Indiana	28%	24%
Iowa	20%	18%
Kansas	26%	23%
Michigan	26%	20%
Minnesota	13%	10%
Nebraska	18%	13%
North Dakota	16%	15%
Ohio	28%	24%
South Dakota	15%	12%
Wisconsin	20%	19%

* Data was last updated in October 2023, using credit data from February 2022.

Source: Urban Institute



WANTED IN THE MIDWEST: WORKFORCE POLICIES TO BUILD TALENT PIPELINES, ALLEVIATE SHORTAGES

State of the State addresses underscored the ongoing importance of workforce issues; here are four strategies highlighted by the governors

1 BOOST RATES OF POSTSECONDARY ATTAINMENT

More jobs are requiring some postsecondary education and training beyond high school, a workforce reality noted in several of the governor’s speeches and proposals.

- In **Michigan**, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer wants to make the first two years of community college tuition-free for every high school graduate. For students, she said, the plan would open new opportunities to pursue better-paying jobs. But Whitmer also noted that the state and its businesses will benefit from a larger pool of postsecondary-trained workers.

“As more supply chains come home and advanced manufacturing businesses expand in Michigan, they will need qualified talent,” she said. The state’s goal is to have 60 percent of working-age adults with a college degree or postsecondary skill certificate by 2030.

- Six years ago, **Iowa** lawmakers set this statewide target: by 2025, 70 percent of the workforce should have education and training beyond high school. To get there, new programs were established and funded under the Future Ready Act (HB 2458 of 2018).

For instance, a last-dollar scholarship has been made available to students pursuing degrees or certificates in high-need occupations. In fiscal year 2023, a total of \$24 million went to nearly 10,000 Iowans. An associate degree in nursing was the most common occupation being pursued. In her January 2024 address, Gov. Kim Reynolds reported to legislators that the state had reached its 70 percent goal ahead of schedule.

- At the start of this year’s session, **Indiana** Gov. Eric Holcomb challenged education and policy leaders to find new ways of making college more accessible. Among his ideas: create more degree options. Under SB 8, every public university would need to offer at least one three-year degree program, as well as study the feasibility of offering associate degrees to students.

2 EXPAND REACH OF APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMS

Another feature of **Iowa’s** Future Ready initiative has been to invest more in registered apprenticeships — “earn and learn” programs for people to get paid while receiving on-the-job training and skills.

Part of Iowa’s strategy has been developing and expanding new apprenticeships in high-demand fields (as identified by the state’s Workforce Development Board).

One of Reynolds’ policy goals for 2024 is to expand high school students’ access to apprenticeships

or other work-based learning opportunities (internships, job shadowing, etc.) in targeted industries.

- In her 2024 State of the State address, **South Dakota** Gov. Kristi Noem highlighted the impact of recent investments in apprenticeships, including a new three-year, \$7.9 million grant program. With that money, apprenticeship sponsors are eligible for up to \$15,000 in funding support as well as state technical assistance.

“In just the first two quarters since launching the expanded effort, we’ve more than doubled the amount of new apprenticeships,” Noem said.

3 ADDRESS CHILD CARE NEEDS OF FAMILIES

In **Kansas**, more than half of the families in search of child care cannot find an open slot.

“[It’s] forcing many parents to quit their jobs,” Gov. Laura Kelly said to legislators in January.

Her proposed budget includes \$56 million for child care. More than half of this money would be used to build up Kansas’ child care infrastructure — grants to build new facilities or expand existing operations. Local and private dollars match the state-level support.

Kelly also proposed one-time funding of \$5 million for a public-private partnership in a 26-county region of northwest Kansas. Combined with private dollars and the support of local foundations, the state dollars would create a new endowment, a sustainable source of funding to add child care slots in this region’s mostly rural communities. If successful, the approach could be replicated in other parts of Kansas.

- **Nebraska** Gov. Jim Pillen has proposed building a “micro-center” network of child care programs.

This model aims to remove some of the common infrastructure and operational obstacles faced by smaller-sized, family-based child care providers — for example, a lack of space to expand capacity in their homes or a lack of capital to build a stand-alone center.

Here is how it works: Smaller providers get low- or no-cost space to deliver care in a few rooms of an existing facility (a school or business in the community, for example). These smaller providers also then get administrative and technical support from a shared, outside entity.

Nebraska’s LB 1416 would establish a state grant program to pursue the micro-center model.

- Last year, **North Dakota** legislators took steps to expand child care capacity, and Gov. Doug Burgum hailed that \$66 million investment in his 2024 State of the State address. As part of that enacted legislation (HB 1540), more families became eligible for state-funded child care assistance, providers are being paid at higher

Workforce is focus of MLC Chair’s Initiative of Ohio Sen. Bill Reineke

Innovation in workforce policy will be an ongoing focus of The Council of State Governments’ Midwestern Legislative Conference in 2024. Ohio Sen. Bill Reineke chose this issue for his MLC Chair’s Initiative. A series of articles will appear in *Stateline Midwest* in support of the initiative. Policy sessions also will be held at the MLC Annual Meeting: July 21-24 in Columbus, Ohio.



rates, and employers are getting incentives to cover part of their workers’ child care expenses.

- **Wisconsin** Gov. Tony Evers told legislators in January that a child care crisis is looming and additional state dollars are needed to keep many centers open. Like other Midwestern governors, too, Evers linked the lack of child care availability to the state’s workforce challenges.

He also is championing two other policies: one, “invest in public education at every level” in order to prepare future workers for success; and two, provide 12 weeks of paid family leave for most private-sector employees. Evers proposes a state investment of \$240 million to jump-start the program.

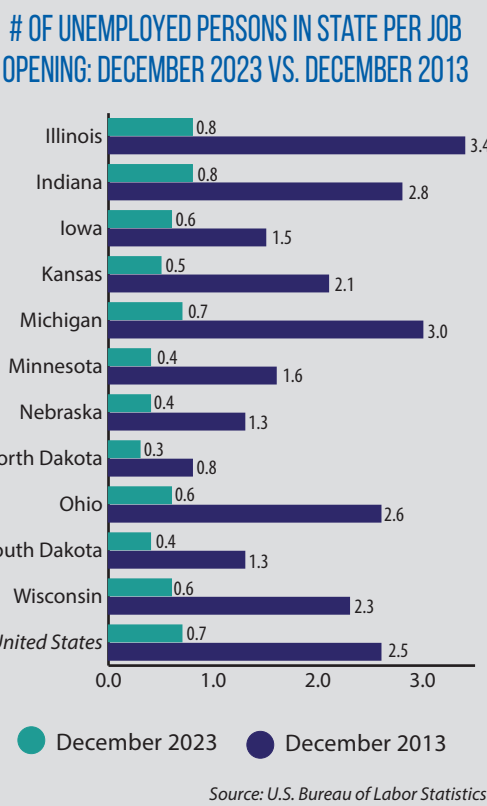
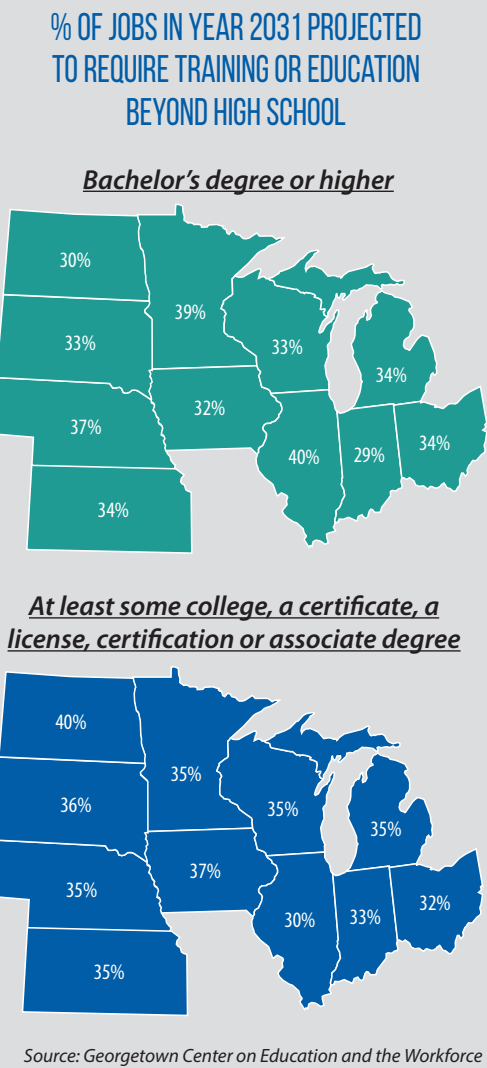
4 RECRUIT NEW WORKERS TO THE STATE

Pillen and Noem said part of their states’ strategies for alleviating workforce shortages should be to attract out-of-state talent.

- Pillen has proposed a new tax credit for employers who cover the relocation expenses of people who move to **Nebraska** for work (LB 1400). The credit is up to \$5,000 per employee. The relocating worker must have an annual wage of between \$70,000 and \$250,000. That worker also would get a one-time income tax break.

• In June 2023, **South Dakota** launched “Freedom Works Here,” a workforce-recruitment campaign with targeted ads for the state’s highest-demand professions — for example, electricians, plumbers, welders, accountants and nurses. This campaign, combined with recent statutory changes that recognize out-of-state professional licenses, has led to more job applicants and a year-over-year increase of 10,000 people in the labor force, Noem said.

Article written by Tim Anderson, CSG Midwest director of policy and research. Governors in three Midwestern states (Illinois, Minnesota and Ohio) had not yet delivered State of the State addresses when this article was written.



COST OF CENTER-BASED CHILD CARE AS % OF FAMILY’S MEDIAN INCOME (2022)		
State	Married couple	Single parent
Illinois	12%	44%
Indiana	12%	39%
Iowa	10%	35%
Kansas	14%	45%
Michigan	12%	40%
Minnesota	14%	45%
Nebraska	12%	36%
North Dakota	9%	30%
Ohio	11%	40%
South Dakota	8%	25%
Wisconsin	12%	40%

Source: Child Care Aware® of America



PROFILE: IOWA HOUSE MAJORITY LEADER MATT WINDSCHITL

‘How we collectively serve’: Veteran of the Iraq War joined the House at an early age, and has since risen to one of his home state’s top leadership posts

by Derek Cantù (dcantu@csg.org)

In 2006, Matt Windschitl was a young, self-described “knuckle dragging Marine” who had returned home to Iowa after a recent tour of duty in Iraq. A life in politics was the furthest thing from his mind. But one day, a customer of his family’s gun shop in western Iowa was at the store and on the lookout for potential candidates for state office. “My mom chuckles and says, ‘Well, my husband, Chris, would be good at it, but he just couldn’t do it. He’s got too many obligations and he’s too outspoken,’” Windschitl recalls.

“Then my mom looks across the shop and she goes, ‘But Matt over there, Matt would be great for it.’” Windschitl, age 22 and a new father at the time, wasn’t so sure the job would be a good fit or if the timing was right. It took conversations with his wife, talks with party officials, and a lot of prayer before he decided to run.

He won that first race and has been a member of the Iowa House ever since, rising in the ranks of leadership along the way. He became majority leader in 2019. Initially, Windschitl didn’t think he would stay long in the Legislature; control had shifted to the Democrats following the 2006 election and would remain so for two cycles. However, he looks back at that time now as being invaluable, an opportunity to “sit back, listen and learn, and not have too many preconceived notions, and not be arrogant or haughty.”

Good attributes, he has learned, for any lawmaker — whether he or she is a 20-something new legislator in the minority party or a veteran of nearly two decades in a top leadership post. In a recent interview with CSG Midwest, Windschitl shared his views on legislating and leadership. Here are excerpts, with questions and answers lightly edited for clarity and brevity.

- Q How did your service in the U.S. Marine Corps impact or prepare you for legislative leadership?

A A lot of the things that you get taught in the Marine Corps are core fundamentals of leadership: how to lead other people, how to not only take commands, but also to be able to listen to concerns of a group and then apply that by action or apply that by working within that group to resolve differences.
- Q How do you approach and view legislative service?



BIO-SKETCH: IOWA REPRESENTATIVE MATT WINDSCHITL

- ✓ has served as House majority leader since 2019; previously served as speaker pro tempore and as assistant leader (in the minority and majority)
- ✓ first elected to the Iowa House in 2006
- ✓ served as sergeant in U.S. Marine Corps: enlisted in 2001, served a tour in Iraq in 2005, and honorably discharged in 2009
- ✓ works at Doll Distributing, a beer distribution company
- ✓ lives in western Iowa town of Missouri Valley; family includes his two daughters and wife, Ivelisse

“Don’t put daylight between the leadership team because when you do, it’s going to make the caucus try and choose who the favorite is. You can’t have that.”

A You can’t forget that these seats that we have in the chamber, they are rented, they’re not ours. ... This job is not about the individual legislator; it is about the people we serve and how we collectively serve together. As majority leader, I always try to put policy and budgetary issues through one main lens before anything else: Is this good public policy? Is this good budgeting for Iowans? If the answer is “yes,” it doesn’t matter whose idea it was or whose name was on it, majority or minority. Let’s see if we can work out the kinks and get an agreement.

Q Disagreement is inevitable in a legislature or caucus. How do you work through intra-caucus differences among leaders, such as yourself and the House speaker?

A When we don’t agree on things, we simply talk about it, but we don’t talk about it openly. One of the things that I learned from a former speaker was you don’t put daylight between the leadership team because when you do, it’s going to make members of the caucus try and choose who the favorite is. You can’t have that. When [Speaker Pat Grassley and I] disagree, sometimes I win, sometimes he wins. But at the end of the day, he is the speaker. He’s the top constitutionally elected officer in the House, and being a military veteran, I respect rank.

Q What are the ways to build trusting inter-caucus relations among leadership?

A Working with Leader [Jennifer] Konfrst, as she came into the minority leader’s role, has been a breath of fresh air. She and I have a deep and profound respect for the institution and what it is intended to do for the good of Iowans. Now, do we disagree philosophically and politically on things? Absolutely. But we’ve been able to build a bridge where she and I, if we know something controversial is going to come up, we talk. I say, “Okay, is this going to be a five-hour debate? Is it going to be an eight-hour debate? How can I make this smoother? I know I’ve got my member over here who is probably going to say ‘this.’ I’m going to try and tamp it down, make sure there’s decorum in the chamber, make sure they’re respectful.” And she does the exact same thing with her caucus. And there are times you get members that say something that you probably wish that they wouldn’t, and then we’ll just text each other from across the chamber: “Sorry, I’ll correct that action.” And then she’ll do the same thing.

Q You’ve been a leader on issues related to gun owner rights, including the voter-approved “Freedom Amendment” from 2022. Why has this policy area been important to you?

A The best way I can answer that is it’s not about the firearm itself, it is about the fundamental right to self-preservation. With the voters of Iowa affirming, with such a large majority saying, “Yes, we want this fundamental right enshrined in our

[state] Constitution,” that tells me that we are on the right path. There’s always years where I want to try and get something done a little bit further — to restore freedoms that I believe should never have been taken away and remove restrictions that shouldn’t be there. But at the same time, make sure that you’re not just having a free-for-all and having people that shouldn’t have access to firearms have access. That’s why we rely heavily on the federal government, the NICS background check system. We’ve also got protections in place in Iowa where if a sheriff does deem that someone should not get a permit, the sheriff can deny it. And then that person can go through an appeals process.

Q Is there potential this session for common ground with those concerned about firearm access?

A What I’d like to look at, and I’m exploring legislation right now [as of the start of 2024], is a new approach to this issue for people who are having a mental health crisis, maybe a life crisis, and they don’t feel as though they should have their firearms around them. I’d like to evaluate if there is a way that these people can take their firearms to their local firearm store and say, “Hey, can you guys store these for me? I’m just in a bad place. I don’t want to have law enforcement take them because then I don’t know what the process is to get [them] back. I don’t want that stigma. Can you just bound them in and hold them for me until I get some help?”

PROFILE: ILLINOIS HOUSE MAJORITY LEADER ROBYN GABEL



‘Always think of the long game’: She shares her perspective on legislating, helping lead a diverse caucus, and leaving a legacy through policy and constituent services

by Mitch Arvidson (marvidson@csg.org)

For Robyn Gabel, the satisfaction of legislative service can come from helping one person at a time, or close to 13 million people all at once.

Either way, the Illinois lawmaker says, she’s thankful to be a part of it.

Through her district office in the Chicago suburb of Evanston, she and her staff help constituents cut through bureaucratic red tape and access services during the “most desperate, difficult times” of their lives.

In Springfield, there’s the opportunity to work on a single law that expands health access, improves economic opportunity or provides new environmental protections across the entire state.

“Both aspects of the job are really rewarding,” she says.

Gabel joined the Illinois General Assembly more than a decade ago, already a familiar face in Springfield at the time for her advocacy, leadership and policy successes as the longtime executive director of the Illinois Maternal and Child Coalition.

As a legislator, she soon earned the moniker “Able Gabel,” someone known for her thoughtful approach to policy and ability to get legislation to the finish line.

In early 2023, she was named to one of her home state’s top legislative posts: House majority leader. In an interview with CSG Midwest, Gabel discussed her views on leadership and some of her most valued legislative accomplishments. Here are excerpts, with questions and answers lightly edited for clarity and brevity.

Q What have you observed or learned about effective leadership?

A Our new speaker, Emanuel “Chris” Welch, is truly one of the most caring and skilled leaders I’ve worked with. We talk a lot about effective legislative leadership, and spend a lot of time training all members of the body to become good community leaders.

I can summarize this in a couple of ways. One, legislative leaders need to be able to actively listen to their members. Two, don’t make assumptions. Ask questions, listen actively and respond.

Another thing is we don’t take things personally. You learn how to disagree without being disagreeable, and move on and not become personally insulted.

Q How would you describe the process for developing a strategy for the entire caucus and then keeping to it?



BIO-SKETCH: ILLINOIS REP. ROBYN GABEL

- ✓ became House majority leader in 2023; had been assistant leader
- ✓ appointed to the House in 2010 and won election that same year
- ✓ served 22 years as executive director of the Illinois Maternal and Child Health Coalition
- ✓ is a 2011 graduate of The Council of State Governments’ Henry Toll Fellowship leadership program; also served as chair of CSG’s Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Legislative Caucus
- ✓ lives in Chicago suburb of Evanston; is married with one daughter and one grandchild

“We really work on being kind and careful with our words. Don’t overpromise, and don’t say things you haven’t thought through.”

A We always think of the long game and our goal of making the world a better place. We know that sometimes you need to change your strategy, but keep the long game in mind. We also really work on being kind and careful with our words. Don’t overpromise, and don’t say things that you haven’t thought through.

Q Your caucus has 77 members. How do you keep members of such a large caucus connected with each other?

A What unites us is our willingness to partner together, and always understand that individual members have individual and local interests.

One of the ways that we have managed these interests is by forming working groups on a variety of topics, including gun safety, the right to choose, the environment and energy.

These groups bring voices together from all sides of our caucus to give them a safe space to speak their minds and find common ground. This has been very successful. They have been able to come up with legislation that has passed, and they have provided guidance on how we can proceed on some controversial issues. We’re going to continue using that working-group model.

Q You serve as co-chair of the bicameral, bipartisan Medicaid Working Group. Has that been a way to build bipartisan working relationships?

A [It] is a great example of bipartisanship. Having all four caucuses on this group gives us an opportunity to understand all the interests in the state. We review legislation and issues brought to us by our members and interest groups. We discuss the issues thoroughly. Then, together, we decide which of these priorities we can fund every year.

Q For many years, you have been a leader in Illinois on health policy, particularly maternal and child health. What are the biggest challenges in your state right now?

A Most recently, I’ve been very surprised, shocked and dismayed that maternal and infant mortality rates are going up. For all the years that I’ve been working on this, rates had been going down. This is very discouraging, and in talking to professionals and advocates in the field about why, they say the issues are both mental health and substance abuse among pregnant women. Those are two issues that we need to address.

Q Are there policy advances that have been made?

A In the past, some of the things I have worked on to improve maternal and child health include legalizing midwives. People who used midwives for home births were often afraid to call an ambulance or go to a hospital [in cases of emergencies] because of the mistreatment and

concern that their midwife would be arrested and jailed. For us, it was very important that this group of providers had a path to be legal in the state.

The other thing was to expand Medicaid eligibility for pregnant women up to a year post-partum.

Q You have taken the lead on many bills. Do any stand out to you as an especially important achievement?

A For me, the passage of CEJA (the Climate and Equitable Jobs Act of 2021) was really an amazing feat. First, it was the process, which was not led by the utilities. It was really the community groups, legislators and the governor’s office that developed this 900-page bill.

This legislation puts Illinois on the path to 100 percent renewable energy by 2050, and it has standards and goals along the way to make sure we meet this goal.

CEJA creates new workforce development opportunities, too. As we phase out coal and gas, we needed to help the current workforce, and we have new programs to prepare these workers as we transition to a clean-energy economy. We’re also making sure that communities that have suffered in the past from coal, gas and carbon emissions are put front and center in creating a new workforce and economy. CEJA also protects consumers, with our strongest-ever ethics requirements and oversight of utilities.

And it will put 1 million electric vehicles on the road by 2030. ...

It was an incredibly comprehensive bill that took us many months, and I’m glad that we were finally able to come to agreement.

NEW RESOURCE FOR STATE LAWMAKERS
EXPLORES VARIATIONS, TRENDS IN SITING
OF RENEWABLE ENERGY PROJECTS

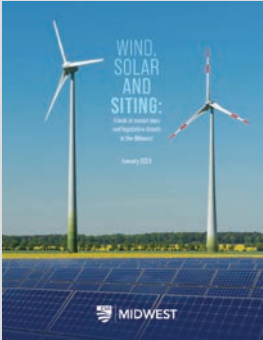
Across the Midwest, interest in new solar and wind projects is undoubtedly on the rise. Less certain: Who should have the authority to approve or deny proposals to build new wind and solar facilities? State regulators? Local governments? Some combination of the two?

Ultimately, the decision on who gets that authority rests with state legislatures, and in a new policy resource for lawmakers, CSG Midwest analyzes the varied approaches being used in the 11 states of the Midwest, as well as significant new siting laws enacted in four states:

- more local control in Ohio;
- a shift to statewide siting standards in Illinois and Michigan; and
- Indiana’s voluntary regulatory framework for counties that want to be designated as “wind and/or solar ready.”

“Wind, Solar and Siting” was done in support of two committees of The Council of State Governments’ Midwestern Legislative Conference: the MLC Agriculture & Rural Affairs Committee and the MLC Energy and Environment Committee. Legislators from across the Midwest serve on these binational, interstate committees.

Available at csgmidwest.org, the report provides comparative data on each Midwestern state’s energy portfolio and an overview of renewable portfolio and clean energy standards.



CSG, MICHIGAN PARTNERSHIP LEADS TO
NEW LAWS TO IMPROVE JUVENILE JUSTICE

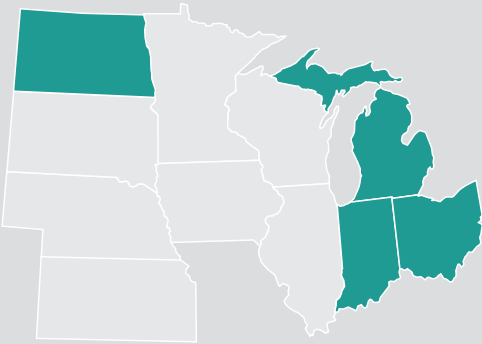
Through the CSG Justice Center, The Council of State Governments has earned a reputation as a valued resource for leaders in all three branches of government looking to improve policies on criminal justice and juvenile justice. One recent example: A partnership in Michigan that helped lead to the passage in late 2023 of several groundbreaking measures to advance that state’s juvenile justice system.

These new laws are the result of the state’s first-ever comprehensive review of its juvenile justice system and recommendations that came out of Michigan’s bipartisan, multi-branch Task Force on Juvenile Justice Reform.

Members of the task force included four legislators: Reps. Brenda Carter and Sarah Lightner and Sens. Kim LaSata and Sylvia Santana. Lightner and Santana are graduates of CSG Midwest’s leadership institute for legislators, BILLD.

The CSG Justice Center helped the bipartisan task force review Michigan’s juvenile justice system and align state policies, practices and resource-allocation decisions with data-driven research.

CSG JUSTICE CENTER’S IMPROVING
OUTCOMES FOR YOUTH INITIATIVE



State and/or local policymakers have received or are receiving assistance through initiative

COME TO COLUMBUS IN JULY, BRING HOME IDEAS
TO ADVANCE, INSPIRE YOUR LEGISLATIVE WORK

Meeting for region’s lawmakers mixes policy sessions, insightful speakers and training workshops with the chance to explore a great Midwestern city

led by Sen. Bill Reineke, Ohio legislators are serving as hosts of the 78th Annual Meeting of the Midwestern Legislative Conference.

This year’s family-friendly event will be held July 21-24 in Columbus, Ohio’s capital and most populous city. Meeting registration is open at csgmidwest.org; an early-bird discount is available.

Every year, hundreds of legislators and their guests of all ages take part in the MLC Annual Meeting. Lawmakers come to learn and collaborate with fellow legislators and leading policy experts, as well to experience a great city of the Midwest.

Special daytime events are held for the spouses, other adult guests and children of attendees.



Among this year’s already-confirmed speakers: CNBC contributor Rebecca Fannin, the author of “Silicon Heartland,” and author/mediator Mark Gerzon on “The Reunited States of America.”

A PEEK AT THIS YEAR’S AGENDA

Part of this year’s meeting will explore the many facets and policy opportunities for legislators in the area of workforce innovation, the subject of the MLC Chair’s Initiative of Sen. Reineke.

As in past years, too, a mix of smaller-group discussions and larger plenary sessions will be held on a wide range of policy issues — education, health, agriculture, Midwest-Canada relations, criminal justice, and much more.

EXPLORE AND EXPERIENCE COLUMBUS

Columbus is the nation’s 14th largest city, and this year’s Ohio hosts are eager to showcase their vibrant capital — the fastest-growing city in the Midwest. Whether it’s policy-focused tours or special evening events (see below), MLC attendees will have ample opportunity to explore Columbus.

Plan now to join your legislative colleagues in July for four days of learning, collaboration and fun!

Special events in Columbus for MLC attendees and their guests



Opening Reception at Franklin Park Conservatory



Evening at the National Veterans Memorial and Museum



State Dinner at the Ohio Statehouse

INTRODUCING THE MLC’S FOUR-OFFICER TEAM

A bipartisan, binational group of legislators is leading The Council of State Governments’ Midwestern Legislative Conference (MLC) in 2024. They were elected to these positions by the Executive Committee of the MLC, the group serving all state and provincial legislators from the Midwest.

• **Ohio Sen. Bill Reineke** is the MLC chair. Reineke served three terms in the House before being elected in 2020 to the Senate. He is chair of the Senate Energy & Public Utilities Committee.

• **Saskatchewan Minister Dustin Duncan** is MLC first vice chair. First elected to the Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly in 2006, he joined the provincial cabinet in 2009 and currently serves in multiple ministerial positions.

• **Minnesota Sen. Mary Kunesh** is the MLC second vice chair. She serves as Senate assistant majority leader as well as chair of the Education Finance Committee. Kunesh served two terms in the House before moving to the Senate in 2020.

• **Michigan Sen. Roger Victory** completed a successful term in 2023 as chair. He led planning for the 2023 MLC Annual Meeting in Detroit and raised awareness regionwide about policies to



Ohio Sen. Bill Reineke, MLC chair



Saskatchewan Minister Dustin Duncan, MLC first vice chair



Minnesota Sen. Mary Kunesh, MLC second vice chair



Michigan Sen. Roger Victory, MLC immediate past chair

improve food security through his MLC Chair’s Initiative. Sen. Victory served six years in the House before joining the Senate in 2018. He currently is minority caucus whip and MLC immediate past 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 representing 11 states (Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota and Wisconsin) and the Canadian province of Saskatchewan. The provinces of Alberta, Manitoba and Ontario are MLC affiliate members.

LOOKING TO 'BILLD' ON YOUR LEGISLATIVE AND LEADERSHIP SKILLS? APPLY FOR A 2024 FELLOWSHIP

Close to 1,000 legislators have graduated from this CSG program for newer legislators

The Council of State Governments' Midwestern Legislative Conference is seeking applicants for the 29th annual Bowhay Institute for Legislative Leadership Development. The highly interactive curriculum is designed for legislators in their first four years of service; it includes a mix of leadership training courses, policy-focused seminars and professional development workshops. Areas covered include conflict resolution, consensus building, negotiation, priority management, media relations and effective speech making. Applications are due April 15 and available at csgmidwest.org. Please contact Laura Tomaka, CSG Midwest director, for more information: ltomaka@csg.org or 630.925.1922. The program's competitive application process is overseen by the MLC's BILLD Steering Committee, a bipartisan group of legislators from each of the MLC member jurisdictions. Since BILLD's inaugural class in 1995, close to 1,000 Midwestern legislators have graduated from the program. Many have gone to serve in top leadership positions, statewide office, key positions in the executive and judiciary branches, or the U.S. Congress. (See "By the Numbers" on this page).



BILLD

About This Year's BILLD Program

- August 23-27, 2024 in Madison, Wis.
- BILLD Fellowships cover the cost of tuition, meals and lodging
- Each Fellow is eligible for a partial travel stipend to help offset the cost of transportation to and from Madison
- Application Deadline: April 15, 2024

Q & A WITH FIVE GRADUATES OF THE 2023 PROGRAM: HOW HAS BILLD HELPED ADVANCE YOUR WORK AS A LEGISLATOR?

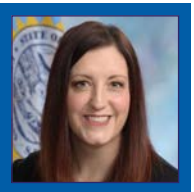
"Through BILLD I learned to build coalitions within our Legislature. I don't hesitate to reach out to members of the other party to find areas of agreement to develop solutions to the challenges faced by our fellow Kansas citizens."

Kansas Rep. Bill Clifford



"I have already put to use large amounts of the training, as I found it to be incredibly relevant and applicable. However, I really learned a lot from the session on legislation and the judiciary. As a new legislator who did not go to law school, it was really impactful to understand how the courts interpret words and phrases in the law. That session has allowed me to think differently about my bill drafts in hopes that they can be interpreted as accurately as possible."

South Dakota Rep. Mellissa Heermann



"The resourceful tools learned while attending the 2023 fellowship program have provided me with an opportunity to advance my leadership and communication skills. I look forward to accomplishing this year's legislative priorities for myself and my constituents, and I am confident that this will be a successful session. Thank you, Bowhay Institute!"

Illinois Sen. Adriane Johnson



"BILLD was an incredible experience as a legislator. Not only did I learn concrete skills in negotiation, time management and making effective arguments, but I also made connections with colleagues from sister states that I stay in touch with to share ideas and learnings in our respective chambers. I cannot recommend the experience enough, and I'm grateful to CSG for the opportunity!"

Nebraska Sen. John Fredrickson



"BILLD helped teach me the importance of finding common ground, no matter your race, party or affiliation. If we have a problem and/or idea, it is important to build consensus among other legislators, understand why someone may differ in opinion, and work toward solutions that can work for all."

Michigan Rep. Donovan McKinney



BY THE NUMBERS: BILLD'S BIG IMPACT IN LEGISLATURES

984	# OF LEGISLATORS WHO HAVE GRADUATED FROM BILLD SINCE ITS INCEPTION IN 1995
256	# OF CURRENT LEGISLATORS IN 11-STATE MIDWEST WHO ARE BILLD GRADUATES
32	# OF CURRENT LEGISLATORS IN CANADIAN PROVINCES WHO ARE BILLD GRADUATES
7	# OF BILLD GRADUATES CURRENTLY SERVING AS TOP CAUCUS LEADERS IN THEIR RESPECTIVE STATES
15	# OF BILLD GRADUATES WHO HAVE SERVED OR ARE CURRENTLY SERVING IN U.S. CONGRESS
17	# OF GRADUATES WHO HAVE SERVED OR ARE CURRENTLY SERVING AS STATEWIDE ELECTED OFFICIALS
MORE THAN 145	# OF BILLD GRADUATES SERVING AS LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE CHAIRS, VICE CHAIRS AND RANKING MEMBERS
16	# OF BILLD GRADUATES WHO HAVE SERVED AS CHAIR OF CSG'S MIDWESTERN LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE
30	# OF BILLD GRADUATES SERVING AS MEMBERS OF CSG'S MIDWESTERN LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

APPLICATIONS OPEN FOR CSG TOLL LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

Named for Henry Wolcott Toll, founder of The Council of State Governments, CSG's national leadership development program brings together 48 state officials from all three branches of government. Many BILLD graduates have gone on to take part in this "graduate level" program for longer-serving lawmakers. This year's application deadline is May 1. The 2024 program will be held Sept. 6-10 in Lexington, Ky. Please visit csg.org for more information and to find the application.

STATELINE MIDWEST

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csgmidwest.org/mlc24
[@CSGMidwest](https://twitter.com/CSGMidwest)

Registration is open for the
78TH ANNUAL MEETING
of the Midwestern Legislative Conference

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