

# Michigan's Lawyer-Legislators of the 101st State Legislature



**W**hen Michigan's 101st legislature convened on January 13, it did so in the wake of an unprecedented year marked by the COVID-19 pandemic, an ongoing event that continues to impact the state. After the 2020 election, the Republicans retained control of both chambers in Lansing. Thirteen lawmakers, all situated in the House of Representatives, are also lawyers.

The Senate started the session with 20 Republicans, 16 Democrats, and two vacancies created when senators were elected to other positions last November. The leadership remains the same with Mike Shirkey (R–Clarklake) as majority leader and Jim Ananich (D–Flint) as minority leader. The new chair of the Senate Judiciary and Public Safety Committee is Roger Victory (R–Hudsonville), who replaces Pete Lucido, who was elected Macomb County prosecutor. Lucido was previously the only lawyer-legislator serving in the Senate; his departure leaves no attorneys in the upper chamber, marking the first time in Michigan's history when one of the state's legislative chambers does not have a single attorney serving in its ranks.

The House of Representatives includes 58 Republicans and 52 Democrats. It has new leadership with Jason Wentworth (R–Farwell) elected as House speaker and Donna Laskinski (D–Scio Township) selected as minority leader. Graham Filler (R–DeWitt) continues as chair of the House Judiciary Committee.

As evidenced by no attorney serving in the Senate, there has been a downward trend of lawyers serving in the Michigan legislature. Of the 13 attorneys serving in the Michigan House, seven are Republicans and six are Democrats.

This session's lawyer-legislators have very different backgrounds. Many left thriving private practices to serve in public office. By doing so, they bring their expertise in a broad range of legal areas—including criminal law, real estate, disability law, family law, and probate and estate planning—to the legislature.

Read the following profiles to learn more about them. ■

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### Representative Ryan Berman

R-39—Wixom, Commerce Township, West Bloomfield Township, and Wolverine Lake



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Bar Admit Date: May 25, 2005  
Law School: Wayne State University Law School

Standing Committees: Insurance (vice chair); Energy; Judiciary; Local Government and Municipal Finance; Transportation

Rep. Berman is in his second term in the Michigan House of Representatives. He is involved in diverse aspects of lawmaking, serving on five committees, including vice chair of the Insurance Committee. The 39th District representative cites transparency and accountability as the driving forces behind his list of legislative priorities for this session. He hopes to continue his work on securing a legislative open-records act and other government transparency measures. Berman also supports initiatives making online access to court records free and easier for attorneys and the public.

The Wayne State University Law School graduate comes from a family of lawyers and knew from the time he was young that he was going to pursue a law degree. Prior to joining the House, Berman was a general practice attorney in Bloomfield working on areas including business, real estate, and criminal law. He also served on the State Bar of Michigan's Criminal Jurisprudence and Practice Committee, where he helped review legislation and court rule amendments for public policy recommendations for the Board of Commissioners. Berman is a reserve police officer and was an Oakland County Sheriff's Office reserve deputy.

### Representative Kyra Bolden

D-35—Southfield, Lathrup Village, Beverly Hills, Bingham Farms, and Franklin



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Bar Admit Date: November 24, 2014  
Law School: University of Detroit Mercy School of Law

Standing Committees: Joint Committee on Administrative Rules (minority party vice chair); Insurance; Judiciary

Rep. Bolden is in her second term in the Michigan House of Representatives and serves on the Insurance and Judiciary committees; she is also minority vice chair of the Administrative Rules Committee. Bolden has three major legislative priorities heading into the session. First, she hopes to see additional progress on criminal justice reform after working on three separate reform packages last session. Second, Rep. Bolden champions greater diversity, equity, and inclusion in the legislative and judicial processes, and supports initiatives encouraging policymakers to think about how laws impact communities of color and ensure those communities are part of the conversation. Third, she wants to prioritize an issue related to women's health care by changing Michigan's outlier status as one a handful of states that criminalizes commercial surrogacy, making any contracts for surrogacy unenforceable.

The University of Detroit Mercy School of Law graduate's legislative initiatives are driven by her personal experiences as well as her work as a lawyer, including serving as a court-appointed criminal defense attorney and staff attorney in Wayne County's 3rd Circuit Court. Prior to joining the legislature, Bolden practiced civil litigation with a focus on no-fault insurance law. When not navigating the twists and turns of the legislature, Bolden enjoys dancing—something she did competitively as a teenager.

## Representative Kelly Breen

D-38—Lyon Township, portions of Northville, Novi, Novi Township, South Lyon, and Walled Lake



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Bar Admit Date: May 13, 2003  
Law School: Wayne State University Law School

Standing Committees: Insurance; Judiciary

Rep. Breen is entering her first term in the Michigan House of Representatives after serving as a Novi City Council member. As a former local government official, Breen wants to focus on bringing relief to local governments and making it easier for them to fund the projects that improve their residents' quality of life. Another one of her top priorities is providing COVID relief funding to schools so they can continue to operate effectively. A former defense and plaintiff's attorney, Breen also wants to reform Michigan's workers' compensation statute to make it more reasonable for workers to get the benefits they deserve.

## Representative Graham Filler

R-93—Ithaca and the townships of Sumner, Arcada, New Haven, North Shade, Newark, Fulton, Washington, North Star, Elba, Hamilton, Lafayette, and Wheeler



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Bar Admit Date: May 31, 2011  
Law School: University of Detroit Mercy School of Law

Standing Committees: Judiciary (chair); Agriculture; Elections and Ethics; Health Policy

Rep. Filler is continuing in his role as chair of the House Judiciary Committee in his second term. Prior to serving in the Michigan House of Representatives, Filler was an assistant attorney general, focusing on protecting the public and fair enforcement of Michigan's health licensing laws. His experiences as an assistant attorney general have prompted him to create legislation that protects the public, but at the same time does not unfairly burden individual rights. He was proud to quarterback many reforms through the legislature during his first term dealing with civil asset forfeiture, "Raise the Age" juvenile court reform, nation-leading expungement expansion, and ensuring that Michigan's Sex Offender Registration Act was constitutional. During his second term, Filler's priorities are pro-victim restitution reforms, restructuring

Michigan's guardianship laws to protect seniors and disabled citizens, and expanding expungement to include first-time offenses of driving under the influence.

Filler is an avid fan of college football, particularly Big Ten football. He helped run the "Off Tackle Empire" blog from 2008 to 2019, where he provided in-depth analysis and discussion of Big Ten football.

## Representative Andrew Fink

R-58—Branch County and Hillsdale County



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Bar Admit Date: October 22, 2010  
Law School: University of Michigan Law School

Standing Committees: Appropriations; Health Policy

Before being elected to his first term in the Michigan House of Representatives last fall, Rep. Fink served on the State Bar of Michigan's Board of Commissioners from 2016 to 2019, where he was a member of its Public Policy Committee, reviewing legislation and court rule amendments. Fink wants to focus on several health policy initiatives, including changing the scope of practice for nurse practitioners and updating Michigan's certificate of need program. He is also interested in legislation to help small businesses and restaurants struggling in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

A former active-duty Marine, Fink is vice chair of the Military Veterans and State Police Subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee. He has introduced House Bill 4066, which replace the current patchwork of local ordinances governing knife possession by creating a uniform statewide law. Fink is a graduate of Hillsdale College and University of Michigan Law School.





## Representative Jim Haadsma

D-62—Battle Creek, Springfield, and Albion, and the townships of Albion, Bedford, Clarence, Convis, Lee, Pennfield, and Sheridan



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Bar Admit Date: November 8, 1984  
Law School: Wayne State University Law School

Standing Committees: Communications and Technology; Energy

Rep. Haadsma is in his second term in the Michigan House of Representatives, serving on the House Energy Committee and Communications and Technology Committee. Constituent service and advocacy help define Haadsma's priorities in the House. As an attorney with the firm of McCrosky Law, PLC since 1987, where he focuses his practice on workers' compensation, disability, and administrative law, he continues to balance the needs of his clients and his constituency.

Haadsma believes that COVID-19 has forced lawyers to evolve and develop reasonable processes for conducting hearings remotely. The drive towards tech proficiency has made him a rapid adopter of many different social media platforms. He is looking forward to welcoming a second-generation lawyer into his family when his daughter, a second-year law student, graduates.

## Representative Matt Hall

R-63—South and central Calhoun County, eastern Kalamazoo County



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Bar Admit Date: November 3, 2017  
Law School: Thomas M. Cooley Law School

Standing Committees: Tax Policy (chair); Insurance; Regulatory Reform; Joint Committee on Administrative Rules

Rep. Hall is in his second term in the Michigan House of Representatives and as chairman of its Tax Policy Committee, he is interested in analyzing current tax laws and finding ways to make the tax code fair and up to date. Also topping Rep. Hall's to-do list is election reform, specifically ensuring that elections work better and restoring confidence in the process. As a member of the House Regulatory Reform Committee and the Joint Committee on Administrative Rules, Hall believes he is in a unique position to see the full spectrum of administrative law in action.

A Thomas M. Cooley Law School graduate who earned his juris doctor in advanced constitutional advocacy, Hall cites his legal training as being instrumental in better understanding the connection between writing laws that empower administrative agencies on one hand and overseeing how those agencies carry forth their legislatively created powers on the other. Hall holds the distinction of being the only Michigan lawyer-legislator portrayed in a "Saturday Night Live" skit—the show once satirized a House Oversight Committee hearing he chaired.



**Representative Kara Hope**

D-67—Mason, Stockbridge, Leslie, Webberville, Williamston, Dansville, Holt, Onondaga, and South Lansing



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Bar Admit Date: June 6, 2003  
Law School: Thomas M. Cooley Law School

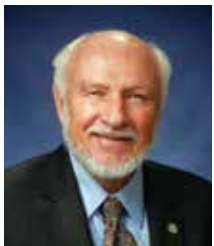
**Standing Committees:** Agriculture; Judiciary; Workforce, Trades, and Talent

Rep. Hope is in her second term in the Michigan House of Representatives. Comprehensive COVID-19 relief and implementing ethical standards for state legislators top her list of legislative priorities for the current session. As the first in her family to go to college and subsequently to law school, Hope believes in serving her constituents and meeting their needs—needs she believes have only grown during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Hope served as a prehearing attorney in the Michigan Court of Appeals and is a former adjunct professor of research and writing at Thomas M. Cooley Law School. In 2015, she established a solo practice focusing on family law. Hope cites her experience as a member of the Ingham County Board of Commissioners—where she served from 2012 until her election to the state representative seat—as being instrumental in her ability to understand the House, accomplish her legislative goals, and serve her constituents.

**Representative Gary Howell**

R-82—Lapeer County



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Bar Admit Date: October 28, 1974  
Law School: University of Michigan Law School

**Standing Committees:** Natural Resources & Outdoor Recreation (chair); Local Government and Municipal Finance; Transportation; Workforce, Trades & Talent

Rep. Howell is in his third term in the Michigan House of Representatives and has the distinction of being the only farmer-lawyer-legislator currently serving in Lansing. The former municipal attorney believes that government works best when decisions are made at the local level and is a staunch advocate for local control issues.

An avid conservationist, Howell prioritizes protecting the environment. In his role as chair of the House Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Committee, he is working on a bipartisan package of bills that would incentivize recycling in the state while reducing waste that ends up in Michigan's landfills.

**Representative David LaGrand**

D-75—Grand Rapids



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Bar Admit Date: November 18, 1992  
Law School: University of Chicago Law School

**Standing Committees:** Judiciary (minority party vice chair); Oversight.

Rep. LaGrand is in his third term in the Michigan House of Representatives and serves as minority vice chair of the Judiciary Committee and is a member of the Oversight Committee. LaGrand lists three areas of focus for his final term in the House: criminal justice reform, government transparency, and environmental protection. A former assistant prosecutor, LaGrand is prioritizing an expungement package; reworking sentencing guidelines to emphasize restorative justice with mediation for criminal cases; and, in collaboration with the State Court Administrative Office, reforms to pretrial incarceration including changing the way cash bonds are handled. In addition to criminal justice reforms, LaGrand wants to bring greater transparency and ethics to government to increase trust in government through a package of bills that would require financial disclosure for elected officials. His environmental agenda includes increasing the ease of use for electric vehicles by pursuing joint federal-state coordination to install fast charging stations at Michigan rest stops.

Before serving in office, Rep. LaGrand worked in private practice at Warner Norcross & Judd, as an assistant prosecutor, and opened his own firm where he focused on family and criminal law. He is also a small business owner, having started a construction company, coffee shop, bakery, and distillery.

## Representative Douglas Wozniak

R-36—Bruce, Washington, Shelby Township, and Romeo



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Bar Admit Date: May 21, 1998  
Law School: Detroit College of Law  
at Michigan State University

Standing Committees: Families, Children, and Seniors (vice chair); Communications and Technology; Families; Judiciary; Oversight

Rep. Wozniak, a practicing attorney specializing in elder law and estate planning, is in his second term as a representative. His agenda focuses on issues impacting seniors and more vulnerable populations. One of Wozniak's top priorities this legislative session is addressing issues that arose in Michigan's nursing homes during the COVID-19 pandemic. As vice chair of the House Families, Children, and Seniors Committee, improving the state's foster-care system also tops his agenda, and he sees the important role treatment plays in rehabilitating individuals with mental health issues caught in the criminal justice system.

Wozniak became an attorney after enjoying a diverse career path that included owning a construction company, a beer and wine distributorship, and a restaurant. He is an oenophile and prior to his legislative service, he "taught wine" by sharing his knowledge of all things wine with fellow would-be connoisseurs.

## Representative Tenisha Yancey

D-1—Grosse Pointe Woods, Harper Woods, Village of Grosse Pointe Shores, and Detroit



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Bar Admit Date: May 21, 2014  
Law School: University of Detroit Mercy  
School of Law

Standing Committees: Tax Policy (minority party chair); Judiciary; Regulatory Reform

Rep. Yancey is in her third term in the Michigan House of Representatives and serves as the minority vice chair of the Tax Policy Committee and as a member of the Judiciary and Regulatory Reform committees. Last term, Yancey served on the Joint Task Force on Jail and Pretrial Incarceration, and she hopes to continue to implement the task force's recommendations. During the 101st legislative session, Yancey's priorities include expanding expungement, continuing work with Rep. Kyra Bolden on habitual offender legislation, and bringing forth legislation to provide for the equitable funding of prosecutor's offices regardless of locale.

Yancey's personal story underpins her strong commitment to improving Michigan's criminal and juvenile justice system. She is committed to people understanding that they "are so much more than their mistakes." Reeling from a family tragedy and loss in her younger days, Yancey made some choices that resulted in criminal charges being brought against her. She ultimately overcame these challenges and not only received a degree from Eastern Michigan University, but also attended law school, graduating from the University of Detroit Mercy School of Law while working full-time for Wayne County. Prior to becoming a member of the Michigan House, Yancey was a Wayne County prosecutor.

## Representative Jeff Yaroch

R-33—Armada Township, Lenox Township, the majority of Macomb Township, Ray Township, Richmond Township, the cities of Richmond and Memphis, and the villages of New Haven and Armada



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Bar Admit Date: May 3, 2011  
Law School: Thomas M. Cooley  
Law School

Standing Committees: Appropriations

Rep. Yaroch is in his third term in the Michigan House of Representatives and serves on the House Appropriations Committee. He chairs the Subcommittee on Licensing and Regulatory Affairs/Insurance and Financial Services (LARA/DIFS), which includes overseeing the budget for the Michigan Indigent Defense Commission. In addition, he is vice chair for the Subcommittee on the Judiciary. This term, Yaroch is focused on local funding issues, reforming the Emergency Management Act, and eliminating unfunded mandates. He credits his legal education with allowing him to spot and understand constitutional issues when they arise during the course of his legislative work.

Yaroch spent 25 years with the Clinton Township Fire Department as a firefighter, paramedic, and retired as a battalion chief. Lawyering runs in Yaroch's family—his wife, Sara, is also an attorney.