

September 11, 2025

Michigan Senators and Representatives of the Northern Michigan Caucus
100 N. Capitol Avenue
Lansing, Michigan 48933

Dear Senators and Representatives,

On behalf of the Northern Michigan Chamber Alliance, we are writing to express concern regarding proposed FY26 budget reductions that would significantly impact economic development and workforce programs essential to the prosperity of rural Michigan and the entire state.

We recognize the challenging fiscal environment and the importance of infrastructure investments, including roads. However, the economic development and workforce programs are not optional enhancements—they are proven, fiscally responsible investments that generate strong returns, address critical workforce and housing shortages, and position rural Michigan as a key driver of statewide economic growth.

Key Programs

Office of Rural Prosperity & Rural Readiness Grant Program

These programs address the unique needs of rural communities, helping those without large grant-writing departments plan and prepare for strategic growth. Demand is high, with 100 letters of intent requesting \$4.4 million in funding. Past awards have produced remarkable returns—Iosco County's \$1 in grants yielded \$60 in local value—and supported projects like joint water/sewer planning in Petoskey, Resort Township, and Bear Creek Township; land bank initiatives in Marquette; and capital planning for the Interlochen Center for the Arts.

Michigan Business Development Program (MBDP) & Michigan Community Revitalization Program (MCRP)

These MEDC programs have been essential in supporting both small- and mid-scale business expansions and downtown redevelopment efforts in rural regions. Since its inception, MBDP has provided critical gap financing to help employers expand in communities that otherwise would not have the resources to compete. MCRP has revitalized key downtown properties, turning underutilized spaces into housing, commercial, and mixed-use developments that anchor rural economies by creating communities current and future residents are proud of and invest in.

Key examples of MBRP and MCRP projects in NMMA Partner communities include:

- Saab's new manufacturing facility in Grayling
- Precision Hardwoods' expansion in Onaway
- Aster Brands' expansion in Harbor Springs
- Able Medical's expansion and new facility Marquette

- Superior Extrusion's investment in Gwinn

Going PRO Talent Fund

This employer-driven training program directly addresses skilled labor shortages, particularly in rural regions. Examples include MR Products (Copemish), which used Going PRO to upskill employees, and Whistle Stop Childcare Center (Benzie County), where a grant enabled a childcare apprenticeship benefiting 13 working families. Increasing permanent funding to \$110 million will ensure long-term workforce readiness.

Employer-Assisted Housing Program

Northern Michigan businesses have already pioneered housing solutions for employees, from Crystal Mountain's seasonal housing to Cherry Republic's owned homes and Short's Brewing's purchase of the Bellaire Inn. State matching funds of \$25 million would accelerate similar employer-led initiatives.

Why These Investments Matter

Rural Michigan generates billions in economic activity, supports industries from manufacturing to tourism, and serves as a year-round base for residents, employers, and entrepreneurs. Strategic investments in housing, workforce development, business growth, and downtown revitalization multiply returns, strengthen public-private partnerships, and keep talent in the state.

Our Request

We respectfully urge you to:

- Restore funding for high-impact rural programs listed above.
- Maintain and expand employer-led workforce and housing initiatives.
- Recognize rural Michigan's role in driving statewide economic competitiveness.

The Northern Michigan Chamber Alliance stands ready to work with you to identify sustainable, high-ROI solutions for the FY26 budget. We welcome the opportunity to provide additional examples from your district to demonstrate the direct benefits of these investments.

Sincerely,



Nikki Devitt
Chair, Northern Michigan Chamber Alliance



Christopher Germain
Vice Chair, Northern Michigan Chamber