

2026 Northern Michigan Chamber Alliance Candidate Questionnaire

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1. Purpose and Responsibility

Why are you seeking this office, and how would you define the responsibility of the office to the people of northern Michigan and the Upper Peninsula?

Answer: I'm running for the people I know and see every day — the neighbor picking up extra shifts who still can't get ahead, the young family that can't find a house they can afford, the folks driving an hour just to see a doctor. Northern Michigan is home. I've spent my career here helping communities find their footing and helping run the rural clinics that keep care within reach — and I've watched us get overlooked while Lansing writes rules for everywhere but here. To me, this office is about service, not a title: showing up in our towns, listening to what people are really living through, and fighting to bring our fair share home — so this stays a place our kids can afford to build a life.

2. Jobs, Investment, and Competitiveness

What specific policies would you support or develop if elected, to ensure northern Michigan and the Upper Peninsula can compete for jobs, investment, infrastructure, and other state and federal resources?

Answer: Northern Michigan can compete with anyone when state policy is built to fit how our region actually works — not a one-size-fits-all formula written for the big metros. I'd champion regionally-driven funding, like the Office of Rural Prosperity, so resources reach the rural communities that need them. I'd back performance-based grants and targeted incentives for our rural small businesses, invest in the infrastructure that lets us compete — broadband, water systems, and roads — and support our emerging strengths in advanced manufacturing, outdoor recreation, and rural health. And I'd be a tireless advocate for our district's specific needs, from Gaylord's water infrastructure to the Lake City trunkline. We compete by investing in our people, our small businesses, and the infrastructure that makes everything else possible.

3. Housing and Regional Partnerships

NMCA's policy framework calls for housing solutions and regional partnerships to address the region's critical housing shortage. What policies or ideas do you have in which you can partner with the Alliance to make a positive impact?

Answer: Everywhere I go, I hear it: an employer who can't fill a job because their new hire can't find anywhere to live, or a young person who grew up here and can't afford to stay. Housing is my top priority, because without it, nothing else holds.

I'd partner with the Alliance on real solutions. That means incentives to build workforce housing — homes that teachers, nurses, and tradespeople can actually afford. It means tools like rural PILOT programs, where a local government can offer a break on property taxes so affordable homes actually get built. It means updating the state's housing agency programs, which are often designed for big cities, so they fit small rural towns. And it means communities partnering across the region, because no single town can solve this alone.

Our lakes, forests, and rivers are a draw — people come from all over wanting a place "up north," and plenty own a second home here just to enjoy it. That's a good thing. Short-term-rental rules should keep homes available for local families while respecting both those who own a place for their own use and those who rent one out. Housing is economic development, and I'll treat it that way.

4. Workforce Development and Talent Attraction

What are your views on programs such as Going PRO, Michigan Reconnect, and talent attraction programs? What would you do to help attract, retain, train, and grow the workforce needed by northern Michigan and Upper Peninsula employers?

Answer: I talk with employers across our region who have good-paying jobs open and can't find the skilled workers to fill them — and with people who'd love to train for those jobs but can't afford to start over. That's the gap these programs close, and they work. Going PRO helps employers pay to train their workers for skilled, well-paying jobs — right here, companies like Weyerhaeuser and Springs Window Fashions in Grayling and Cooper Standard in Gaylord have used it. Michigan Reconnect makes community college and skills training tuition-free for adults going back to earn a credential. I'd fully fund Going PRO and expand Reconnect so more people can retrain close to home.

I'd also invest directly in skilled-trades training at Kirtland Community College here in Grayling, and bring labor to the table as a full partner — union apprenticeships are one of the most proven paths to a good-paying career, and our trades unions want to help build that workforce. Beyond that, I'd make sure these programs actually reach our small and rural employers, grow apprenticeships and school-to-career pathways, and keep young people here with good jobs and housing they can afford. Recruit them, train them here, and give them a reason to stay.

5. Childcare Access

Please describe your view of the need for childcare in the region, and what would you do to enhance access to this resource?

Answer: Childcare is one of the first things I hear about from families and employers across the district — and it's real. Here in Grayling, and in Gaylord, Roscommon, and our smaller towns, I know parents who've turned down good jobs, cut their hours, or driven 40 minutes each way because there simply isn't care close to home. Much of Northern Michigan is a childcare desert, with too few providers, long waitlists, and costs that rival a mortgage. When a parent can't find care, they can't work — and that hurts our families and our local businesses alike.

The encouraging part is that a real solution is already taking root here. Michigan's Tri-Share program splits childcare costs three ways — employer, employee, and state — and its Northern Michigan hub opened this year covering Crawford, Otsego, Roscommon, and Oscoda, four of the counties I'd represent. I'd fight to fund and grow it so more of our small employers can take part. I'd also help providers open and stay open — startup support, common-sense rules for home-based care, and real investment in the early-childhood workforce so we have enough qualified people to do the job. Families here shouldn't have to choose between a paycheck and knowing their kids are cared for close to home.

6. Education Outcomes and Funding

What do you believe is the best action you could take to support growth in measurable outcomes for k-12 students in northern Michigan and the Upper Peninsula? How well is Michigan's funding of our higher education systems working, and would you make any changes to the way we fund education in this state?

Answer:

K-12 outcomes. I've spent my career designing learning experiences, so this one is personal. Our rural schools do remarkable work with less, but the headwinds are real — declining enrollment, long bus routes, and a hard time keeping teachers. The single biggest difference-maker is funding students according to what they actually need. Michigan sets a base of about \$10,000 per pupil, but ranks near the bottom nationally in how it weights funding for kids from low-income families, and it shortchanges small, isolated districts where the cost of keeping the lights on doesn't shrink just because enrollment does. I'll fight for stronger weighted and rural-sparsity funding, and for a multi-year enrollment count so one hard year can't gut a district. Paired with a real teacher pipeline and strong career-tech and dual-enrollment through partners like Kirtland, that's how we move what matters — reading, graduation, and readiness for a job or college.

Higher education funding. The math tells the story. In 1979, the state covered about 70% of our public universities' operating costs and students covered 30%. Today it's flipped — tuition covers roughly 78%, the state about 22% — and average tuition tops \$17,000 a year. We've quietly shifted the cost of a degree onto families, and the debt that follows keeps young people from buying homes and putting down roots in communities like ours. I'd reverse that: steady, predictable state investment tied to keeping tuition affordable, plus continued support for community colleges and Michigan Reconnect —

often the most direct, affordable path to a good career up here. Fund education as the economic investment it is, and hold down what it costs families to reach it.

7. Regulatory Climate and Small Business Growth

What regulations, permitting processes, taxes, mandates, or compliance burdens do you believe most limit small business growth in our region? What would you do to make our state's regulatory environment more predictable?

Answer: I run a couple of small businesses, so I know what it's like to be responsible for keeping the doors open — and I also know the regulatory challenges many of you face run deeper than mine. So I'll do the work to understand them, and I'll do it the right way: by learning directly from the people who live them. A good representative earns their expertise by listening closely, asking hard questions, and coming back with real solutions.

The frustration I hear most from owners isn't any single rule — it's that the rules keep changing without warning. Last year's changes to the sick-time and minimum-wage laws are a good example: rewritten at the last minute and enforced almost immediately, leaving many small employers scrambling. Add slow, inconsistent permitting and paperwork spread across multiple agencies, and it's easy to see why owners hold off on hiring or expanding.

I'll learn what regulations impact the small businesses in our region, and I'll fight to make the environment more predictable — real lead time before new mandates take effect, streamlined permitting with published timelines and a clear point of contact, and business owners at the table before rules are written, not after. Owners shouldn't have to become policy experts just to keep their doors open.

8. Affordability and Economic Vitality

What meaningful changes do you believe would help advance Michigan's economic vitality by making this state a more affordable place to live, work, and do business?

Answer: Affordability up here comes down to the cost of the basics — a roof, food on the table, care for your kids, health care, and a paycheck that keeps up. Get those right and the rest follows: people can take the jobs, businesses can staff them, and our towns grow.

Housing is the biggest lever. Our region is short more than 31,000 homes through 2027 — not just low-income units, but the "missing middle" housing our workforce needs: teachers, nurses, tradespeople, young families. I'd make it easier and faster to build it — modernizing local zoning, supporting rehab of the buildings we already have, and growing tools like the state's new Employer-Assisted Housing Fund so businesses can help house the workers they're trying to hire.

Health care may be the clearest example of a cost in the wrong place. Right now we ask small businesses to shoulder the expense of insuring their workers — a burden that climbs every year and puts them at a disadvantage against big companies. I don't believe health care should ride on the backs of small business owners at all. In the long run, I support a single-payer system funded at the federal level, so coverage follows the person, not the job. Until we get there, I'll fight for state solutions that shift the cost off small employers and their workers — so no owner has to choose between offering coverage and keeping their doors open.

Food matters too — groceries take a bigger bite out of family budgets every year, and in parts of our district affordable fresh food isn't a given. I'd support our local farms and the programs that keep families fed.

The rest adds up: expanding childcare cost-sharing through Tri-Share so parents can stay in the workforce, building affordable paths to good careers through Reconnect and Going PRO, and watching the everyday costs — energy bills, property taxes — that quietly squeeze households and small businesses alike.

Affordability isn't one policy. It's making sure a person can live, work, and build a future in the same community. Too many of our young people leave because they can't — and I want to give them a reason to stay.