

# Transforming Times *election year edition*

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## Amplifying your voice through your vote

As Election Day in November approaches, let the words of John Lewis serve as a reminder that your vote, and your voice, make a difference. Your vote will help to determine our future leaders and the direction of our way forward as a country. Henry Ford Health has been engaged in many efforts to promote voter awareness, education and registration. Our Government Affairs team has actively participated at the local, state and national levels to support voter access and participation. You can read more about their voter engagement efforts below. Supporting voter access is a crucial part of our DEIJ Strategic plan, and is intended to benefit all Henry Ford Health employees, patients and the communities we serve.

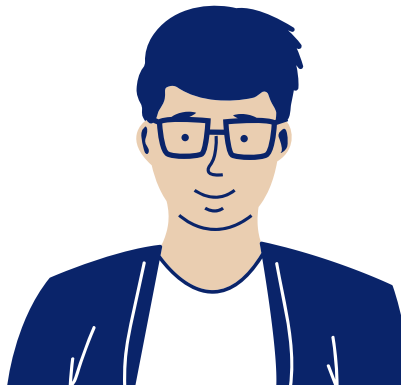
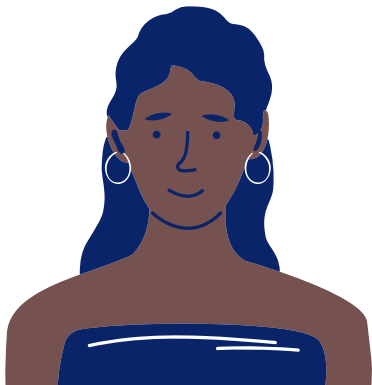
Today, all American citizens over the age of 18 have the right to vote in federal and state elections. It has not always been this way. The United States Constitution, signed in 1776, established the procedures for voting in the United States, but did not specify who could vote. Because of this,

states determined who could vote. This led to the disenfranchisement of women, Black people, and other marginalized groups, as the ability to vote was exclusive to white male property owners.

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**“The vote is the most powerful, non-violent tool we have in a democratic society.”**

**-John Lewis, U.S. Representative and civil rights activist**



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Over the course of our country's history, there have been constitutional amendments and legislation removing previous barriers to vote based on sex and race, including the 15th amendment in 1870 that provided Black men the right to vote and the 19th Amendment in 1920 that provided women the right to vote. Even after these amendments, there were many restriction efforts, such as poll taxes, literacy tests, English-language requirements and more, that were designed to suppress the vote among people of color, immigrants and low-income populations. This led to the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which made it illegal to impose restrictions on federal, state and local elections. However, voter suppression continues to be an issue many voters face across the country. Examples of voter suppression can range from voter registration restrictions, strict voter ID laws, reducing polling locations and limiting polling station hours. These measures disproportionately impact people of color, students, the elderly, and people with disabilities. As we look back, we remember that the right to vote has not always been accessible, and there is still more work to be done. It is the fundamental right of all eligible voters to use their voices and vote.



*Dr. Kimberly Dawn Wisdom with Michigan Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson at Brown Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church's 71st Annual Brotherhood Banquet, where Secretary Benson spoke on voting access issues.*

Your vote has power. By exercising your freedoms and rights as a citizen of the United States of America, you play a part in choosing the next leaders on federal, state and local levels. Elections impact our communities and families, including what community services receive funding and what laws and policies go into effect. Your vote helps determine who runs your community, how your tax dollars are allocated, and which projects will receive funding on local, state and federal levels. Exercise your vote to impact elections by choosing officials that align with the values you believe in.

As we prepare for the upcoming election in November, we will continue to engage in efforts to increase voter awareness, education, and registration among Henry Ford Health team members, patients and community members. Here are a few points to remember:

- **Registration:** Eligible citizens in the state of Michigan can register online, by mail or in person up to and on Election Day. Please visit the [Michigan Voter Information page](#) for more information on how to register.
- **Casting Your Vote:** All Michigan voters have the right to choose to vote in person at their polling place on Election Day, in person at an early voting site before Election Day, or by absentee ballot by mail or in person at their clerk's office before Election Day. Voters are not required to provide a reason to vote absentee. For more information, including how to locate your clerk's office or polling place, please visit the [Your Voter Information page](#). To request an absentee ballot online, please visit the [Vote at Home \(absentee\) page](#).
- **Accessibility:** Remember your rights. You have the right to vote in person at your designated polling place between 7:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m. local time on Election Day or at your early voting site before Election Day. If you are in line to vote by 8:00 pm, you have the right to cast your ballot. Polling places and early voting sites must be accessible. If you plan to vote in person, it is recommended that you contact your local clerk's office in advance to ensure your polling place or early voting site is accessible for you.

## Henry Ford leader supports policy win for Michigan patients

A bill to license registered dietitian nutritionists (RDNs) in Michigan was passed and signed into law! Beth Thayer, Director of Henry Ford's Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention, also an RDN, has been leading the charge to license dietitians in the state of Michigan for the past six years. Previously, Michigan was only one of two states (along with Arizona) that had no regulations or licensure for registered dietitians. On April 30, 2024, that changed as Governor Gretchen Whitmer signed HB 4608 into law, with Thayer and other key advocates in attendance.

"In many cases, food is medicine, and evidence-based medical nutrition therapy is a key part of managing many health conditions," said Thayer, adding "This is an important step forward to ensure that people seeking professional nutrition support receive the best quality care."

Next steps are to build a state licensure board and write rules and regulations for the implementation of this law. When rules and regulations are finalized, RDNs will be able to apply for their Michigan state license.

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*HFH Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Director Beth Thayer, MS, RDN, FAND (left) and Emily Camiener, MPH, RDN, CDCES (second from right), co-chairs of the Michigan Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics' Licensure Task Force, attended the signing event for the new licensure bill with bill sponsor Representative Laurie Pohutsky (right) and Governor Gretchen Whitmer (seated).*



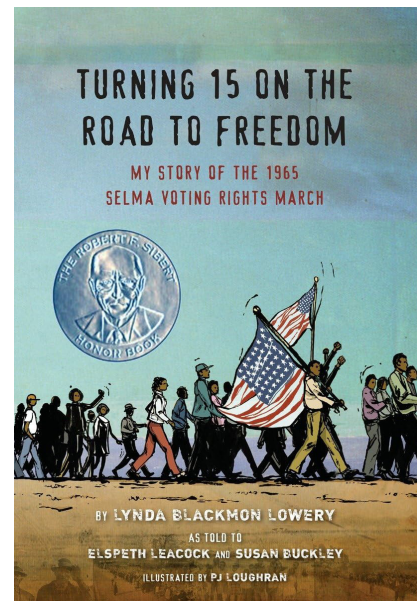


## Government affairs voter engagement efforts

Voter engagement is one of Government Affairs' goals under Henry Ford Health's DEIJ strategic plan. Our team engages in several activities leading up to the primary and general elections that aim to increase voter awareness, education, and registration among Henry Ford Health team members, patients, and the surrounding community.

Leading up to the February and August primary elections, the Government Affairs team convened an election engagement committee made up of individuals from across the system. We worked closely with this committee to develop language on how to register, where to vote, and other considerations including how to access absentee ballots and early voting. The language was then disseminated out to employees across Henry Ford Health. Additionally, we crafted alerts to be shared on the Morning Post, and internal and external webpages. Other activities included the convening of town halls to provide information about the election to residents at each hospital and Henry Ford Health partnered with the Secretary of State, joining the Michigan Business United for Elections.

Voter engagement leading up to the general election, taking place in November, will include similar activities. In addition to those listed above, we will provide flyers to each of our locations that provides voter information and a list of candidates that will appear on the ballot. We will assist in coordinating a public service announcement from Bob Riney and other Detroit leaders. We are also exploring hosting informational tables at our hospitals to provide details on how to register, where to vote, and other relevant services.



## Civil Rights heroine speaks to Detroit leaders, offers voting access support

On March 20, Ms. Lynda Blackmon-Lowery generously shared her wisdom, candor and personal experiences as a civil rights heroine while speaking to a group of influential leaders at the Huntington Tower in Detroit, on behalf of Huntington National Bank Chairman Gary Torgow and HFH President and CEO Bob Riney. Mr. Torgow had previously hosted a Civil Rights tour that spanned several southern states, inviting Detroit civic and business leaders (including Bob Riney). During the tour, Mr. Torgow met Ms. Blackmon-Lowery and organized the March 20th event to share her story as a civil rights champion with local leaders from Henry Ford Health and elsewhere.

The youngest person to participate in the Montgomery voting rights march, also known as Bloody Sunday, Ms. Blackmon-Lowery delivered an enlightening address on pursuing justice, equality and human rights. It was particularly striking to hear about her commitment as a young teen to make the world better through "steady, loving confrontation." Her recollections represented a powerful reminder of the ongoing importance of advocating for social change and standing up against injustice in all its forms. Ms. Blackmon-Lowery offered to amplify HFH's efforts to improve voter access. Learn more about Ms. Blackmon-Lowery in her book, [Turning 15 on the Road to Freedom](#).



## 2024 Community Health Worker Advocacy Day in Lansing

Several Community Health Workers (CHWs) from the department of Community Health, Equity, Wellness & Diversity participated in Community Health Worker Advocacy Day on April 18, 2024, at the State Capitol in Lansing. They visited their local elected officials to talk about the critical work and services that CHWs provide.

### Community health workers bill passes

For decades, Henry Ford Health has been at the forefront of organizing community health workers (CHWs) and advocating for their positions, their professionalization, and their value in addressing the social determinants of health.

The American Public Health Association has adopted the following definition of a CHW:

- A community health worker is a frontline public health worker who is a trusted member of and/or has an unusually close understanding of the community served. This trusting relationship enables the worker to serve as a liaison/link/intermediary between health/social services and the community to facilitate access to services and improve the quality and cultural competence of service delivery.
- A community health worker also builds individual and community capacity by increasing health knowledge and self-sufficiency through a range of activities such as outreach, community education, informal counseling, social support and advocacy.

With the leadership of the Michigan Community Health Worker Alliance, which HFH helped to create and continues to strongly support, effective January 1, 2024, the role of CHWs who meet the necessary requirements and qualifications is reimbursable through Medicaid.

This funding through managed care organizations and fee-for-service Medicaid is expected to expand CHW services and to more fully integrate them into the healthcare system, according to the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services. For more on Michigan Medicaid CHW Services, visit: <https://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/assistance-programs/medicaid/community-health-workers>.

While this policy represents important movement in supporting and sustaining CHWs, there is still work to be done to ensure living wages for CHWs, a pipeline for professional advancement, a structure of support and technical assistance, and connection among CHWs, who like all health professionals, are subject to burnout. For these reasons, HFH continues to develop and grow its CHW Hub, which is housed within the Office of Community Health, Equity, Wellness, and Diversity at Henry Ford. This structure ensures appropriate training and supervision, both general CHW certification and specific training related to the CHWs role. More information about the CHW Hub is available here: <https://www.henryford.com/about/community-health/chw-hub>.



## Family Medicine Chair named

When a national search is conducted for key leadership positions within our HFMG, it reflects our commitment to pursuing the absolute best talent. Oftentimes, that road leads right back to Henry Ford, as is the case now. We are incredibly fortunate that **Denise White-Perkins, MD, PhD**, has accepted the position of [Chair of the Department of Family Medicine](#), a role she has filled on an interim basis since May of last year. She will also continue to serve as Vice Chair of Academic Affairs for the Department of Family Medicine and Director of Healthcare Equity Initiatives for the Office of System DEIJ. Additionally, Dr. White-Perkins is a member of the HFMG Board of Governors.



## Tobacco bills awaiting action in the Michigan legislature

Henry Ford Health has long been active alongside community partners pushing for improved tobacco treatment and prevention policies at many levels of government. In recent years, as a member of the Detroit-Wayne-Oakland Tobacco-Free Coalition, and of the statewide Tobacco-Free Michigan coalition and the Keep MI Kids Tobacco-Free Alliance, we have supported efforts to educate policymakers about the impact of tobacco use in all its forms on Michiganders across the lifespan.

Now those groups' diligent efforts have borne fruit: In late 2023, an eight-bill package was introduced in the Michigan Senate with the goal of discouraging youth access to tobacco by licensing sellers; increasing taxes on tobacco products, with revenues being used to support tobacco prevention and treatment; and eliminating enticingly-flavored tobacco products from the marketplace, including e-cigarettes and menthol tobacco products. However, with election season in full swing, progress toward their passage has been slow, despite the measures having strong support.

"The need for policy change to further reduce tobacco use is urgent," said Amanda Holm, MPH, Senior Project Manager for Henry Ford Health's Tobacco Treatment Service and liaison to several tobacco-focused coalitions. "We haven't upgraded our statewide policies in many years, funding remains low, and it shows in how Michigan is lagging behind other states in reducing tobacco use."

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has characterized Michigan as belonging to a group of states it calls "Tobacco Nation," given that over 15% of Michigan adults smoke cigarettes and 14% of Michigan youth use e-cigarettes, compared with nationwide averages of 11.5% and 10% respectively. And each year, over 16,200 Michiganders die from smoking-related causes, incurring healthcare costs upwards of \$5.3 billion.

The bills currently reside in the Senate Regulatory Affairs Committee, but it is unclear whether they will be taken up in the Fall. Advocates predict a rapid reduction in youth tobacco use if policies like those in the bill package were enacted.

# Michigan Momnibus bill

To commemorate Black Maternal Health Week, Senator Erika Geiss (D-Taylor), with colleagues Sens. Stephanie Chang (D-Detroit), Sarah Anthony (D-Lansing), Mary Cavanagh (D-Redford Twp.), and Sylvia Santana (D-Detroit) introduced a bill package to improve equity and accountability for those providing maternal healthcare services in Michigan. The “MI Momnibus” legislation, Senate Bills 818–827, is a multi-faceted approach to build on the existing community-driven programs, care solutions, improvements in prenatal care and maternal healthcare that amplifies the voices of Black birthing people, mothers, women, families, and stakeholders.

Included within the package of bills are:

- SB 818 (GEISS): Requires the Dept. of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to include studies and reports on biased or unjust perinatal care, including but not limited to instances of obstetric violence or racism on their website. The bill also codifies the use and duties of the Maternal Mortality Review Team.
- SB 819 (GEISS): Requires the Dept. of Civil Rights to receive reports utilizing the patient-reported experience measure scale to identify instances of obstetric violence or racism.
- SB 820 (CAVANAGH): Requires hospitals to provide the Dept. of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs information that they have a policy in place to support patient protection.
- SB 821 (CAVANAGH): Upon request from DHHS, the Dept. of Insurance and Financial Services will collect information on malpractice insurers’ policies related to perinatal care.
- SB 822 (ANTHONY): Ensures pregnancy status does not affect the right for a designated patient advocate to make life-sustaining treatment decisions.
- SB 823 (CHANG): Amends the Elliot-Larsen Civil Rights Act to make clear that “sex” includes but is not limited to pregnancy or lactation status.
- SB 824 (SANTANA): Establishes a non-punitive plan of safe care for an infant and parent if the infant is shown to be affected by alcohol or a controlled substance.
- SB 825 (ANTHONY): Adds licensed midwives to the state’s Essential Health Provider Repayment Program.
- SB 826 (CHANG): Creates a scholarship program for residents with low incomes working toward certification as a doula in the State of Michigan.
- SB 827 (SANTANA): Requires private insurers to reimburse licensed midwives for services.

“This package of bills is all about providing mothers with the healthcare and human decency they and their babies deserve during one of the most vulnerable yet special times in a woman’s life,” said Sen. Santana. “My legislation will guarantee mothers struggling with addiction or other forms of controlled substance use, and their infants, get the safe care they need to thrive without fear of punishment. This package will also require private insurers to reimburse licensed midwives for their services, better supporting these workers and the vital care they provide for Michigan mothers and their babies.”  
In April, these bills were referred to the Committee on Housing and Human Services, which received the summary of the introduced bills on June 18, 2024.



## New Civil Rights monument honors Detroit's voting activists

In September 2024, the City of Detroit held a dedication ceremony for a monument to activists who participated in demonstrations for – and in some cases died for – the cause of voting rights for all. The monument, located in Viola Liuzzo Playground in Detroit's West side, commemorates Dr. Liuzzo's life and mourns her murder by the Ku Klux Klan when she traveled to Alabama to join the Selma to Montgomery marches in 1965. It celebrates her friend Sarah Evans' pledge to take care of Liuzzo's five children as well. The bond of friendship between Liuzzo, who was white, and Evans, who was Black, made them "sisters in life... sisters in struggle," which is inscribed on the monument. It also lists many Detroiters and leading lights of the civil rights movement, including John Lewis, Hon. John Conyers Jr., Horace Sheffield Jr., and Rosa Parks. The monument notes that it is "dedicated to those who fought for the right to vote and to those who continue the fight."

"Let us all recommit to continuing on that legacy as a new generation of foot soldiers who are marching forward for democracy, teaching about the past and being clear-eyed about the present challenges and the work we must do to preserve that sacred promise of democracy for everyone," said Michigan Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson, who attended the ceremony. Henry Ford's Vice President for Community Health, Equity, Wellness and Diversity Dr. Kimberlydawn Wisdom was also present to pay tribute to Detroit's civil rights heroes, and spoke about HFH's five-year strategic Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice Strategic Plan, which includes a commitment to support voter access and participation at all levels of government.



*Michigan Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson and Dr. Kimberlydawn Wisdom with Viola Liuzzo's sister Rosemary at the ceremony.*



*Michigan Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson with Dr. Kimberlydawn Wisdom at the monument unveiling ceremony.*