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# Coalition Of Union, Business Leaders Show Support For Aggregate Bills

A new effort to get aggregate permitting legislation across the finish line has emerged through a bipartisan, three-bill package that has renewed backing from some union and business leaders.

The bills introduced on Wednesday in the House are sponsored by [Rep. Angela Witwer](#) (D-Delta Township), [Rep. Tyrone Carter](#) (D-Detroit) and [Rep. Pat Outman](#) (R-Six Lakes).

They represent a push to modify aggregate mining regulations in the state. Last session saw a dueling set of bills that aimed to do the same. The House and Senate versions of the previous bills were subject to a long debate before the House Local Government and Municipal Financing Committee but went nowhere.

The Senate bills, however, had been previously passed on the floor before ending up before the House committee. One would have placed oversight and permitting responsibilities in the hands of a state department while the other would maintain approvals and oversight by local communities as the law already mandates.

Local government groups were by and large opposed the bills previously and remain opposed to the most recent bills. Business groups and union leaders contended that the bills would provide fairness for industry to obtain valuable resources and provide needed materials to upgrade the state's road infrastructure.

That support was also there for the new package, two representatives of a coalition backing the new package said Wednesday in a news conference.

"Our future is at stake with this plan. Without expanded access to aggregates, we risk losing another generation of professional tradespeople because we cannot logistically and financially put them to work," said William Miller, political director of Operating Engineers 324. "Given the state of our infrastructure needs, this would be catastrophic to our future."

The same sentiment was shared by Doug Needham, executive director of the Michigan Aggregates Association.

"While Michigan is spending more tax dollars on roads than at any time in history, it's incumbent on state government to ensure every dollar possible is put directly into getting results for taxpayers," Mr. Needham said. "We fully support the aggregates supply chain reforms proposed by Representatives Witwer, Carter and Outman and will support them until they are passed into law."

The coalition is made up of 11 entities who see aggregate permitting reform as a way to catalyze infrastructure repairs and to boost the state's economy. It includes Michigan Teamsters, Michigan Laborers, Michigan Chamber of Commerce, Michigan Infrastructure and Transportation Association, Home Builders Association of Michigan, the Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce, Asphalt Pavement Association of Michigan, the Michigan Concrete Association, the Michigan Manufacturers Association.

Some of the advantages noted by the coalition include its belief that the move could save hundreds of millions of tax dollars and fix more roads by shifting the aggregate mining process out of what it described as "politically-charged local government situations" and into the hands of the Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy. The coalition stated that it should be handed like other mineral mining for oil, gas, copper, nickel and iron ore.

The plan, the coalition said, would also protect air, water, and surrounding environment by placing permitting authority in the state's environmental protection wheelhouse, maintaining all water and air regulations, while cutting exhaust emissions by as much as 313,000 tons of CO2 each year.

The coalition said that was the equivalent of taking 68,000 cars off the road yearly by reducing the distance of trucks hauling aggregates to job sites.

Other advantages eyed by the coalition include supports for jobs and a pipeline for trades, protections for local communities due to EGLE handling the permitting process and controls, and plans for the reclamation of exhausted mines into new sites for housing and recreational activities.

While the business and union groups continue to support the legislation, local governments are still opposed.

"This harmful legislation usurps local authority and allows a sand and gravel mine, crushing facility or storage facility to operate anywhere in a community – regardless of zoning," Judy Allen, Michigan Townships Association director of government relations, said in a statement. "Under the three-bill package, no local regulations could apply to operation issues that are inherently local in nature – including hours of operation, truck routes, noise, dust and fencing, or any other policy. Residents elect their local leaders to act on their behalf for the best interests of the community and the people they serve. This legislation eliminates that ability for local officials to balance the needs of all property owners."

– By Ben Solis

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