**MEA-Retired Tribune**

**June, 2022**

**What has gone on for way too long must stop**

On a late April day in 1999, the warm, sunny weather surely made the idea of skipping school an inviting one to a number of high school students at Traverse City West Senior High School. As I was enjoying a performance in my third hour public speaking class, one of the administrative assistants interrupted the speech over the PA system, asking students to go to their lockers and leave the building for the day, and for staff and any students with no way home to meet on the tennis courts. While I’m sure that many students were happy to leave school late in the morning and enjoy the sunshine that beautiful day, the reason for the early dismissal was disturbing to many as well.

Later that day, we learned that a bomb threat had been faxed to a Michigan State Police post downstate, with enough specifics to indicate that whoever sent the fax knew the floor plan of TC West and some of the staff who worked there. This occurred about a week after the deadly Columbine tragedy, so it was taken seriously. Although the several explosive-sniffing dogs and law enforcement officials who went through the building found nothing, the thought of the threat that day brings back memories of feeling frightened and violated.

Fast forward over 23 years. Countless mass shootings have occurred since then—in schools, shopping centers, places of worship and other public venues. Then last week, yet another teen legally purchased a deadly weapon. He used it to end the lives of 19 children and two educators at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas. The previous week, innocent victims in and around a Tops Friendly Market died after being gunned down by a teen in Buffalo, New York.

I don’t pretend to know the ins and outs of weapons laws. I do not own a gun. I have friends who hunt; I have friends who legally carry concealed weapons. When the Second Amendment to the Constitution was penned by our forefathers, AK-47’s didn’t exist.

I don’t need to rehash the details of what has been said countless times in the last week or so, and has been said every time a tragedy like this has occurred since before the last century ended.

Weapons laws. Background checks. Mental health. School safety. Social media lies. All of these issues, and more, must be addressed, and must be addressed NOW.

Politicians at the state and federal levels can—and MUST—work together immediately to reach common sense legislation and programming with the aim of ensuring that no community will have to endure such devastation again. Enough is more than enough.

**You can easily help us with a few minutes of your time**

As an MEA/NEA-Lifetime member, you recently received the latest issue of the *Michigan Retirement Report* in your “snail” mailbox. Included in that mailing was a flyer encouraging you to contribute to PAC. According to our administrative assistant Lisa Fox, over 200 of you have sent contributions and others have gone online and done the same in just the last couple of weeks. Thank you to those who have done so.

As part of our PAC outreach, we’ll be conducting a phone drive the week of June 6. Do you have a little time to spare to help the cause? If so, please contact our NEA PAC Captain Jeanne Hansen ASAP at jdhomes2001@yahoo.com to see how easily you can take a little time to help in this important effort, right from the comfort of your home. We’d really appreciate your time; thank you for volunteering!

**BREAKING NEWS - Let MI Kids Learn will not turn in signatures today** The two Let MI Kids Learn citizens initiative announced the campaign has enough petition signatures to push the issue before the Legislature, but will not be turning in the signatures by today's deadline.

Spokesperson Fred **WSZOLEK** said the Let MI Kids Learn petition campaign will continue collecting signatures beyond [June 1](https://r20.rs6.net/tn.jsp?f=001PcjnQ4UVkiSmfzgRaJurvqECywK1x8qeSs4EdwFjXzqHUD6hxg1y6WcaF3pVcN7AoDonsXn-OFATHqcL0z-Gm-54e9ntPzuSZEt6bDh1gkB36nl74AT8nMJVN5sjRl27vTmIoPgrjR0H50gYm_5H2vKl2fwBvPzeVIfFiCmCktQIC1RO0DDtYgcHc2vO10uOMXLNOi4NueUOhBNLstXa08TvLGQGidEINRMM5XGJ-1lnvXy8CH504EDwaBCOq1vFa686RexnLD-c8Vy4emG-UUjF33n_hvtcyxmgEGx9Kdxv5O3-XuxHzC0NU01Bwqcbhyi_u4g7KVw680r28SBsoDlXy6rlrw-P&c=go5xBRJ_Y2wI0VugowJf2HDoL-BHLrxrUo6QFRsWgbC0IQH95R5h8w==&ch=BlJ5hgotPs7KgEgD7W9-v8Ue8NMyfvQ-H32jg8X6nvG1KCLWGGpgFw==)because he said the date is only for people trying to get on the 2022 ballot, and the initiative would be passed by the Legislature.

Let MI Kids Learn, an initiative pushed by former U.S. Secretary Betsy **DeVOS**, is an initiative designed to allow people to donate money tax deductible for K-12 private school scholarships. The House and Senate passed legislation that would have created this program in law, but it was vetoed by the Governor.

If Let MI Kids Learn was concerned about the Legislature not giving final approval to their citizens initiative and wanted the November 2022 ballot as a backstop, it would have turned in signatures today. However, by blowing by today's deadline, it is gathering the numerous signatures with the intention of putting it before the Legislature with the backstop being the 2024 ballot.

The downside of this approach, however, is that when Let MI Kids Learn turns in the signatures, it will not be a high priority for the Bureau of Elections since the initiative is not pressing for the 2022 ballot.

“We’re interested in achieving transformational change to Michigan’s education system and putting the needs of students and families first.  We’re going to be patient in achieving our goals because the stakes for our children are so high,” he said.

He said the campaign is padding out their signatures to withstand any challenges against the campaign.

He also wasn’t worried about the signatures being canvassed by the Bureau of Elections and said the petitions could be looked at later this year after the constitutional amendment petitions.

He also said the campaign wasn’t a victim of the alleged fraudulent circulators that hit the five gubernatorial candidates.

“We were victims of winter. It was a really, long hard winter,” Wszolek said.

**Important update: BCBS Verification of Coverage Survey**

**The annual Blue Cross Blue Shield Verification of Coverage (VOC) survey will NOT be mailed to retirees in spring of 2022.**

The Michigan Office of Retirement Services (ORS) is currently working with our health insurance carriers to improve the process by which we obtain information about other health coverage you or your dependents might have in addition to your retirement system coverage. While our improvement efforts are in progress, the annual VOC process, administered by Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan on behalf of ORS, has been suspended. If you previously completed a VOC survey about other insurance plans for you and your dependent(s), you won’t be required to do so for 2022.

***You are not eligible for membership in the retirement system’s health and prescription drug plans if you enroll in another Medicare Advantage or Medicare Prescription Drug plan.***

***From ssa.gov:***

**Survivor benefits: Four tips you need to know**

Months before the first Social Security check was issued in 1940, lawmakers made changes to the planned benefits. Instead of the retired worker’s benefit ending when he died, his widow could collect a survivor benefit for her lifetime. Since then, the eligibility rules for survivors have improved. The age requirements are lower, surviving ex-spouses are eligible, including surviving spouses and partners of same-sex relationships.

One thing that hasn’t changed is that the surviving spouse is often unsure how to start claiming their survivor’s benefits. We have some information to assist you in applying for benefits as a surviving spouse.

If you are a widow (or your ex-spouse died), you may be eligible to receive benefits on your late spouse’s, or ex-spouse’s, Social Security record. How much you receive will depend on your age, the amount of benefits you may receive on your own record, and whether you have dependent children.

You may be entitled to receive a survivor’s benefit under the following circumstances:

* At age 50 if you have a disability.
* At age 60 (the benefit amount will be reduced).
* At any age if you have a child under your care who is under age 16 or who became disabled before age 22.
* If you were widowed and remarried after age 60.

If you’re entitled to retirement benefits – but haven’t applied yet – you have an option. You can decide to apply for either the retirement or survivors benefits first. You can switch to the other (higher) benefit later.

To help make this decision, it’s important to know your Full Retirement Age (FRA). Your FRA is when you can start receiving your full retirement benefit amount. For instance, if you were born between January 2, 1943 through January 1, 1955, your FRA is 66. If you start receiving benefits before your FRA, your benefits will be reduced, generally for as long as you continue to receive benefits.

There are many variables involved. [Contact Social Security](https://www.ssa.gov/agency/contact/) to discuss which benefit to take first – before applying for either benefit. You want to be sure you’re choosing the option that best fits your financial circumstances.

All the information you need is on the [Social Security website](https://www.ssa.gov/benefits/). You must apply for [survivors benefit](https://www.ssa.gov/benefits/survivors/)s over the phone or make an appointment to apply in person. You will also need to provide certain original documents.

Local Social Security offices are helping people in person with or without an appointment. This means staff will take applications in person and they will be available to help and answer any question you may have. I encourage you to call and schedule an appointment in advance to save time and so you have all the documents we need to help you in one visit. Please share this information with your friends and family – and post it on social media.