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SEIU Trying To Get MQCCC Into Constitution

A SEIU-bankrolled organization is beginning a drive to enshrine into the Constitution the controversial state umbrella organization over home help care workers in an attempt to save the group from potential Republican-led legislation.

The Citizens for Affordable Quality Home Care is seeking clearance Monday from the Board of State Canvassers to begin circulating petitions to enshrine into the state Constitution the Michigan Quality Home Care Council, a group that already exists through an inter-local agreement as the Michigan Quality Community Care Council (MQCCC).

The umbrella group is designed to give the elderly and disabled (and their families) a registry of potential home health workers from which to choose. It also provides workers with training, networking groups and career openings.

In Lansing, the MQCCC has been a punching bag for the free-market Mackinac Center for Public Policy and the conservative Republicans because it has been used as a tool to organize between 40,000 and 50,000 home health workers by making the claim that they are all state employees.

Rep. Paul OPSOMMER (R-DeWitt) has seen his bill, HB 4003, pass out of the House last year and out of a Senate committee in December. The bill is sitting on the Senate calendar, but it doesn't have the full support of Senate Majority Leader Randy RICHARDVILLE (R-Monroe) and isn't on the fast track to go anywhere.

But MIRS has learned that organized labor is nervous. There is a strong belief Gov. Rick SNYDER would sign the bill if it makes it to his desk and there does appear to be the votes in the Senate to pass it.

Earlier this week, Sen. Dave HILDENBRAND (R-Lowell) introduced SB 1018, which is very similar to HB 4003 in that more strictly defines what a public employee is and what it is not. Both bills make it clear that those under the MQCCC umbrella are not employees.

The Hildenbrand bill has 22 co-sponsors, with Richardville, Sen. Roger KAHN (R-Saginaw), Sen. Tory ROCCA (R-Sterling Heights) and Sen. Mike NOFS (R-Battle Creek) being the only Senate Republicans to take a pass at sponsorship.

"The only thing preventing this bill from being law right now is Richardville, and what happens when he's gone?" one source told MIRS.

Richardville spokeswoman Amber McCANN said the majority leader finds SEIU's ballot initiative "overall to be unfortunate.

"Several people in the caucus would like to see action on MQCCC," she said. "We took steps in the last budget cycle to defund the MQCCC. We thought that would end its ability to function. We also have members who think the functions of the MQCCC are valuable.

"The majority leader believes the best way to resolve this is through discussion and dialogue rather than coming out guns blazing with a petition drive. I'm not sure that will help SEIU's cause."

SEIU Healthcare Michigan, led by President Marge FAVILLE, and its government affairs director, Bob ALLISION, are behind the effort to lock a MQCCC successor into the Constitution that would guarantee the employed had a right to collectively bargain.

However, the employees would not be considered state or public employees for any other purpose or entitled to any other legal benefit. They would not have the right to strike.

But Dohn HOYLE of ARC Michigan said the real reason behind the ballot proposal is to make permanent a critical service for the state's seniors and disabled who want qualified and trained workers to assist them with everyday living so they can stay in their homes and not go into assisted living.

The MQCCC still exists in Michigan but not without the roughly \$1 million in state funding it was receiving during Gov. Jennifer GRANHOLM's tenure. A fully funded MQCCC saves the state millions in Medicaid funds by keeping folks out of expensive nursing homes, he said.

It's a message that seems to be lost to certain state legislators despite their best efforts, Hoyle said, which is why they're going directly to the people.

"This is not a union issue," he said. "This is about our aging population and those with disabilities being able to find and choose a provider to support and care for them, someone who has had a background check or if comfortable taking care of pets if need be or can speak a second language if need be."

The benefits of a MQCCC is the main reason it's still around, sources tell MIRS, as opposed to a similar inter-governmental agreement involving day care workers that was almost immediately disbanded when Snyder took office.

But its unionization benefits are what has made it a lightning rod for criticism by the Mackinac Center. Attorney Patrick WRIGHT called the ballot proposal a "Hail Mary pass" by the SEIU to keep the \$6 million in annual union dues he says the labor union is getting off home help workers.

"They recognize that there's movement for a legislative end to this and they have the money to spend," Wright said.

As a non-profit, the Mackinac Center can not get involved in a public campaign against the proposal should it get on the ballot, but Wright said his hope is that the public is well aware of the issue and not much of an anti-campaign will be needed. The Center's publication, Capitol Confidential, has done a lengthy series of articles on the issue.

"We'll monitor the situation as we get closer to the date to decide whether something needs to be done," Wright said.