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## Gov. Whitmer Is Standing In the Way of Health Professionals

By Jarrett Skorup

### Summary

Government rules in Michigan make it more difficult for the state to have the number of nurses it needs.

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Michigan hospitals say they have a shortage of nurses, which is making it harder to fight COVID-19. Unfortunately, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer has made it harder for nurses to get employed and do work they are qualified for.

The Henry Ford Health System says the number of job applicants has dropped at a time it has an increased need for new employees, including nurses. This has forced officials at the hospital system to trim 120 beds, since they can't find the staff. Nationally, the demand for intensive care nurses has nearly tripled.

Henry Ford President and CEO Wright Lassiter III recently said his organization will go overseas, primarily to the Philippines, to find nurses. At the same time, the Michigan Health and Hospital Association is asking state lawmakers to ease licensing requirements to make it easier to find new workers.

That would be a much-needed change, and lawmakers should take up the association's proposal. Unfortunately, they've already tried, but Whitmer has rolled back her earlier actions to ease licensing restrictions and vetoed a bill that would make it easier for U.S. workers to come to Michigan.

Early in the pandemic, the governor loosened medical scope-of-practice rules, which allowed Michigan nurses to do more. She said that doing so "saved countless lives" – but then promptly reinstated them.

The governor's own health adviser, Deena Kelly Costa from the University of Michigan, noted that Michigan has some of the nation's most restrictive scope-of-practice rules for advanced practice nurses. Costa has said the state should permanently repeal these regulations, but current rules are a roadblock to nurses who wish to move to and work in Michigan. The governor should get behind the effort to repeal these unnecessary regulations for good, as other states have done.

In 2020, Michigan lawmakers passed a bill that would have placed us in an interstate nursing compact with 38 other states. This bill would have encouraged nurses from most other states to move here and almost immediately begin working. It would also allow Michigan nurses to provide medical services by traveling elsewhere, or through telemedicine. Given



Michigan needs more nurses.

that medicine is uniform from one state to another, these reforms would seem to be common sense.

But at the end of the year, Whitmer vetoed the bill.

Eliminating these restrictions would allow qualified medical professionals to work more easily, stop people from having to move and find work outside Michigan and provide our patients with greater access to hospital beds and care. Michigan lawmakers should reform the licensing and scope-of-practice rules on medical workers for the benefit of everyone.

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