



## Michigan Report

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### **MUNICIPAL LEAGUE SEEKS CHANGES TO ARBITRATION**

With many local governments feeling the economic squeeze, now is the time to make long sought-after changes to how police officers and firefighters bargain for their pay and benefits, proponents of change said at a press conference held Tuesday by the Michigan Municipal League.

[HB 5325](#) would amend PA 312 to clarify that arbitrators must look at a city's ability to pay and compare the city's other employees to police and fire officials when deciding if salary and other requests are fair.

Almost since the act's inception, municipalities have been seeking to alter the law, but supporters said the tide has finally turned in their favor because of the economic downturn that has crippled many communities.

Dan Gilmartin, Municipal League executive director, said that many lawmakers have said that since they can't increase revenue for local governments, they want to help in other ways. He added that if the public understands that the bill would help keep or add more law enforcement officers and firefighters, they would support the legislation after seeing so many layoffs in their hometowns.

The Small Business Association of Michigan released a statement saying while it understands why groups would try to alter PA 312, it prefers repealing it altogether.

John Buczek, executive director of the Michigan Fraternal Order of Police, said if that happened, police and firefighters would have to be allowed to strike as an alternative to binding arbitration, something he doesn't think would go over well when the public needs emergency services.

He said those behind the legislation are purposely distorting its intention so they can pass a bill that would benefit municipalities.

He said they are also mistaken that the current law doesn't order the arbitrator to look at a city's ability to pay.

Mr. Buczek said currently the union and the city both present evidence of the city's ability to pay and the arbitrator decides which is more convincing.

He said if the bill were to pass it would result in unfair, lower wages for police officers and firefighters because it puts more emphasis than the current law does on comparing wages to other public employees in jobs that are not similar.

As for the municipalities the Municipal League says arbitration has nearly bankrupted, "They make those statements but they can present no evidence, not one example," Mr. Buczek said.

Both Mr. Buczek and MML officials agreed that the number of arbitrations has been falling each year, but Mr. Buczek took it as evidence that the system "isn't to blame" for municipalities' dire straights; it's more a matter of revenue sharing and other revenue streams that have dried up, he said.

Despite the optimism in the press conference that the current legislation will meet a different fate than prior attempts, it was introduced and referred to the House Labor Committee in September and has yet to get a hearing.

A call to Labor Committee Chair [Rep. Steven Lindberg](#) (D-Marquette) to ask whether he would support the bill was not returned.

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