

Michigan Chamber Says 2007 'Judicial Hellholes' Report on Legal Reform is a 'Winter Storm Warning' for State Lawmakers

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The Michigan Chamber of Commerce today issued the following response to the American Tort Reform Foundation's (ATRF) annual release of its "Judicial Hellholes" report in which the Michigan Legislature received a "dishonorable mention" for an effort by the State House to expand litigation opportunities for personal injury lawyers.

"Earlier this year, House Democrats -- with support from Governor Granholm -- passed a package of bills to retroactively repeal one of Michigan's product liability reform laws and make it easier to file lawsuits under Michigan's no-fault auto insurance law," said Wendy Block, Director of Health Policy and Human Resources for the Michigan Chamber. "We agree with ATRF that the State House deserves dishonorable mention.

"The good news is that, to date, the Michigan Senate has wisely refused to consider this costly and counterproductive legislation," Block added. "Unfortunately, it now appears that Michigan's historically reasonable and balanced legal environment may be on the verge of serious backsliding in 2008."

"Michigan's legal environment is a key factor in determining our state's business climate," said Rich Studley, Executive Vice President of the Michigan Chamber. "This 2007 report is like a winter storm warning for state lawmakers. Reversing Michigan's legal reform laws would have a chilling effect on economic development efforts for years to come."

"With Michigan's economy continuing to struggle, it is a bad idea and exactly the wrong time for lawmakers to send a message to job providers that Michigan is a place where entrepreneurial trial lawyers are viewed as a growth industry," Studley added.

"We urge the Michigan Senate to reject the personal injury bar's aggressive efforts to expand liability and craft new opportunities for litigation," said Bob LaBrant, the Michigan Chamber's General Counsel and Senior Vice President of Political Affairs.

In all, the ATRF report names six states and jurisdictions "judicial hellholes," puts six states and jurisdictions on their "watch list" and gives five jurisdictions, Supreme Courts and legislatures -- including the Michigan Legislature -- a "dishonorable mention." According to ATRF, the "dishonorable mention" category is intended to recognize particularly abusive legal practices, unsound court decisions, or legislative actions that damage the fairness of a state's civil justice system. The complete report may be viewed at www.atra.org.

The Michigan Chamber is a statewide business organization which represents more than 7,100 employers, trade associations and local chambers of commerce. The Michigan Chamber was established in 1959 to be an advocate for Michigan's job providers in the legislative, political and legal process.

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