

Negligence Law Section

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“Budget Squabbles in Lansing Portend a Long Summer”

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In Michigan, referring to the “Big Three” has traditionally meant the major automakers located in the state. For the purposes of this column, however, the Big Three refer to Governor Whitmer, Speaker of the House Matt Hall, and Senate Majority Leader Winnie Brinks. We are six months into the 2025-6 legislative season, and so far, common ground has been hard to find.

Normally at this time in a legislative session, dozens of bills would have already been passed through both chambers and signed into law. So far this year, only six new public acts have been created. Suffice to say, the bipartisan relationship between the Republican-led House and the Democratically-led Senate has gotten off to a rocky start.

Normally in a split power situation, the Governor will act as an extra partner to whichever chamber is led by the same party. This year, however, the situation is a little more complicated. For example, Governor Whitmer and Speaker Matt Hall have made it clear that they share the same top goal of providing an additional \$3 billion for road and transportation funding. Senate Majority Leader Brinks, while expressing support for the concept of additional transportation funding, has yet to offer the Senate proposal to do so.

To make things even more complicated, the House plan for road funding is significantly different than Governor Whitmer’s proposal. The debate over this issue, and how it would impact the entire state budget, has slowed down activity on just about every other piece of legislation.

It has slowed things so much, in fact, that, for the first time in years, the legislature failed to agree on a budget to fund state operations and public schools before their arbitrary July 1 deadline. Budget talks are continuing over the summer, but so far there seems to be more finger-pointing than negotiating. If they fail to reach agreement by September 30, there is a chance that the government could shut down, which would have wide reaching consequences.

So what does this mean for legislation related directly to negligence law? Frankly, it means that there is a little likelihood of any major changes moving through the legislature this session. Even

bills which are bipartisan in nature, such as legislation to make it easier for lawyers to do remote witnessing and notarization, is getting bogged down in bipartisan fights. The insider joke in Lansing these days is that, in this climate, the legislature would have difficulty passing a bill to rename the highway, let alone something more substantive.

For those who are happy with the status quo, this is good news because there is a little chance the legislative needle will move one way or the other for the next year and a half. However, for those hoping for changes in state law, avenues such as litigation or court rules may bear more fruit for the time being.

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