Michigan Association of Fairs & Exhibitions

PO Box 127
Munger MI 48747-0127

989.450.5942
Fax: 989.659.2911
E-mail: **mifairs@yahoo.com**

www.michiganfairs.org

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To: Members of the Senate Economic Development Committee

Re: HB 4727 – Labor; youth employment; waiver of work permit for minor performing work as unpaid volunteer for an agricultural Fair or exhibition; provide for.

Good morning and Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to address the Committee.

My name is EJ Brown, Executive Director of the Michigan Association of Fairs and Exhibitions.

The Michigan Association of Fairs & Exhibitions (M.A.F.E.) is the statewide association that was organized in 1885 and represents our 87 local & county fairs. This includes the 15 fairs in 2011 that will have harness racing.

In addition our Associate members (approximately 241) consist of all the carnival ride companies that are licensed to operate in Michigan, along with food concessionaires, midway games, acts, attractions & grandstand entertainers, rodeos, demolition derbies, livestock groups, ribbons, trophies, special event insurance companies, and many other groups that help make the Fair industry in Michigan such a family entertainment event.

Our county fairs & fairground facilities in Michigan and the M.A.F.E. promote:

1. Youth development
2. Help educate the public of the importance of agriculture to the economy of Michigan
3. Help promote agriculture and the development of agriculture
4. Contribute to tourism and especially ag-tourism throughout the state (fairs are the original ag-tourism concept)
5. Economic impact of fairground facilities in our communities for not only the Fair but being available to host so many other activities at the fairgrounds

    - Attendance for 2009 was 4,742,820
    - Volunteers donated over 532,253 hours
    - Over 79,500 exhibitors
    - Youth exhibitors for 2009 was 47,376
    - Open class participants were 31,782
    - Livestock sales amounted to $12,213,865.00.
      Most of which is used by our youth to advance their education in agriculture.

Fair people are unique. For the most part they are volunteers. While a few are able to afford full time managers, most are staffed by unpaid volunteers. Fair people love what they do – putting on the fair.

Many of our youth involved in our fairs, I might say just about all of them, volunteer their time not just during the fair but contribute many hours year round to help maintain the fairground facilities.

This may consist of raking leaves and grass; cleaning stalls; painting and minor repairs to barn stalls and buildings; picking-up litter; planting flowers and trees, including landscaping; helping direct traffic for parking and many other assorted chores.

Under Act 221 of 2010 Sec. 4.3.b – "A minor who is performing work as an unpaid volunteer for an organization that is recognized as tax-exempt under, or whose purposes , structure, or activities are exclusively those that are described in, section 501c3 of the internal revenue code, 26 USC 501c3."

HB 4727 would extend similar exemptions for minors (youth) whose is performing work as an unpaid volunteer for a Fair or exhibition operated and managed under 1929 PA 11, MCL 46.151 to 46.153, or held by an agricultural or horticultural society under 1855 PA 80, MCL 453.231 to 453.240.

Michigan currently has 87 recognized fairs/horticultural societies under these two Acts (11 & 80). These two acts can be found under the Horse Racing Law of 1995.

Under Act 11, there are 7: Ingham, Jackson, Emmet-Charlevoix, Alcona, Cheboygan, Dickinson and Gogebic.

The other 80 fairs, 14 are organized as 501c3 as recognized by the IRS.

The remaining 66 fairs are organized as 501c5 Horticultural and Horticultural Societies as recognized by the IRS; with an emphasis of educational or instructive purposes. These fairs usually use a dba. As an example – Clare County Agricultural Society, dba. as the Clare County Fair.

Youth are involved at our local/county fairs year round. For the past few weeks and weekends there have been groups of untold numbers prepping the facilities and grounds for the many livestock exhibitions and training events that take place weekly at the fairgrounds. Youth, whether from 4-H, FFA, various open class groups, are the biggest portion of handling these activities. The youth take ownership of their surroundings and are proud to have the public walk through the faculties and see what can be accomplished by our young people.

The work permits as mentioned in Act 221 of 2010 are only good for 10 day time limits and need to be acquired from their respective school districts. The MAFE would encourage the members of the House Commerce Committee to allow our youth to be able to volunteer their time when needed and time permits for them to help at the local/ county fairgrounds.

Local & county fairs are the original Ag-tourism concept. In 2011 we will be celebrating 200 years of the American Fair in the United States. The Michigan Association of Fairs & Exhibitions this past January 2011 celebrated our 126th Annual Convention in Grand Rapids. The Hillsdale County Fair has a mural painted on a wall in their Woman's Congress Building depicting a locomotive pulling into the railroad station in 1851 that brought over 30,000 visitors by rail that year to visit the Hillsdale County Fair; a long tradition of folks wanting to understand the importance of agriculture and where their food products came from even in those days.

Your local fairs are the least expensive family oriented entertainment venues in the state. Families get to spend quality time together and grow; whether they are exhibiting or just spectators. Fairs help teach responsibility and good sportsmanship to our participants, especially our youth. Studies have shown that youth who are regularly engaged in quality extra-curricular activity are less apt to have problems with the law or drug abuse, and kids of all ages build memories by attending our local fairs.

Conclusion

Youth, families, farming, education and recreation are what agricultural fairs are all about. Fair experiences are especially important among the young people who will soon be making decisions as to the use and conservation of our land and our water.

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee and your support.

I will be glad to entertain any questions at this time.

Every Day is a Fair Day in Michigan!

EJ Brown
Executive Director
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E-mail: mifairs@yahoo.com