



Volume 143, Issue 03
Serving EMU and Ypsilanti since 1881

Tuesday, November 18, 2025
easternecho.com

EMU set to repurchase parking, students hopeful



Fencing surrounds Eastern Michigan University's parking structure, located near the Student Center on Jan. 24. The university is set to repurchase the parking system from LAZ Parking on Jan. 30. *Gray Connor / The Eastern Echo*

AnnaBelle Favre
News Reporter

On Jan. 30, Eastern Michigan University's Department of Public Safety will take over all parking operations at EMU, formerly run by

LAZ Parking.

Matthew Lige, the police chief at Eastern, will be in charge of the new "Eagle Parking" system. Lige hopes to enact positive changes in the parking system on campus.

"I have been chief here for almost

five years, and there is this recurring frustration about parking ... The way I see it, students are upset about three things: rates, enforcement and the parking structure," Lige said. "I am concerned about those things too, and we are trying to make things more

appropriate for campus."

On Oct. 23, 2025, the EMU Board of Regents approved a plan for the university to repurchase the parking system. In 2018, EMU entered a 35-year agreement with finance company Preston Hollow Capital. The agreement allocated rights to Provident Group-EMU Properties, with LAZ Parking managing enforcement. Provident Group and EMU have been in multi-year litigation over the 2022 closure of the parking garage on campus, with a dispute over the expected cost of repairs of the garage.

Students living on campus, commuters and staff members alike have been continuously frustrated with the prices of their semester parking passes.

Each semester, LAZ Parking has increased parking fees for students by \$6. Alberto Derieux, a commuter student, expressed discontent with price increases.

"They increase the price of the parking pass over the summer, when nobody is here, so between school years, the price increases \$12," Derieux said. "They're increasing the price of parking but not increasing the

availability of parking."

The prices for parking in the current winter 2026 semester are as follows:

- Commuter: \$223
- Residence Hall: \$223
- 601 Apartments: \$223
- Cornell Apartments: \$151
- Westview Apartments: \$151

When asked his thoughts and hopes about the university repurchasing parking, commuter Mason Vasques responded, "I hope they make it cheaper, because my tuition already is going up and I don't want parking to [increase] as well."

Derieux was hopeful that the university's repurchase of the system would help ease some of the concerns students have.

"I feel good about it now that the university has control over it," Derieux said. "My hope is in the future that they will have more student-friendly pricing and use all available parking to the best of their ability."

Lige explained to *The Eastern Echo* that while he doesn't have an answer to those wishing for prices to decrease, he is hoping to make that possible.

SEE PARKING, PAGE 3

Michigan state, local officials work to limit immigration enforcement agents

Lilly Kujawski
Managing Editor - News

As communities across the country push back on federal immigration policies, some Ypsilanti, Washtenaw County and Michigan officials are passing resolutions and introducing proposals to limit the power and presence of immigration officers in the area.

Ypsilanti Council supports Michigan Senate bill

At their Jan. 20 meeting, Ypsilanti City Council members passed a resolution supporting proposed Michigan Senate Bill 510, which would require law enforcement officials to be unmasked when carrying out official duties and interacting with members of the public.

The bill, introduced in August by state Sens. Stephanie Chang (D-District 3), Mary Cavanagh (D-District 6) and Jeremy Moss (D-District 7), would amend the Michigan Penal Code to prohibit face coverings worn by officers in certain circumstances.

The proposed change would require that "a law enforcement officer, while interacting with a member of the public in the performance of the law enforcement officer's duties, shall wear an appropriate uniform and shall not wear a mask or personal disguise."

Ypsilanti City Council members Desirae Simmons, Ward 3, and Me'chelle King, Ward 1, introduced the resolution. There has been Immigration and Customs Enforcement presence in Ypsilanti, and it is important for the city to respond, Simmons told *The Eastern Echo*.

"I've had people reaching out to me about neighbors being gone missing, cars being left," she said.

Michigan Senate bills

Senate Bill 510 is one of three bills introduced by Chang, Cavanagh and Moss to curtail what they described in a statement as dangerous immigration enforcement tactics used by ICE and U.S.

Customs and Border Patrol.

"Unethical, terrorizing immigration enforcement tactics have been increasing across the nation under the second Trump administration," the statement said, which pointed to the killing of Renee Nicole Good, a 37-year-old U.S. citizen who was shot by an ICE agent in Minneapolis on Jan. 7.

Democratic state Sen. Jeff Irwin, who represents Ypsilanti in District 15, is a supporter of these bills, he said.

"What (these bills) seek to do is they seek to rein in some of the worst abuses we're seeing from ICE right now," Irwin said to *The Echo*.

Immigration agents should operate how other law enforcement activities have traditionally functioned in the U.S., Irwin said, with anonymity reserved for undercover operations and other narrow, reasonable circumstances.

"When you're talking about officers who are operating out in the community, it's important that people be able to know who they are for a couple reasons. One is that when people's rights are violated, when people are experiencing violence at the hands of police authorities, whether it's federal or local, there has to be some way to hold those people accountable," Irwin said. "I am just appalled that the vice president has even said publicly that there is no accountability for these officers; they have complete immunity. That is a recipe for disaster, it is a recipe for violence, and it is a recipe for the kind of killings that we have seen on the streets in places like Minneapolis."

When law enforcement officers are not properly identified as such, it can put members of the public, as well as the officers, in danger, Irwin said.

"They're pulling people over in vehicles that are not marked, and they are not identifiable. How do those people know that these are ICE agents and not just random criminals who are using this chaos and violence in our streets as a smokescreen for violence?" he said.

Senate Bill 508 would enact a new law to prohibit law enforcement officers from

conducting an immigration enforcement action in a sensitive location, except with a court-ordered warrant or to address an imminent threat to public safety. Sensitive locations include schools, places of worship, hospitals, courthouses and other similar spaces.

Irwin said current immigration enforcement tactics have put citizens and noncitizens alike at risk.

"What we're talking about are just these sweeps without judicial warrants making it hard for people to go to court or go to school, and even driving citizens who might have the valid paperwork but might have an accent or who are not acceptably white enough for the ICE officers; these folks are also scared of being accosted ... or maybe even detained, just when they go to court or go to a healthcare facility or go to church. So, I think that's wrong, and so that's why we have put this legislation together to try to protect people in those spaces," he added.

Senate Bill 509 would bar government entities from disclosing information that will be used for immigration enforcement in certain circumstances, unless obligated to by a court-ordered federal or Michigan warrant.

Irwin said he anticipates the bills will move through the Democratic-majority Senate to the House of Representatives eventually, but he expects resistance to the bills from Michigan Republicans, who control the House.

"I think it is going to be challenging for these bills to make it all the way through the process and to the governor's desk because the Republicans in Michigan have basically said that they agree with Trump's desire to make America unfriendly to immigrants," Irwin said. "In the past, we used to have, I thought, a bipartisan agreement that immigration is making our state stronger and we want to bring talented, hardworking people from all over the world that could be a part of our communities. They have turned their back on that, and it has been really sad to watch."

"I think the governor has more tools,



A duo of protesters hold signs in Riverside Park before Ypsilanti's No Kings protest on Saturday, Oct. 18, 2025. A sign states "Abolish ICE", protesting current immigration enforcement tactics. *Max Taylor / The Eastern Echo*

from in Ypsilanti ... it's happening a lot in Ypsilanti," Somerville said.

The resolution opposed ICE's use of face coverings to conceal identity during civil immigration enforcement activities, except in circumstances where face coverings are required for verified public health or safety reasons. The resolution also instructed county employees, contractors and agents against voluntarily assisting ICE officers in Washtenaw County buildings and property, unless required by law.

"I think this resolution is great, but I am also thinking ... how can we use all of our networks to provide care and support for people right now who are afraid to leave their homes in our community, especially after seeing some of the live footage from other areas of the country?" Somerville said.

In the resolution, the Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners encouraged cities, townships, villages, school districts and other governing entities in and outside of Washtenaw County to adopt similar policies and resolutions.

Ypsilanti City Council Member Simmons said to *The Echo* that she would like to see a ban of ICE agents from Ypsilanti municipal spaces, which will take more time to work out within the law.

The Eastern Echo

The Eastern Echo serves the Eastern Michigan University and Ypsilanti communities as an independent student-operated newspaper. Founded in 1881 as *The Normal News*, *The Eastern Echo* distributes weekly print editions on campus and throughout the surrounding Ypsilanti community during the fall and winter academic semesters. *The Eastern Echo* also publishes online year-round. Published content is subject to copyright and may not be reproduced without prior written consent of the newspaper.

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THE ECHO MISSION

The Eastern Echo informs the Eastern Michigan University and Ypsilanti communities by highlighting newsworthy content in a fair, accurate and timely manner.

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Winter 2026
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CORRECTIONS

On page 1 of the Jan. 20, 2026 issue of *The Echo*, AnnaBelle Favre was listed as managing editor. Favre is a news reporter at *The Echo*.

On page 1 of the Jan. 20, 2026 issue of *The Echo*, the word hydramatic was misspelled.

On page 5 of the Jan. 20, 2026 issue of *The Echo*, the name of Bradan Copeland, *Echo* photographer, was misspelled.

Cellar Roots,
EMU's Fine Arts
and Literary
Magazine:

**CALENDAR**

**JAN
27**

Learn to Lift

6-7 p.m.

Rec/IM Building — Room 127

**JAN
28**

**Women's Resource Center's
Sexapalooza**

4-7 p.m.

Student Center — Ballroom

**JAN
29**

**EMU Gymnastics meet:
Eagles v. Wilberforce**

Starts at 6 p.m.

George Gervin GameAbove Center

**JAN
30**

Queer Talks 2026

12-5 p.m.

EMU Honors College

**JAN
31**

**EMU women's hockey:
Eagles v. UM-Dearborn**

Starts at 8:35 p.m.

Arctic Edge Ice Arena — 46615 Michigan Ave., Canton, MI

**FEB
1**

JCPenney Suit Up

3-6 p.m.

Briarwood Mall — JCPenney, South Entrance

**FEB
2**

Indoor Flag Football

9-11 p.m.

Indoor Practice Facility — Fields 1 & 2

**Where to find
The Echo:****Off Campus:**

- Cafe Liv, 202 N. Washington St.
- Chef Restaurant Mediterranean Grill, 1098 N. Huron River Drive
- Cottage Inn, 2407 Washtenaw Ave.

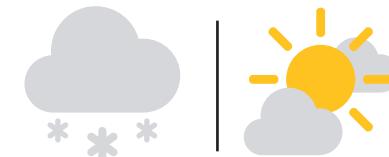
On Campus:

- Mark Jefferson Science Complex
- Marshall Building
- McKenny Hall

Where to find our links:**WEATHER FORECAST**

Tuesday, Jan. 27

High: 19 | Low: -2
Mostly cloudy* / Partly cloudy



Wednesday, Jan. 28

High: 15 | Low: -4
Mostly cloudy* / Mostly cloudy



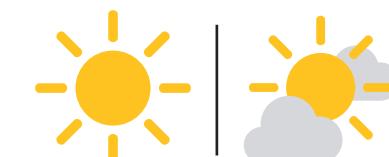
Thursday, Jan. 29

High: 14 | Low: -5
Mostly sunny / Partly cloudy



Friday, Jan. 30

High: 15 | Low: 1
Mostly sunny / Partly cloudy



Saturday, Jan. 31

High: 18 | Low: N/A
Mostly sunny / N/A



*Chance of precipitation



Source:
The National Weather Service



Instagram @easternechoofficial



TikTok @theeasternecho



Facebook @ The Eastern Echo

Ypsi residents condemn barricade incident



Members of the public showed up to the Jan. 20 Ypsilanti City Council meeting with signs in support of the 53-year-old man who barricaded himself inside a West Cross Street residence. *Natalie Kyle / The Eastern Echo*

Lilly Kujawski

Managing Editor - News

Public commenters at the Jan. 20 Ypsilanti City Council meeting spoke out against the police response to an incident in which a man barricaded himself inside a West Cross Street residence. Officials say the man was experiencing a mental health crisis.

Public participation filled the 45 minutes allotted for comment at the meeting, which was held in Eastern Michigan University's Student Center Ballroom instead of City Hall. The meeting was moved to EMU to accommodate the expected increased capacity, Mayor Nicole Brown said.

Originally slated as a resolution for council members to vote on, the council moved to change an agenda item about the incident to a discussion item.

Ward 3 resident and public commenter Lillian Blair urged council members to vote on the resolution tonight, voicing their support for the resolution.

On Jan. 4, police officers, including Washtenaw County Crisis Negotiators and Washtenaw Metro SWAT, responded to a man who barricaded himself inside a residence on West Cross Street, stated a Jan. 5 post from the Washtenaw County Sheriff's Office. Police said when they first responded, the man, 53, had a sword and confronted officers. The man then barricaded himself in the house. The incident was ongoing for over 30 hours.

"After over 30-hours of crisis negotiation, the armed 53-year-old man who had barricaded himself in the upper levels of a house in the City of Ypsilanti has been safely taken into custody," the Jan. 5 post from the Washtenaw County Sheriff's Office stated. "This matter remains an on-going investigation. We are unable to comment further at this time."

Mayor Brown addressed the incident before public comment began.

"I know the situation was frightening; it was disruptive and harmful to Ruben, the person directly involved," Brown said. "When something like this happens,

it affects more than the immediate people in the area. It shakes our sense of safety, trust and confidence in the systems meant to protect us. So, since this incident, I've been in direct communication with our police department's leadership, the sheriff's office and other responding agencies to better understand the decisions that were made and the sequence of the events."

Ypsilanti residents filled the meeting room, some raising signs of support for Ruben, the man who barricaded himself. Many commenters criticized tactics used during the incident.

"Recently, my tuition dollars were used to assist in the torture of a 53-year-old man named Ruben," said Colton Ray, a public commenter at the council meeting. Ray is a graduate student at Eastern Michigan University. "Both EMU police and Livingston County police forces, among others, partook in the siege."

Resident Greg Woodring, who lives six doors down from the house the incident occurred, called the police response to the barricade a militarized descent into a police state at the city council meeting.

"It may not be the same, but it certainly rhymes with what we are seeing across the country," Woodring said.

In a previous interview with *The Eastern Echo*, Woodring recounted the events of the barricade incident, which he witnessed as a bystander. During the barricade incident, police used tear gas, flash bangs and a long-range acoustic device, a specialized sound weapon used to produce sound at a high pitch, Woodring said.

Police also used a rook, a modified vehicle used by SWAT forces and police, to allow officers to shoot water from a fire hose into the house where the individual was located, Woodring said.

Dale Milliman, a public commenter who lives two doors down from the residence where the incident occurred, spoke of the impact of the two-day event.

"I was one of the people who was not allowed to go back in my house," Milliman said. "I had to miss work one

the winter 2026 semester.

"The rate of pay for these student employees will be higher than most other student employees, because I want to have the right students on the job ... We need engaged students who want to promote parking without only being focused on enforcement," Lige said.

"Enforcement is certainly a part of the job, but it's only one part of many. We want them to be ambassadors for Eagle Parking around campus and ambassadors for public safety."

Primarily among students who commute to campus, the availability of places to park during peak hours has become an issue.

"I resent the current state of parking, because today I got to school 15 minutes before class, and I still ended up late for class because of parking," Deric said. "There's a lot behind the parking structure, and if you get there at (9 a.m.) or after, you don't have a place to park, because it fills up so quickly before 9:30 classes."

Many students experience issues with parking that interfere with their class schedules, even when allowing extra time to park.

Mason Vazquez, a junior studying physical therapy, typically parks in the Science-Complex lot, behind Mark-Jefferson. Like many students, he has never seen the parking garage on campus in use after its closure.

"That parking garage has been empty for years," Vazquez said. "I've seen two people skateboarding there, and that's it." He said that if the parking structure was open, he would choose to

day."

Milliman said he had previous interactions with Ruben and spoke against the tactics used by police, calling what happened to Ruben ridiculous and unnecessary.

"I'm standing behind Ruben," he added. "I'm just hoping that it doesn't fall onto deaf ears."

Several commenters urged that charges against Ruben be dropped and demanded accountability from the law enforcement agencies involved.

"If there's no consequences, if there's no accountability, then they will get the message that they can get away with it," one commenter said.

Other commenters recounted their own experiences during the response, claiming they were tackled by police officers while observing the incident. Video recorded by Woodring and reviewed by *The Echo* showed a physical altercation between police officers and onlookers, with some onlookers pushed to the ground and detained by police.

During council discussion of the incident, council members voiced support for Ruben, the barricaded man.

"I don't think anybody on this body thinks that that was handled in the correct way, and we are committed to figure out where that went wrong and how we can make this not happen again," Mayor Pro-Tem Steven Wilcoxen said. "In the context of our country at this time — this is just another example. I see the direct line between the escalation of the last year and how this became an acceptable outcome to the people that were making this decision."

Council Member Amber Fellows raised concerns of the normalization of systemic police violence, saying situations like this are too common to simply reform.

"We are at an inflection point, really, a reckoning," Fellows said. "We're either going to continue to barrel down the path of 50 years of police state militarization, and add to the barbarism, an absolute cruelty that is accelerating nationally; or, we are going to finally take the steps towards humanity, and embrace the harsh truth that the status quo is not working."

Council members chose not to vote on the resolution at this meeting, with some members saying they did not have enough information to vote yet. The resolution would have urged County Prosecutor Eli Savit to drop charges. Council Member Roland Tooson said he did not know what Ruben was charged with.

"All the facts are not known by everybody," said Council Member McChelle King.

City Attorney Randolph Barker said that the incident is an ongoing investigation with limited information publicly available. The incident is currently under investigation by the

park there every day.

The parking garage provides 784 spaces, representing more than 8% of the university's parking system, a 2023 statement from Walter Kraft said. Kraft is the vice president of communications for EMU.

"How come I have to pay \$250 to park each semester, when I walk past an empty parking structure every day?" he said. "I can't find a parking spot most days and have to walk extra far for no reason."

The parking garage closed Sept. 25, 2022. A campus-wide email sent two days earlier said that engineering teams needed to begin an assessment of needed repairs. The decision was based in part on third-party engineering reviews that pointed to concerns about the structure's safety.

"The parking structure is the elephant in the room," Lige said. "There are maintenance considerations we have to address, which I can't do until we physically take it over ... My goal is to provide President Kelly a comprehensive review of the maintenance issues that are there so that he can make a decision."

Lige explained that until the lot is inspected, DPS has gated off the structure and posted signs that it is closed.

Chief Lige also plans to re-evaluate the mapping of the parking on campus.

"Campus has changed a lot. A lot of buildings have closed, and there are some new buildings. Numbers of commuters and residents has changed,

Michigan State Police, Barker said.

"As a legal adviser, I recognize that there are various issues that this body needs to take into account before making statements," Barker said. "The frustration is well understood; we share a lot of it."

Barker said the right thing to do for the community is to wait for more information to be available.

Council Member Desirae Simmons said despite criticism of the more than 30 hours for which the incident occurred, she credits the length of time with keeping everyone involved alive.

"The length of time was really a focus on making sure everybody came out alive," Simmons said. "I really think the time is why everybody is alive."

A meeting attendee interrupted to push back on this, saying that Ruben was hospitalized due to tactics used. Simmons responded, reaffirming her statement.

"I will 100% lift up being alive," Simmons said. "He's not in a grave."

Simmons also said she did not downplay a sword as a weapon, and also mentioned that calls for more de-escalation training of police need to be specific. She spoke of the need for an unarmed response team, which was named as a priority for 2026 by multiple council members.

During the meeting, Fellows said that Ruben was maimed by tactics used by police. Ruben's condition has not been made public.

During public comment, residents also raised concerns about an individual who was fatally shot by Washtenaw County Sheriff's Office deputies after fleeing police on Jan. 6. There was no firearm recovered in the car of a driver, said a Jan. 13 statement from Washtenaw County Sheriff Alyshia Dyer.

Officers on the scene originally reported to dispatch that shots had been fired and that the driver was armed with a shotgun.

"Upon further investigation, it can now be confirmed that there was not a firearm found in the vehicle," Dyer said in the Jan. 13 statement.

The identity of the individual killed has not been made public. The deputies involved were placed on leave and the shooting is currently under investigation by the Michigan State Police, Dyer said.

"I am saddened by any death by police, whether the person is armed or unarmed, whether they committed a crime or did not commit a crime," Simmons said. "I think it is really smart that the county sheriff did not take on this investigation themselves."

Council Member Roland Tooson also addressed the incident of the individual killed by police.

"I'm dedicated to gaining more information as to what happened and why it happened," Tooson said.

What's the Move?

Jan. 20 - 26

Allie Beecher

Copy Desk Chief

Looking for something interesting to do this week? Check out this list of events happening around Ypsilanti.

Virtual African American Authors Book Discussion Group — Jan. 27

On Tuesday, Jan. 27, from 7 to 9 p.m., the library will host a discussion of the book "Uncommon Favor" by African American author Dawn Staley.

This book discussion event is free, and no registration is required. For more information and to Zoom link, visit the Events page of the YDL website.

Paranormal Club - Investigate the Unexplained! — Jan. 28

Fans of the paranormal will not want to miss this event! On Wednesday, Jan. 28, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., the Michigan Avenue branch of the Ypsilanti District Library will host Paranormal Club, during which attendees can discuss everything from hauntings to alien abductions to UFO sightings.

For those who cannot attend the meeting Jan. 28, the Michigan Avenue branch will also host meetings Wednesday, March 25, and Wednesday, May 27, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

Attendance is free, and no registration is required. The Michigan Avenue branch of the YDL is at 229 W. Michigan Ave.

For more information, visit the Events page of the YDL website.

YDL Trivia Night Winter '26 — Jan. 29

On Thursday, Jan. 29, from 7 to 8:30 p.m., the Whittaker branch of the Ypsilanti District Library will host a free trivia night open to everyone 13 and older. Those interested in participating can register a team of up to four. The teams that score the highest will receive small prizes.

To ensure a spot, register early on the YDL's website. Those who do not register may be admitted on a first-come, first-served basis as space allows.

The library will be serving light refreshments, and attendees are welcome to bring snacks and non-alcoholic beverages.

For more information, visit the Events page of the YDL's website or contact Brett Hamilton at bhamilton@yplibrary.org.

Washtenaw County Celebration of Girls and Women in Sports — Jan. 31

Presented by the Ann Arbor Sports Commission, this event offers attendees an opportunity to have fun while honoring girls and women in sports. It will take place Saturday, Jan. 31, at the George Gervin GameAbove Center on Eastern Michigan University's campus.

The event will begin at noon with an educational panel about women in sports. Panelists include girls' soccer coach Marley Duerst, EMU student-athlete Ella Grasso and EMU senior secretary for football Lauren Drinane. Then, at 12:30 p.m., the event will feature a sports clinic for attendees 13 years of age and younger. Sports include lacrosse, rowing, soccer, cheer and football.

At 2 p.m., the EMU women's basketball team will play against the Western Michigan University Broncos. After the game, attendees will have the chance to get autographs.

Those interested in attending should register on the Ann Arbor Sports Commission website. More information is available there.

The Trail to Oregon Auditions — Jan. 31 and Feb. 1

New Leaf Players will be hosting auditions for their inaugural production of "The Trail to Oregon!" at the Riverside Arts Center. Auditions will take place 5 to 8 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 31, and 11 a.m. to noon Sunday, Feb. 1.

For more information and to find audition cuts, visit the New Leaf Players' Facebook page or email vp@newleafplayers.com.



Instagram @easternechoofficial



TikTok @theeasternecho



Facebook @ The Eastern Echo

Engagement in student government elections trails statewide voting trends

Laura Meriweather
News Reporter

Editor's note: The Eastern Echo is conducting a survey to learn more about students' thoughts on student government elections. The survey is open to all EMU students and can be found by scanning this QR code.



In March 2025, the Eastern Michigan University Student Government election was decided by 5.4% of the student body. Only 644 students cast ballots to give select peers the power to advocate for the student body behind closed doors and control a six-figure budget.

Low voter turnout in 2025 was not an anomaly. Since 2019, student government elections at EMU have been decided by an average of 602 votes. The average turnout during these years has been 4.6% of the student body, the entirety of which is entitled to vote under the Student Government Constitution. In 2021, turnout dropped as low as 1.6%, according to enrollment data on EMU's website and election results posted to the Student Government website.

In contrast to recent turnout numbers for EMU Student Government, statewide turnout in local and federal elections was 61.7% in 2020 and 40.8% in 2022 among 18- to 29-year-olds, according to a June 2024 report by the Michigan Department of State.

During this academic year, the sitting administration has enacted several resolutions. In the fall 2025 semester,

it voted to continue funding bus passes and New York Times subscriptions for EMU students. Other resolutions allocated funding for event-specific items, such as Starbucks vouchers for a series of events with Counseling and Psychological Services, flu vaccines and tickets to the recent MLK President's Luncheon event.

The Eastern Echo spoke with three individuals Jan. 22, 2026, to get their thoughts on Student Government elections. Chris Santiago, a second-year chemistry student who is part of the Tau Kappa Epsilon fraternity on campus, said he hasn't voted in previous Student Government elections but would consider voting in the upcoming election March 25 and 26.

"I know a couple of fraternity brothers [that are] not in my frat — I know they're really heavy into Student Government, so they sometimes inform me about things," Santiago said, adding that he wasn't very aware of EMU Student Government in general.

Javonte Holmes, a junior mechanical engineering major, also has not voted in previous Student Government elections but said he would possibly participate

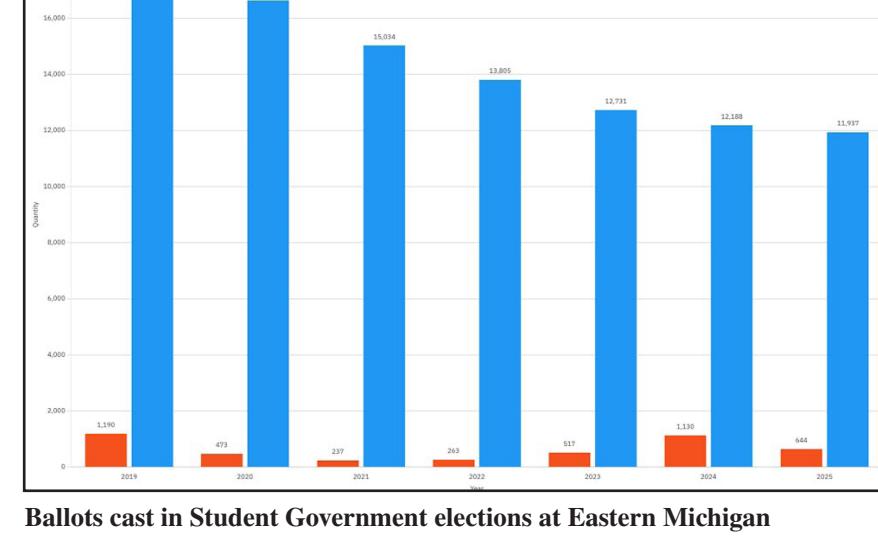
this year. When asked about Student Government overall, Holmes replied, "I don't really know too much about it. I hear some things here and there, but I don't really get into that."

Faris Weiss, an English major who has attended EMU for more than four years, said she does not plan to vote in the upcoming election due to a lack of interest.

"I've just not really had much passion in the school itself, and only recently have I found any joys in any of the programs," Weiss said.

EMU is not alone when it comes to low engagement in student government elections. Turnout at the University of Michigan has averaged 16.4% in the last three cycles, and Western Michigan University saw an average of 3.7% turnout from 2020 through 2024, according to data accessed through the schools' respective websites.

In concluding her thoughts on the upcoming EMU Student Government election, Weiss said, "I'm hoping I can find a reason to care, cause that would be lovely."



Ballots cast in Student Government elections at Eastern Michigan University each year compared to student enrollment. Laura Meriweather / News Reporter

Ypsilanti City Council expands public comment rules

Lilly Kujawski
Managing Editor - News

On Jan. 20, Ypsilanti City Council members voted to change the council's public comment rules.

Introduced by council members Desirae Simmons and Me'Chelle King, the new rules adopted state that the public comment section at the beginning of council meetings will be expanded to 60 minutes, more than the previous 45 minutes allotted. Public comments will be alternated between in-person and Zoom attendees in 10-speaker increments.

Council members voted to amend the resolution, removing a third rule change that would reinstate a second unlimited public comment period at the end of the meeting. The council retains the rule that commenters who sign up at the beginning of the meeting who are not heard from in the first public comment portion can speak at the end of the meeting.

In November 2024, the Ypsilanti City Council changed the rules regarding public comments, sparking pushback from some Ypsilanti residents.

The 2024 change reduced total public comment time from one hour to 45 minutes. It also required residents to sign up for comment with their name and address ahead of time and limited individual speaker time to two minutes instead of three minutes if more than 30 commenters signed up. These rules still stand amid the latest change.

Jennifer Heimberg, a Superior Township resident, voiced support for expanding time for public comments at council meetings. At past meetings, Heimberg has repeatedly urged council members to reconsider the previous



Jennifer Heimberg, a public commenter at the Jan. 20 Ypsilanti City Council meeting held in the Eastern Michigan University Student Center, urges council members to support a resolution expanding public comment rules. Natalie Kyle / The Eastern Echo

public comment limits.

"When people come to speak at council, they should be heard before (...) a potential vote," Heimberg said.

King said the council has received what she called constant calls from the community to expand public comment rules. She said for many constituents, council meetings are the only opportunity they have to address all members of the council.

Mayor Pro-Tem Steve Wilcoxen said he could not support a rule that allowed for a second, unlimited public comment section at the end. He said he has been in council meetings that went on until early morning hours in the

past due to unchecked public comment time.

In an interview with The Eastern Echo, Heimberg said that tonight's resolution is a start in the right direction.

"I do think that there are some unnecessary restrictions still that are exclusionary, specifically to some of our more vulnerable folks," Heimberg said, voicing concern especially for those who may have elder care or childcare considerations, or transportation or mobility issues. "Having to sign up at the beginning to be able to speak at the end is a barrier — an unnecessary barrier."

Opinion

The WellNest Watch

Islamophobia is a public health concern, whether we name it or not



Kegan Tulloch

Contributor

Editor's note: In The WellNest Watch, master's degree candidates in the public health program at EMU's School of Health Promotion and Human Performance explore news, research and standard practices in the field of health and wellness.

Islamophobia is often framed as a political debate or a matter of individual prejudice, but that framing misses the full picture. When discrimination becomes routine, when fear follows people into classrooms, workplaces, clinics and public spaces, it stops being just a social issue and becomes a public health one.

Islamophobia affects how safe people feel, how connected they are to their communities and how their minds and bodies respond to chronic stress. Ignoring these impacts does not make them disappear; it only allows the harm to continue unchecked. Public health considers the conditions that allow people to thrive. That includes more than access to healthcare or healthy food; it includes a sense of belonging, safety and well-being.

Islamophobia directly threatens these conditions. For some Muslims, especially those who are visibly Muslim, everyday life may involve navigating stereotypes, microaggressions and the possibility of hostility. Over time, these experiences accumulate. Constant vigilance, wondering if a comment, look, or policy is rooted in bias, creates chronic stress that chips away at mental health and overall well-being.

Chronic stress is not just an emotional experience; it has real physiological consequences. Living with ongoing discrimination can contribute to anxiety, depression, sleep disturbances and burnout. It can also make people avoid certain spaces altogether, whether that means withdrawing socially, hesitating to seek medical or mental health care, or disengaging from school and work.

From a public health perspective, these outcomes matter because they shape population-level patterns of health inequity. When one group is consistently exposed to stressors tied to identity-based discrimination, disparities are not accidental; they are predictable.

Belonging is another critical, yet often overlooked, determinant of health. Feeling unwelcome or unsafe in one's own community can be deeply destabilizing. Islamophobia sends a clear message to Muslims that they are viewed with suspicion, as outsiders or as threats. That message undermines social cohesion and weakens trust, not only between individuals, but between communities and institutions. Schools,

workplaces and healthcare systems cannot effectively support well-being when people fear judgment or harm simply for who they are.

At the same time, it is important to recognize resilience. Islam itself can function as a powerful protective factor against the harms of discrimination. Strong religious practices, shared values and close community networks can provide Muslims with meaning, coping tools and social support. Prayer, spiritual reflection and communal gatherings can offer grounding and comfort in the face of hostility. Mosques and community organizations frequently serve as spaces where people feel affirmed, understood, and safe; conditions that are essential for mental health. However, resilience should never be used to minimize harm. The fact that Muslim communities demonstrate strength in the face of Islamophobia does not justify the conditions that require such strength.

Protective factors can reduce risk, but they do not eliminate it. Public health does not ask marginalized groups to simply "cope better" with discrimination; it asks why the discrimination exists in the first place and how systems can change to prevent harm. Addressing Islamophobia as a public health issue requires a shift in perspective. It means recognizing discrimination as a social exposure that affects mental and physical health over time. It also means holding institutions accountable. Schools should foster inclusive environments where Muslim students feel seen and protected. Healthcare systems should move beyond surface-level cultural awareness toward genuine respect and equity in care. Media and political leaders should understand that rhetoric has consequences, shaping not just public opinion but lived experiences and health outcomes.

Ultimately, confronting Islamophobia is about more than tolerance; it is about health, equity and collective well-being. A society that allows entire communities to live under the weight of fear and exclusion cannot claim to prioritize public health. If we are serious about preventing harm rather than simply treating its outcomes, then Islamophobia must be named, challenged and addressed as the public health issue that it is.

Contributors to The WellNest Watch health column are Kegan Tulloch and Ebrima Jobarteh, graduate assistants in the Office of Health Promotions, and Shafaa Ali Choyon and Nathaniel King, graduate hall directors in the Department of Residential Life. All four are master's degree candidates in the Public Health Program from the School of Public Health Promotion and Human Performance at Eastern Michigan University.



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Eagle Watch | Jan. 18-25



Eastern Michigan University women's basketball player No. 23, Peyton Hill, shoots a 2-pointer in the game against Toledo on Jan. 20 at the George Gervin GameAbove Center. Bradan Copeland / The Eastern Echo

Ruby Brannon
Sports Editor

This week's inaugural Eagle Watch celebrates the outstanding individual performances of Eastern Michigan University athletes across various sports, highlighting their grit, skill, and record-breaking achievements for the week of Jan. 18 through Jan. 25.

Gymnastics: Abby Brushwood

At the Air Force Quad Meet on Jan. 23, Eastern Michigan junior Abby Brushwood delivered a standout performance by tying for first place on the floor exercise with a score of 9.875. Her consistency helped the team to a third-place finish overall. Brushwood

also contributed a 9.700 on the vault during the same meet.

Women's basketball: Peyton Hill

Freshman guard Peyton Hill had a historic week, exploding for a career-high 25 points in a thrilling comeback win against Toledo on Jan. 20. Her 25 points represent the most scored by any MAC freshman in a single game this season. Hill also showcased her versatility by grabbing a career-high eight rebounds and recording three steals in the victory.

Men's basketball: Mohammad Habhab

In a grueling double-overtime battle against Kent State on Jan. 24,

Mohammad Habhab anchored the Eagles with a dominant double-double, recording 22 points and 11 rebounds. Habhab also recorded a career-high four blocks while playing a career-high 47:28 of game time. This performance marked his eighth double-double of the season.

Women's track & field: Mariah Taylor

Sophomore Mariah Taylor reached new heights at the third annual Bob Parks Memorial on Jan. 24. Competing in the triple jump, Taylor secured first place with a massive personal-best mark of 12.49m. This elite performance earned her the No. 72 spot in the current NCAA rankings and directly followed the program Top 10 mark she set just

one week prior.

Men's track & field: Bamidele Ajayi

EMU junior Bamidele Ajayi proved to be the fastest man at Bowen Field House during the Bob Parks Memorial. Ajayi captured gold in the 60m dash with a personal-best time of 6.82 seconds and doubled his gold medal count by winning the 200m collegiate event with a time of 21.96 seconds.

Tennis: Pehal Kharadkar

Freshman Pehal Kharadkar has become the ultimate "closer" for the EMU tennis team. During the Jan. 23 match at Youngstown State, she secured the team-win-clinching point for the third consecutive match, coming back from one set down to win 4-6, 6-1, 7-5. She continued her hot streak the next day against St. Francis, moving to 4-0 in spring singles play with a 6-1, 6-2 victory.

Diving: Rose Kendrick

EMU sophomore Rose Kendrick led a complete sweep of the diving events in a conference matchup against Ball State on Jan. 24. Kendrick won both the one-meter and three-meter competitions, setting personal bests in both. She earned 280.88 points in the one-meter dive and a dominant 295.13 points in the three-meter event.

Swimming: Nina LaRosa

In the pool against Ball State, Nina LaRosa was the definition of dominance in the breaststroke. She captured two first-place finishes, touching the wall first in the 100-yard breaststroke with a time of 1:02.61 and following it up with a victory in the 200-yard breaststroke at 2:20.02.

**Eagle Sports
Tips & Tales:**

Jan. 27 - Feb. 2

Ruby Brannon
Sports Editor

Get ready, Eagle fans! From Jan. 27 to Feb. 2, the Eastern Michigan University athletic calendar is bursting with high-stakes rivalries, historical milestones, and road-trip adventures.

Wednesday, Jan. 28: Buffalo bound

Midweek, the women's basketball team travels to New York to face Buffalo at 6 p.m.

The Tale: The Eagles have a 16-19 all-time overall record against Buffalo, including a dominant 79-46 win back in 2005.

The Tip: Keep an eye on the fourth quarter! This team has a reputation for erasing deficits, much like their thrilling comeback against Toledo last week.

Thursday, Jan. 29: Home floor heroics

The midweek magic continues as the women's gymnastics team takes over Ypsilanti for a thrilling home meet against Wilberforce at 6 p.m..

The Tale: Having faced Wilberforce only once in program history, the Eagles look to remain undefeated in the series. Keep an eye out for Abby Brushwood, who won the floor event when these two programs last met.

The Tip: You can follow every twist and tumble by keeping the Live Stats page open on your phone or checking Eagle All-Access and ESPN+ for the live broadcast.

Friday, Jan. 30: A Track & Field takeover

Friday is a "split-squad" spectacular for Track & Field. The Eagles will compete simultaneously at the Meyo Invitational in South Bend, Indiana, and the SVSU Jet's Pizza Invitational in University Center, Michigan, on both Friday and Saturday.

The Tale: The program is currently riding a wave of momentum after earning 13 event wins at the Bob Parks Memorial. The team's spirit is at an all-time high following the news that alum Jasmine Jones was selected for the 2026 U.S. Olympic Bobsled Team.

The Tip: To watch the Eagles fly from afar, follow the Live Stats provided on the EMU Athletics website, which allows you to track every sprint and jump in real-time.

Saturday, Jan. 31: Super Saturday at home and away

Saturday is the busiest day of the week, featuring three different sports across two different states.

Women's basketball vs. Western Michigan (2 p.m.): This is a home game at the Gervin GameAbove Center.

The Tale: EMU leads this long-standing series 53-44. They have a history of nail-biters, including a double-overtime win in 2016.

The Tip: Keep an eye on freshman Peyton Hill, who has been setting career highs in points and rebounds to power comeback wins.

Tennis vs. Oakland (1 p.m.): Head over to The Chippewa Club in Ypsilanti for some indoor tennis action.

The Tale: Historically, the Eagles have dominated Oakland with a 15-3 record.

The Tip: If you can't make it to The Chippewa Club you can follow the action through Live Stats, available on the EMU Athletics website.

Men's Basketball at UMass (6 p.m.): The men head to Amherst, Massachusetts.

The Tale: On Dec. 30, 2025, EMU secured its first-ever win against UMass with an 80-74 victory, breaking a three-game losing streak against the Minutemen.

The Tip: Tune in to ESPN+ or the WEMU/Varsity Network to watch

Motor City MACtion: Eagles set to trade The Factory for Ford Field

Ruby Brannon
Sports Editor

The gray turf of Rynearson Stadium has seen its share of battles, but in 2026, the Eastern Michigan University Eagles are taking their toughest rivalry to the brightest stage in the state.

Eastern Michigan University and Central Michigan University have officially announced that their historic rivalry is heading to Ford Field in Detroit for the 2026 and 2027 seasons. This isn't just a change of scenery; it's a high-stakes move to the home of the Detroit Lions, designed to turn one of college football's oldest rivalries into a Motor City MACtion spectacle.

A championship stage for a century-old grudge

The EMU-CMU series is the longest-running rivalry in the Mid-American Conference, dating back to 1902. The 2026 matchup will mark the 104th meeting between the two schools, making it the second-longest-running series in Michigan, trailing only the University of Michigan-Michigan State University rivalry.

While CMU currently leads the series with 65 wins to EMU's 32 and six ties, the Eagles have a history of making magic happen at Ford Field. In 2004, the two teams met for the first Collegiate Clash in Detroit, where EMU secured a legendary 61-58 victory in four overtimes.

"Taking this rivalry to Detroit places Eastern Michigan, Central Michigan, and the Mid-American Conference on a major stage in a city with a strong football tradition," EMU Vice President and Director of Athletics Scott Wetherbee said in a statement.

The green and white takeover

For EMU, this move is a strategic "home game" for the 2026 season. With Wayne County hosting more EMU graduates than anywhere else in Michigan, the game is expected to be a massive homecoming.



Ford Field in Detroit on July 23, 2019. The Eagles will play Central Michigan University at Ford Field during the 2026 and 2027 football seasons. Charles Post / The Eastern Echo

Wetherbee said that there are 98,000 EMU alumni throughout Metro Detroit.

In a statement, EMU President James Smith described Ford Field as a powerful gathering place for the university's alumni to join current students and supporters. He added that the partnership "sparks the kind of spirited, good natured rivalry that builds excitement leading up to game week."

Central Michigan is also looking to tap into its own base of over 70,000 alumni in the metropolitan Detroit region. CMU President Neil MacKinnon stated that these games are a "tremendous way to showcase CMU's connection with the city of Detroit."

A Lions legacy

Both programs are no strangers to the professional atmosphere of 2000 Brush Street. Eastern Michigan hosted a series of games at Ford Field from 2004 through 2007, including matchups against the U.S. Navy Academy and Northwestern University. More recently, in 2019, the Eagles returned for the Quick Lane Bowl, which drew a record crowd of 34,765 fans.

Central Michigan brings an

even deeper stadium resume, as the 2027 game will mark their 13th all-time appearance at Ford Field. The Chippewas' history at the venue includes four MAC Championship games and six bowl appearances, with their games averaging more than 32,000 fans. Brad Michaels, Detroit Lions vice president of events, expressed excitement about hosting the annual rivalry, stating that both teams have been familiar faces at the stadium over the years.

Elevating the MACtion brand

This collaboration between the schools, the MAC and the Detroit Lions is a calculated move to showcase the universities in one of their most vital markets. CMU Athletic Director Amy Folan emphasized that the goal is to reconnect with alumni and showcase the entire university on a major platform.

The move also provides a professional-grade experience for the players. By stepping into an NFL facility, student-athletes get to compete in what Wetherbee calls a championship setting that elevates the prestige of the Mid-American Conference. President

James Smith noted that this stage "elevates both universities in the eyes of fans across the state," turning a standard conference game into a premier athletic event.

What to expect: Midweek madness

Fans should prepare for the unique energy of midweek football. While the specific dates and television information will be released by the MAC in early spring of 2026, the shift to a weeknight game under professional lights adds a level of prestige usually reserved for bowl games.

Key dates to watch

- **March 2026:** Official game date and time announced by the MAC.
- **Spring 2026:** Tickets officially go on sale to the public.
- **November 2026:** Eastern Michigan University hosts Central Michigan University at Ford Field.
- **November 2027:** Central Michigan University hosts Eastern Michigan University at Ford Field.

Men's Basketball at UMass (6 p.m.): The men head to Amherst, Massachusetts.

The Tale: On Dec. 30, 2025, EMU secured its first-ever win against UMass with an 80-74 victory, breaking a three-game losing streak against the Minutemen.

The Tip: Tune in to ESPN+ or the WEMU/Varsity Network to watch

Ypsilanti Art Supply to open storefront, offer multi-use studio space



The storefront of Ypsilanti Art Supply on Jan. 22. Ypsilanti Art Supply is expanding into the storefront directly to the left of the current store. *Jada Hauser / The Eastern Echo*

Katherine Tatomir
Newsletter Editor

Ypsilanti Art Supply opened its doors on a crisp Friday evening in 2023. A line formed out the door, full of local artists who missed the independent art

scene after the closing of Art Attack in 2013, which left Ypsilanti without an independent art store. After over two years of business, owner Megan Foldenauer says an idea that started as a passing thought is now becoming a reality.

The storefront on the north side of Ypsilanti Art Supply is in the beginning stages of its transformation into a space for teaching, lounging and a small gallery, among other things. The new space is roughly double the size of the current store, separated into an open

front, and a more secluded back.

"It's the perfect space for classes, for workshops, for people to ... rent per hour," Foldenauer said.

She expressed her desire to create a small library area surrounded by cozy second-hand chairs and stocked full of art books that have begun to clutter her house. The library will be in the front section of the new store, and will act as a place for customers to relax and make art.

The back of the new store will be a place for more semi-formal activities, like classes. Foldenauer plans to hold classes, especially in her areas of expertise, like drawing and watercolor. Teaching opportunities, however, are not limited to just Foldenauer. Local artists will be able to hold their own classes in the new space, though the logistics of the booking process are not yet solidified.

One of the distinctive qualities of Ypsilanti Art Supply is its vast inventory of supplies from independent vendors. With more space, Foldenauer will be able to carry an even wider range of supplies and expand into different mediums of art as well.

"There's a couple areas I haven't gotten into because of the space or the resources, more in the sculpture and ceramics area, I'd love to expand into that," Foldenauer said.

One of Foldenauer's many hopes for the new storefront is to expand accessibility to every artist in and around Washtenaw County. To Foldenauer's surprise, there is a hidden gem in the space in terms of accessibility.

"The space in the back is separated by an ADA accessible bathroom, like a brand new one, which makes me so happy to be able to offer that," Foldenauer said.

Foldenauer is a member of the Ypsilanti Downtown Development Authority, a group that is dedicated to offering support to small businesses in Downtown Ypsilanti. It has expanded several times since its creation in March of 1976, offering a place for small businesses to build strength in numbers and thrive despite financial uncertainty.

"It feels really good to get rid of one of the empty storefronts in downtown," Foldenauer said.

While an opening date is not yet solidified, Foldenauer hopes to have the new space ready to open to customers on Ypsilanti Art Supply's third birthday, April 7.

Ypsilanti Art Supply is located at 42 N. Huron St., in downtown Ypsilanti. Those looking to stay updated on Ypsilanti Art Supply's expansion can follow the store on Instagram @ ypsiartsupply.

Ypsilanti's Rhizome Roots Studio fosters community with monthly open-mic nights

Lauren Holloway
News Reporter

On the first Friday of every month, Rhizome Roots Studio opens its doors to the residents of Ypsilanti for its open mic night.

Charlie Fuller has had the studio space at 108 Pearl St. since July 1, 2025. At Rhizome Roots, Fuller hosts dance classes for beginners and intermediates alike, donation-based yoga with a pay-what-you-can policy and other events centered around moving the body.

Fuller also likes to host open mic nights where members of the community can come in to display their skills, watch others perform and socialize with new people.

From 8:30-10:30 p.m. every first Friday, all are welcome in the studio to listen and perform.

The ticket cost at the door is \$10 for audience members and \$5 for performers. Fuller and her dog Gemma greet every new face. The space provides places to gather, drinks,

snacks and card games for attendees to play throughout the night.

There is no set schedule for the open mic nights. From singing to poetry to magic tricks, participants are welcome to perform whatever they want whenever they want.

When nobody is performing, attendees can play games, sing together, or simply talk and socialize.

The space purposefully has no stage for performers. Fuller described the events the studio puts on as structured but understanding; there is no pressure or expectations.

"I want it to be a place people want to go, not where they need to go," Fuller said.

Angela Alexander, a first-time attendee, found the intimate atmosphere very welcoming.

After seeing an ad for the open mic night on the Meetup app, Alexander decided to check out the event just to see what it was like.

The night was very fun and a good way to make community connections, Alexander said.

Scott Watson has been a guitar player since the age of 19, and has attended Rhizome Roots' open mics. While Watson is new to songwriting, Roots Studio offered the opportunity to conquer his fear of playing guitar in front of others.

Before opening Rhizome Roots, Fuller held his background in health, first working as a Safety and Wellness Director at Washtenaw Community College. Many of the classes there are concentrated on mindful movement and connecting the body to the mind.

Even the name of the studio connects to Fuller's vision of connection. A rhizome is a root structure from which a plant grows from another plant, but if the roots are disconnected, each plant can keep growing by itself.

"I want the community to grow interdependently," Fuller said. "You're part of the community, but not owned."

For those interested in attending, the next Rhizome Roots open mic night will take place Friday, Feb. 6, from 8:30-10:30 p.m.



Rhizome Roots, at 108 Pearl St., hosts weekly open mic nights on Friday evenings. *Lilly Kujawski / The Eastern Echo*

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EMU's eagle mascot, Swoop, reads *The Eastern Echo* while the opponent's team lineup is announced during the Jan. 24, 2026, women's basketball game against Northern Illinois University. *Bradan Copeland / The Eastern Echo*

Winter swoops into EMU campus



Eastern Michigan University women's basketball player No. 23, Peyton Hill, shoots a 2-pointer in the game against Toledo on Jan. 20, at the George Gervin GameAbove Center. *Bradan Copeland / The Eastern Echo*



Members of Alpha Theta Alpha, Epsilon Eta and The National Pan-Hellenic Council gather around EMU's Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. statue on Eastern Michigan's campus following the Wreath Laying Ceremony for MLK Day on Monday, Jan. 19. *Maddy Makin / The Eastern Echo*



Soup is served by Kerri M. at the Japanese Student Association New Year's Event in McKenny Hall, held on Thursday, January 22. *Kaleb Stanley / The Eastern Echo*



Medical assistants from Trinity Health prepare to administer flu shots at the Walk-in Flu Shot Clinic on Thursday, Jan. 22 in the Student Center Ballroom. *Lee Hammock / The Eastern Echo*



Former White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre signs a copy of her memoir "Independent: A Look Inside a Broken White House, Outside the Party Lines" at her book signing on Eastern Michigan University's campus on Monday, Jan. 19. *Maddy Makin / The Eastern Echo*



Graduate student Riley Coffee (left) and undergraduate student Sara Abuzir spread bingo cards while they wait to greet students attending the Cocoa & Cards: Winter Bingo Night at the Honors College on Thursday, Jan. 22. *Owen Cardenas / The Eastern Echo*