



April 28, 2010

To: Members of the House Appropriations Subcommittee for School Aid and the Department of Education

From: Jack Kresnak, President and CEO

RE: FY 2011 Early Childhood Spending

On behalf of Michigan's Children and its Board of Directors, I am pleased to be able to share with you our early childhood priorities as you consider the Fiscal Year 2011 budget. Michigan's Children is a statewide child advocacy organization that provides a voice for vulnerable children. Michigan's Children is independent; it does not receive any government funding or represent professionals who receive government contracts.

First, let me say that we applaud the Governor's recognition that revenue options must be part of the FY2011 budget deliberation. At a minimum we must hold the line on current funding and make children a priority under any circumstances. There's no way around it: More cuts continue to erode the foundation of our future economy.

Michigan's Children places a high priority on ensuring that children are raised by parents or caregivers that have the supports they need to be their children's first and best teachers, and are guaranteed the opportunity to participate in high quality early learning programs. Without investments in young children, the state's attempts to improve schools, increase educational attainment, expand access to higher education and rebuild its economy will not be successful.

I am providing you with a copy of a white paper for Michigan's next Governor and Legislature that addresses what we believe state leaders must do to rebuild Michigan's economy by investing in its youngest citizens. Let me provide you with just a few highlights:

- **A new and bold commitment is needed.** After years of relative prosperity, analysts predict that Michigan will soon be among the 10 poorest states. Fortunately, economists, political, business and community leaders agree that the path back to prosperity lies in the state's ability to build a highly educated workforce. While we appreciate that you have begun to tackle the problems of high school graduation and college access, missing from the arsenal so far have been the investments needed to ensure that all children enter school ready to succeed.
- **Brain scientists have provided concrete evidence of the importance of investments in early childhood.** As much as 85 percent of the brain's "architecture" is developed by the time children reach kindergarten, making the first years of life a critical window of opportunity. Unfortunately, Michigan kindergarten teachers report that more than one-third of all children are entering school unprepared, in part because they haven't had access to high quality early learning experiences. Further, nearly 9 of every 10

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teachers say that the time needed to work with those children detracts from the time they are able to give to other students.

- **Economists and social scientists have shown us what works.** There is a growing body of research showing that early childhood investments can generate savings that more than repay their costs. That research, some of which is summarized in the white paper, has drawn the attention of some of the nation’s top business leaders, educators and economists.
- **Michigan’s early childhood foundation—already inadequate—is threatened.** Since Michigan’s economy began to decline in 2001, many critical children’s services have been reduced. Michigan is not alone in facing these challenges. Yet, many states have struggled to maintain funding for early education and care because they appreciate the competitive economic advantage they offer. A recent study showed that 27 of 38 states with state-funded preschool programs maintained or increased funding in their 2010 budgets. Michigan was one of ten states that reduced funding, failing to “put proven programs ahead of politics”.
- **We know what do to and need to muster the political will to do it.** Among the recommendation in the white paper are the following:
  - Hold children harmless as you work to balance the state budget.
  - Make investments in the services that all young children need to thrive a top state priority.
  - Focus on the most vulnerable children and ensure equal opportunity.
  - Engage communities, parents and the public. Parents and communities must be strong partners, and local Great Start Collaboratives are working to make that a reality.
  - Support changes in state government that require departments to work together to meet the needs of young children. Schools alone cannot solve the problems. We need a comprehensive solution that links supports to parents of young children to Michigan’s public K-12 system.

For fiscal year 2001, we specifically ask you to protect funding for the following early childhood programs.

Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP): The Governor and Senate maintained current funding for preschool programs. This includes \$88.1 million for district programs, and \$7.6 million for competitive programs. However, access to the preschool experiences that research shows lead to school readiness, and ultimately educational achievement, has been restricted this year. First, the competitive portion of the GSRP was cut by 50 percent in the current fiscal year, denying access to more than 2,200 children around the state. In addition, school districts under stress because of cuts in the School Aid per pupil allotment were given discretion in the current year to use GSRP funds to fill other holes in their budgets. As of the end of December, more than 10 percent of total GSRP funds had been redirected, further constricting the number of preschool slots available for at-risk children.

To stem this erosion of access to high quality preschool in Michigan, we urge you to restore funding for the GSRP competitive program (\$7.6 million), and to support language, proposed by the Governor but rejected by the Senate, that requires districts to protect funding for preschool by removing the flexibility to redirect those funds to other budget priorities.

Great Parents/Great Start program: The Governor and the Senate budgets maintain funding (\$5 million) for Great Parent/Great Start early childhood programs. These funds, which flow through local Intermediate School Districts (ISDs), are used by communities to leverage other local dollars to provide

services to encourage early literacy, improve school readiness, strengthen families, improve parenting and reduce the need for special education services. We urge you to also hold the line on these critical funds.

Great Start Collaboratives: The Governor and the Senate maintain critical funding through the Early Childhood Investment Corporation for local Great Start Collaboratives. This investment of \$6 million dollars enables 55 local collaboratives and parent coalitions to increase the efficiency of local services and successfully leverage local and private resources to improve services to young children.

Thank you for this opportunity. I am available to address questions throughout the budget process. Please feel free to contact me at 517/485-3500 or by email at [jack@michiganschildren.org](mailto:jack@michiganschildren.org)