



February 23, 2009

To: Members of the House Appropriations Subcommittee for the Department of Community Health (DCH)

From: Jack Kresnak, President & CEO

RE: FY 2010 DCH Budget

On behalf of Michigan's Children and its Board of Directors, I am pleased to be able to share with you our priorities as you consider the Fiscal Year 2010 budget for the Department of Community Health. Michigan's Children is a statewide child advocacy organization that provides a voice for vulnerable children from around the state. Michigan's Children is independent; it does not receive any government funding or represent professionals who receive government contracts.

Michigan's Children's work is based on a set of core beliefs, including:

- *Equal opportunity:* We believe *all* children need equal opportunities to thrive.
- *Prevention:* We believe that Michigan can and must prevent problems facing children and families, rather than intervene after children are damaged and families destroyed.
- *Civic engagement:* We believe everyone has a stake in ensuring the success of our future generations and we work to engage a range of stakeholders, including community leaders, parents and youths.
- *Collaboration:* We believe that neighborhood and community partnerships that include both the public and private sectors are critical.

Unfortunately, we again find ourselves in the position of trying to protect basic services for our most vulnerable citizens in the face of devastating economic problems at the state and federal level. We respect the tough choices that you need to make, and ask you to remember that the state budget is the vehicle through which you will express what we value as a state. We trust that you will make decisions that reflect first and foremost the needs of the most vulnerable children who will ultimately determine the state's future.

We have three main concerns with the Governor's budget recommendation that we bring to your attention today, asking you to take the following actions as a Subcommittee:

1. Oppose the elimination of DCH funding for the Early Childhood Collaborative Secondary Prevention Program (O-3 Secondary Prevention), a critical, community-based child abuse and neglect prevention program. The Governor's budget removes \$524,000 in funding through the DCH budget for the Early Childhood Secondary Prevention Program. These funds are combined with appropriations in the Department of Human Services and School Aid budgets, and used by communities to leverage additional local dollars to prevent the abuse and neglect of the most vulnerable infants and toddlers through home visits, and parenting and other services.

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One of every 100 children in Michigan is a victim of child abuse and neglect, and the very youngest children are the most vulnerable. Unfortunately, as child abuse and neglect prevention programs have been cut since 2000, the rate of victimization of young children has increased.

The research is clear. These local programs have protected children from abuse and neglect and saved Michigan taxpayers an estimated \$49.6 million in the direct costs associated with child abuse and neglect, including foster care payments.

2. Oppose the elimination of funding for the Michigan Nurse Family Partnership program. The Governor's budget removes more than \$2 million for the Nurse Family Partnership (NFP) program. The NFP program partners vulnerable pregnant mothers with registered nurses who do home visits and ensure healthy births and access to health care for infants and toddlers. State funds for the program are matched by Medicaid and local dollars.

The communities served by the NFP (Berrien, Kent, Oakland, Kalamazoo and the City of Detroit) suffer some of the greatest racial and ethnic disparities in health outcomes for children. There are striking and unacceptable disparities that persist in this state on most health indicators for African American children, including roughly triple the rate of infant mortality; and doubled rates for low birth-weight, asthma-related hospitalizations and childhood deaths.

The NFP has been extensively evaluated, and shows dramatic outcomes, including increased immunization rates, more full-term births, fewer emergency room visits or hospitalizations for infants and toddlers, and reductions in subsequent pregnancies. Further, every dollar invested in NFP programs yields more than five dollars in return, with most of the savings accruing to the government in reduced health care, educational, social services and criminal justice expenditures.

3. Support the state matching dollars and policy changes needed to ensure that Michigan leaves no low-income child uninsured by turning away new federal dollars for the MICHild program (the federal State Children's Health Insurance Program or SCHIP). Michigan's Children worked with a wide range of partners for a positive reauthorization of SCHIP, and we appreciate the support of Michigan Legislators who also urged Congress and the President to move the legislation. The recent passage of SCHIP legislation, in conjunction with new revenues from the economic stimulus package, provide Michigan with an opportunity to reach out boldly to ensure that all of the state's children are covered and have access to the high quality health care services they need to grow and thrive.

We urge you to move aggressively to provide the funding needed to expand eligibility and outreach efforts to ensure that Michigan draws down all the federal dollars to which it is entitled. First, although Michigan was a leader in streamlining eligibility and enrollment policies for MICHild, budget cuts over the last 5 years resulted in the loss of funding for community outreach services, and enrollments have remained flat. Second, Michigan now has the opportunity to expand its eligibility criteria to ensure coverage for more uninsured children. Michigan currently insures children in families up to 200 percent of poverty, while many states have increased eligibility limits up to as much as 300 percent of poverty. In addition, Michigan should now work to ensure coverage for legal immigrant children. Every state dollar spent on MICHild services will draw in 3 federal dollars. Michigan cannot afford to turn its cheek on these new federal funds when the health of children is at stake.

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 kresnak.jack@michiganschildren.org.