



speaking **up** for kids

WINTER 2010

2010 Policy Agenda: Children Key to Economic Future

For the past decade, Michigan has struggled to balance its budget because state revenues have been insufficient to fund basic services and programs. In fact, state revenue estimates are now at their lowest point since 1970.

In response, state leaders have cut more than \$4 billion in spending since 2001, depleted the state's "rainy day fund," adopted some temporary taxes, and relied on federal funds to fill holes in state budgets. Missing have been the longer-term structural solutions necessary to correct Michigan's deficit.

The impact on our greatest asset, children, is undeniable:

- One of every five children in Michigan lives in poverty, up nearly 40 percent since 2000.
- The number of victims of child abuse and neglect has grown almost 10 percent this decade.
- Thousands of children no longer have access to early learning experiences proven to help them achieve in school and ultimately the workplace.
- High numbers of youths are dropping out of school, cutting short their chances and compromising Michigan's future workforce. Meanwhile, fewer programs are available to help them continue their education or find career training.
- More children are being denied access to preventative services that keep them healthy and out of hospitals and expensive emergency rooms.

(Policy Agenda—cont. on page 3)

Investing in Early Childhood: The First Step toward Economic Prosperity in Michigan

2010 has the potential to be a huge year for Michigan's children and families! After more than nine years of state budget cuts and government downsizing we have a tremendous opportunity this year to change course and start investing in the programs that matter and that will help put Michigan back on the path to economic prosperity.

With the upcoming November election and another year of budget turmoil ahead, Michigan's Children

has teamed up with the national Birth to Five Policy Alliance, and is working with partners statewide on a campaign to protect and invest in early childhood as a part of its larger policy agenda covering all children.

The imperative for action is clear: As much as 85 percent of the intellectual and emotional wiring of children's brains is set in the first five years. Yet, crucial programs serving young children have been slashed in recent

"Skill begets skill; motivation begets motivation. Early failure begets later failure."

—James Heckman
Nobel Laureate in economics
University of Chicago

budget cuts. Lawmakers have closed preschools, ended vital mental health services, reduced access to health and child care, and cut lead poisoning and infant mortality programs.

We cannot expect children to become the educated workforce Michigan needs without investing in these early years.

Through this campaign, Michigan's Children and our partners will:

- Strengthen state and local advocacy to protect early childhood funding.
- Educate candidates for state-wide offices and for the Michigan Legislature on the importance of investments in early childhood.
- Expand constituencies for public investments in early childhood.

Now is the time to grow the workforce of tomorrow by ensuring our children are ready to learn!

Help put our state on the path to prosperity!

Join the **Early Childhood Action Network** to receive notices of special reports, Action Alerts, updates, and more information specifically about early childhood issues.

Sign up at www.michiganschildren.org/index.php/Early-Childhood

Young Scoops to Produce News Network

Michigan's Children is thrilled to announce plans for an unprecedented venture giving new voice to children and family issues while teaching young people valuable skills and engaging them in public debate.

KidSpeak® Neighborhood News, a multi-media, youth-focused information network, will utilize a wealth of untapped talent to create citizen journalists and provide opportunities for youths to make themselves heard on neighborhood and school issues often overlooked by mainstream media, business leaders and policymakers.

With the help of former Detroit Free Press journalist Cynthia Burton (see pg. 2 staff news) and volunteer journalists acting as mentors, youths will write and produce local news

stories for distribution online as well as through partner Web sites. Detroit Public Television has agreed to broadcast some reports, and stories will be available for use by mainstream media outlets.

Topics will run the gamut from education and health to economics and politics, but most stories will have ties to policy under debate at the local, state and federal levels. (KSNN—cont. on page 3)



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Jack Kresnak
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A member of



michiganschildren.org

president's message



Jack Kresnak, President & CEO

We are happy to say goodbye to Michigan's *annus horribilus* – 2009, a year in which our state leaders did what would have been unthinkable in previous years: Sharply reducing public support for the education of our children and gutting or outright eliminating programs proven to help vulnerable children succeed.


For the fiscal year 2010 budget, Michigan slashed spending for programs that prevent child abuse and neglect (turning away even more unmatched federal dollars that will now go to other states), as well as programs and services that keep struggling families together and help parents be their children's first and best teachers.

Already we are seeing a 16 percent increase (2008 over 2007) in confirmed victims of child abuse or neglect, reflecting the fact that child maltreatment increases as unemployment rises and household incomes shrink.

Despite the proven benefits of early childhood programs such as home visits by nurses for at-risk families, the leadership of our state chose to balance the budget on the backs of our most vulnerable citizens, our children, rather than make the difficult decisions necessary to raise the revenue needed to provide for the health, safety and education of our children. It is a short-term strategy that is guaranteed to cost Michigan taxpayers more money down the road in terms of higher welfare caseloads, unhealthy children, higher dropout rates and increased criminal behavior by youths.

This must not be allowed to happen again. Please join us as we speak up and advocate for the children of Michigan. We need you to sign up for our e-mailed Action Alerts and to follow through by talking with your elected representative with one, clear message: Our children must be Michigan's top priority.

Let's make 2010 the year when we put the needs of children FIRST.


Jack Kresnak, President and CEO, Michigan's Children

Kids Count Released



The *Kids Count in Michigan 2009 Data Book* released Jan. 12 shows increases in child poverty, abuse and neglect – all of which are related to Michigan's high unemployment and declining family income.

Child poverty rose 6 percent between 2005 and 2007, with nearly one in five children living in poverty. Confirmed victims of abuse or neglect jumped 16 percent between 2000 and 2008, with nearly 30,000 children found to be abused or neglected in 2008.

The report also found that in 2008, well over 20,000 Michigan students who should have graduated that year had dropped out – that's 14 percent of the young people who began high school four years earlier. Another 13,500 students needed more than the traditional four years to graduate.

On the positive side, the report found child deaths dropped 18 percent, teen deaths fell 11 percent and infant mortality declined 4 percent between 2000 and 2007. Births to teens declined 20 percent over the decade.

Kids Count in Michigan is a collaboration of the Michigan League for Human Services, which researches and writes the reports, and Michigan's Children, which assists with dissemination of the data to communities across the state. Read more about the project at www.michiganschildren.org.



staffnews

Michigan's Children welcomes **Cynthia Burton** to the staff! Cynthia will oversee the new KidSpeak® Neighborhood News project (see cover story).

Cynthia spent 22 years working for daily newspapers in South Carolina, Pennsylvania and Michigan. She has been a reporter, copy editor, managing editor, assigning editor and most recently, the copy desk chief at the Detroit Free Press. She grew up in Arizona, served in the Air Force, and holds a bachelor's degree in journalism from the University of Maryland and a law degree from Wayne State University. She has two daughters and lives in Madison Heights.

Web Changes

Over the past several months, Michigan's Children has worked to improve its website to make it easier for you to find information important to you. Among the many changes are a streamlined main menu with corresponding sub-menus, automatically updated Latest News section, and a Library to easily locate key reports. Be sure to check out all of the changes at www.michiganschildren.org.

2010 Policy Agenda — cont. from pg. 1

Continuing down the path we are on cannot be an option. Vulnerable children and families are being devastated. The quality of life in Michigan has dropped substantially. Without decisive action, the future of Michigan is bleak.

Michigan's Children believes that children are the key to our economic future. In solving the state's budget problems, leaders must prioritize children as our next workforce and place all solutions on the table, including tax reform in order to create a sustainable base on which to rebuild Michigan's economy.

The Board of Directors of Michigan's Children has established the following policy agenda for our legislative and administrative advocacy during the 94th Legislative and 110th Congressional sessions.

The single best predictor of economic prosperity is a state's success in educating and preparing its workforce. To ultimately thrive in school and the work place, children need:

To be born healthy and have access to health care services.

MICHIGAN'S CHILDREN WILL WORK TO:

- Support federal and state health care reforms guaranteeing that all children are insured and have access to health care.
- Ensure adequate outreach for Medicaid and MICHild programs, and adequate funding for comprehensive coverage for all eligible children and young adults.
- Expand public funding for evidence-based health programs that promote prenatal care access, reduce rates of teenage pregnancy, and reduce high mortality and morbidity rates for African American and other at-risk infants and children.

To be raised by parents or caregivers who have the supports they need to be their children's first and best teachers.

MICHIGAN'S CHILDREN WILL WORK TO:

- Expand funding for home visiting and other parent support services proven to strengthen families and help young children thrive.
- Expand funding for proven child abuse and neglect prevention services, including the 0 to 3 Secondary Prevention program.
- Ensure the availability of adequate financial and other supports for relatives and other kin who provide child care, foster care or respite care.

To be guaranteed the opportunity to participate in high quality early learning programs.

MICHIGAN'S CHILDREN WILL WORK TO:

- Expand funding for preschool programs, and ensure access for children in full-day care.
- Secure adequate funding to improve the quality of child care settings, including sufficient levels of home inspectors to ensure that children are in safe, high quality programs while their parents work.

To be educated in high quality schools engaging parents and the community in preparing students for post-secondary education, work and life.

MICHIGAN'S CHILDREN WILL WORK TO:

- Expand federal and state incentives for communities and schools to provide multiple pathways to high school graduation, including alternative education, truancy prevention, credit recovery initiatives and innovative partnerships with community colleges and other local agencies.
- Establish incentives for schools to create community links aimed at strengthening educational opportunities and increasing parent involvement.
- Revise Michigan's "Zero Tolerance" suspension and expulsion policies that disproportionately affect youths of color and are much stricter than federal law, and create incentives for schools to establish effective discipline alternatives.

To live in communities that work together to provide services to children and families in the most impactful way.

MICHIGAN'S CHILDREN WILL WORK TO:

- Secure adequate funding to support Great Start Collaboratives in every Michigan county.
- Establish incentives for schools, workforce development, community colleges, local business and philanthropy, human services, and others to create community links aimed at meeting children's educational needs.

Michigan's Children will work with legislators and other policymakers through meetings, testimony at public hearings, and other communications to put forward this agenda. We also will give community leaders, parents and youths the tools they need to advocate on their own behalf by providing timely information on budget and policy issues affecting children, informing communities of opportunities to influence decision making, training community leaders and youths to be effective advocates, providing forums for children and youths to share with legislators and policymakers their perspectives on the problems they face growing up, and providing communities with necessary data about how local children are faring.

See how you can help advance our 2010 agenda at www.michiganschildren.org!

KidSpeak®

Neighborhood News

KSNN — cont. from pg. 1

"We are putting real faces to what often are faceless discussions among policy-makers who need to see the impact of their decisions on the lives they affect," said Jack Kresnak, President & CEO of Michigan's Children.

"Young people have a huge stake in the future of their communities and our state. Now, we will have an opportunity to hear directly from them about their lives and how they are affected every day by the world around them. Plus, they'll be learning real-world skills from a very talented group of current and former journalists."

The project, expected to launch in April, will focus on the Detroit area with participating youths being recruited from high schools and colleges within six neighborhoods: Vernor, Chadsey/Condon, Brightmoor, Osborn, Cody/Rouge and the Northend. It is hoped this work will become a model for creating information and news centers to reach youths in other under-served communities throughout Michigan.

Support for this project comes from The Skillman Foundation, as part of its Good Neighborhoods Program, and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, as part of its Knight Community Information Challenge, a five-year, \$24 million initiative to help community and place-based foundations find creative ways to use new media and technology to keep residents informed and engaged. The Good Neighborhoods Program, launched in 2006, provides full-scale support to six Detroit neighborhoods (listed above) containing roughly 30% of the city's child population, half of which live in poverty. The program encourages the creation of safe, healthy and vibrant neighborhoods where children, with support of caring adults, programs and experiences, can develop fully.

Michigan's Children thanks our funders for their support.

Already we have had a lot of interest from potential partners, youths and journalists wanting to participate in the project. If you would like more information or want to know how you can become involved, contact Cynthia Burton at Cynthia@michiganschildren.org.

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Representative Tim Melton



Justice Elizabeth Weaver with Jack Kresnak



Jack Kresnak and (Mrs. Kevin Kelly) present Thomas Cleary with the second annual Kevin A. Kelly Award.



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Representative Rashida Tlaib with Jack Kresnak



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