

March 17, 2010

Priorities for the Fiscal Year 2011 State Budget:

Supporting Families With Young Children

Background:

The state has no greater responsibility than protecting its children, and the Governor's budget continues to allocate the resources needed to comply with the state's settlement agreement in the Children's Rights lawsuit, including funding to make critical improvements in the state's foster care and protective services systems.

Unfortunately, the lawsuit does not address the state's efforts to strengthen families and prevent child abuse and neglect from occurring in the first place. Since FY 2000, funding for most of the major child abuse and neglect prevention programs has been cut, while the number of substantiated child abuse and neglect victims has grown. This year, many family support services were entirely eliminated.

During its most recent federal review, Michigan was cited for gaps in the services needed to keep children safely in their homes and out of foster care. Those gaps are both geographical and in terms of the array of services available. We believe that this continued erosion of funding for prevention services will subject more children to needless suffering, and will ensure that there is an ever-growing need for more costly state-funded services.

Recommendations for Fiscal Year 2011:

1. Restore budget language related to the allocation of 0 to 3 Secondary Prevention program dollars.

Until this year, funding for local 0 to 3 programs was administered by the Children's Trust Fund (CTF), and allocated on a competitive basis statewide. The funds were used for local services to prevent the maltreatment of the state's most vulnerable children, infants and toddlers. Budget boilerplate language authorized the use of those dollars for secondary prevention, or supports for high risk families *before* abuse and neglect occurred. At its peak in 2001, \$7.75 million was available through three state departments for the 0 to 3 program.

In the current year budget, funding was continued only in the DHS budget (\$3.8 million), and *contrary to legislative intent*, as expressed in boilerplate language in the FY 2010 DHS budget, the DHS: (1) shifted the administration of the funds from the CTF to DHS Children's Services; and (2) targeted all remaining funding to the five counties in the state with the largest urban areas. The DHS also focused funding on low-risk cases *that had already been referred to the DHS for abuse and neglect.*

The overall funding reduction in the 0 to 3 program, along with the redirection of funding to five urban counties, disrupted many effective programs and left many families with young children without critical supports. Recent Kids Count data show that child abuse and neglect are statewide problems, and are not more prevalent in urban counties.

- In 2008, over 182,000 children in Michigan lived in families that were investigated for child abuse or neglect, and over 29,000 were confirmed victims.
- Children in urban counties were less likely to be in families investigated for abuse or neglect, and were also less likely to be confirmed victims.

The key components of the boilerplate language that should be preserved are as follows: (1) language authorizing the allocation of funds to local community collaboratives and requiring that the services provided be part of the strategic plan or family support strategy of the community collaborative or local Great Start Collaborative; (2) language permitting the use of funds for secondary prevention, or services for at-risk families before child abuse and neglect are confirmed; and (3) language requiring interdepartmental collaboration and a competitive, statewide request for proposal process administered by the Children's Trust Fund.

2. Restore funding for the 0 to 3 Secondary Prevention program (\$2.9 million). The evidence for the 0 to 3 Secondary Prevention program is strong, with benefits both to children and to taxpayers. In fiscal year 2009, 0 to 3 Secondary Prevention was a statewide, community-based, collaborative program serving at-risk infants and toddlers (ages 0 to 3) and their parents in 47 of the state's 83 counties. The services provided included home visits (64%); services coordination (27%); and parenting education, support groups and counseling services (9%).

The initial appropriation in fiscal year 2009 was \$6,649,000, with approximately \$3.8 million appropriated through the DHS budget, and the remainder through the DCH and K-12 School Aid budgets. The program was reduced by \$1 million through an Executive Order, resulting in a 16 percent reduction in local agency grants between April and September of 2009. During that quarter, enrollments in local programs dropped significantly, and at least 1,500 fewer families were served than in 2008. While local program managers tried to find alternative services for families, there were few other resources available, particularly in rural areas of the state.

We believe that there is value in the collaborative nature of the project—at both the state and local levels, and whether funding is provided through a single or multiple budgets, we hope that budget language will be retained to require state departments and local community collaboratives to work together to meet the needs of young children.

There is strong evidence of the effectiveness of the 0 to 3 program both for young children and for taxpayers:

- Virtually all of the children (99.5%) served by the program in 2009 did not become substantiated victims of child maltreatment while enrolled. By contrast, a third of the children whose parents dropped out of 0-3 programs were substantiated victims that year.
- Children involved in the programs were more likely to have access to appropriate health care, with approximately 9 of every 10 having timely health screenings, well-child visits and immunizations.
- Over 90 percent of the pregnant women in the programs had the recommended number of prenatal care visits.
- For every \$1 invested in 0-3 Secondary Prevention services, \$6 is saved on the direct consequences of child abuse and neglect in this target population—a return on investment of 500 percent.