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New Report Proves Need To Prioritize Early Years *Right Start in Michigan 2010 Data Shows Huge Racial Disparities*

LANSING – Michigan’s Children President & CEO Jack Kresnak issued the following statement today in response to the release of the *Right Start in Michigan – 2010* report by the Kids Count in Michigan project showing wide racial and ethnic disparities in maternal and infant well-being:

“This report should serve as a wake-up call to our next governor and legislature that despite all the rhetoric, Michigan is not doing a good job of preparing all kids equally to be the skilled and educated workers we need to rebuild our state.

We all know that today’s jobs require more education, but how can we expect kids to learn if they aren’t healthy? How can they succeed if they are born already at a disadvantage, and the services that used to help them are being cut or ended?

Since 2001, the state has cut over \$4 billion, including funding for programs and services for our most vulnerable children and families. At the same time, progress on lowering teen birth rates has leveled off after decades of improvement, nearly one in ten babies in Michigan is born at low birthweight and see no improvement in that indicator, and one in five babies is born to a mother without a high school diploma.

The recently passed 2011 state budget continues devastating cuts in preschool and dropout prevention, the elimination of funding for teen parent counseling, cuts in prevention services for very young children, and cuts in vital health and mental health services.

In addition, the stark disparity in outcomes for babies and mothers depending on the community in which they live, suggests that targeted interventions are necessary. Without these targeted interventions and supports, disadvantaged children are more likely to become society’s future burden – dropouts, criminals, welfare recipients, teen parents.

But for every \$1 invested in high quality early care and education services for low-income children, the state saves as much as \$17 on welfare, criminal justice, special education and other social expenses while at the same time ensuring kids are ready to learn and succeed and move Michigan forward.

Michigan has an opportunity – and a responsibility – to do better for our children.

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With the approaching elections and change in leadership, great things can happen for children and families. Key changes Michigan needs are:

- A new revenue structure - In the coming year, Michigan must begin to address its structural deficit and devise a revenue structure that meets the needs of citizens.
- A Cradle to Career perspective – Michigan must adopt a birth to adulthood educational system integrating early learning and the k-12 system, and utilizing a bipartisan and interagency P-20 Council that has been successful in 38 other states.
- Improved access to health and mental health services, including health care coverage for all children and access to preventive services.
- Increased access to support services, including evidence-based home visiting services.
- Expanded access to high quality early learning programs, including child care and the Great Start Readiness program.

These steps will help our children, and investing in our children to prepare them to learn and lead is the way to turn around Michigan.”

To read more about the importance of early childhood or to access our library of Budget Basics reports detailing the impact of budget cuts on children and families, go to www.michiganschildren.org.

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. The report is available from the Michigan League for Human Services and on the web at www.milhs.org.

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Michigan’s Children is a statewide, independent voice for children and their families.

We work with lawmakers, business leaders and communities to make Michigan a place where all children have the opportunity to thrive.