

# Action Alert!

*Time-sensitive facts regarding legislation affecting Michigan's children and families.*

## for Child and Family Advocates



March 18, 2011

### **Federal Budget Advocacy Opportunity – Visit Your Senators Next Week!**

Every year, Congress and the President must agree on a federal budget that sets general funding levels for government programs. This year's process is complicated by the staggering deficit, a divided Congress and the fact that the battle is happening on two fronts:

- Funding levels for the remainder of fiscal year 2011 (FY11), which covers March 18 through Sep. 30, 2011, and
- Fiscal year 2012 (FY12) budget; President Obama released his FY12 budget proposal on Feb. 14, 2011.

Currently, funding for FY11 continues to be debated. Congress has voted on another stopgap measure to keep the government running through April 8<sup>th</sup>, also known as a Continuing Resolution, though funding the government for weeks at a time is no way to operate. In the meantime, Congress must decide on the budget for the remainder of the current fiscal year before they can move to the FY12 budget. Unfortunately, the House-passed measure – H.R. 1 – that would fund the remainder of the current fiscal year, cuts at least \$7 billion in non-security discretionary spending on children, a decrease of 8.2 percent compared to FY10 (9.7 percent cut in inflation adjusted terms).

The impact of the cuts in H.R. 1 will impact Michigan children and families in the following areas:

- Cuts to maternal and child health programs will impact 2.8 million Michigan residents including over 256,000 pregnant women, infants, and children who receive WIC benefits.
- More than 21,100 Michigan children could lose Head Start and child care.
- Nearly 125,000 individuals could lose comprehensive family planning and related preventive health services due to the proposed elimination of funding for the Title X Family Planning program.
- 337,000 Michigan students could find college less affordable because Pell grants would be cut by up to \$845 (\$598 on average).
- 166,700 Michigan workers, including older youth and young adults, could lose job training opportunities due to proposed elimination of Title I of the Workforce Investment Act.
- Halts funding for the Affordable Care Act, the federal health care reform that passed in early 2010.
- Cuts funding for elementary and secondary education.
- Cuts funding for community health centers, energy assistance, and other services for low-income families.

[See a full list of cuts in H.R. 1](#) that will impact children, youth and families.

The Senate has yet to agree on a budget bill for the remainder of FY11. Votes were casted for both [H.R. 1](#) as well as an amendment to H.R. 1 – [Amendment Number 149](#). Amendment 149, proposed by Senator Inouye (D-HI) provides significantly less cuts to the FY11 budget compared to H.R. 1, though it includes cuts to critical children and youth programs. Neither H.R. 1 nor Amendment 149 passed through the Senate, so the Senate continues to debate the budget for the remainder of FY11. However, time is of the essence as piecing together the FY11 budget through stopgap measures will negatively impact children and family services.

## **What You Can Do**

Members of Congress are expected to be back in their districts next week, the week of March 21<sup>st</sup>. Now is the time to schedule face-to-face visits with your Congressional delegation to discuss the importance of your programs to Michigan children and families.

**Go to a public event arranged by the Senator's office:** Many senators are holding town meetings, "meet-'n-greet" events, or other forums where they can speak with constituents. [Call Senator Stabenow and Senator Levin's offices nearest you](#) and find out whether they will be staging an event you can attend. If there is one, make plans to attend, preferably with at least a few other advocates. Here are some important steps:

Be prepared with a question that incorporates a brief statement, such as:

"Senator, thanks for voting against the extreme cuts in the House spending plan earlier this month. I work at (service provider agency), [and/or] in our area, cuts are already being felt in [program example]. We have high poverty and joblessness, and cuts in [community health centers, Head Start, job training, education...] will make things even worse. We'll never reduce the deficit if you don't fund the services that support children and families through this recession. As you work on approving final spending for this fiscal year and move on to plans for next year, will you oppose cuts that hurt Michigan's most vulnerable citizens, ***including restrictive caps on all spending that will inevitably cut needed services***, and support investments with proven outcomes?"

Modify the question so that it applies to you and your community. If appropriate, ask the senator if s/he would be willing to visit a service provider site in your area sometime soon, to see the value of the services provided. If you aren't given a chance to ask the question during the event/forum, try to catch the senator on the way out and ask then.

**Arrange for your senator to visit a service provider site:** [Call the senator's local office](#) now to invite him/her to your agency (child care center, Head Start program, community health center, training program, school, etc.). If s/he is unable to come the week of March 21<sup>st</sup>, ask for a visit during the next recess, April 18-29. Give the senator an opportunity to meet agency staff and the children and families it serves. If possible, make it an event and get press attention. Consider incorporating a meeting in which the senator can hear from people representing a range of services that help children and families, inviting other agencies or organizations. Consider doing a press statement before and/or after the visit; if there is press coverage, follow up with a letter to the editor to amplify your points.

**If the Senator is in the news during the recess, write a letter to the editor** making the connection to the need to protect children and families from harsh cuts. For example: "Senator X was right to focus on the need to invest in education. That's why, as a constituent and [service provider, etc., or, as a constituent concerned about the urgent need to protect services for children], I am counting on Senator X to oppose foolhardy cuts, not only in education but also in nutrition, child care, health care, and education. Children who are hungry, sick, or unsupported are more likely to fall behind in school and unable to catch-up. Senator X did the right thing by opposing the extreme cuts to these and other programs in the House spending plan. (S)He needs to take the lead in fighting for the necessary investments in our future in the budget decisions still before Congress."

### Excerpts from:

- Coalition on Human Needs: [www.chn.org](http://www.chn.org).
- First Focus: [www.firstfocus.net](http://www.firstfocus.net).
- National Women's Law Center: [www.nwlc.org](http://www.nwlc.org).