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# Kresnak: What does Michigan gain by slashing programs for kids?

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**JACK KRESNAK** is president of Michigan's Children, a Lansing-based advocacy group.

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Do kids count in Michigan?

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After cutting more than \$4 billion from the state budget - much of it in services to children and their families - Michigan has reached a dangerous crossroads. Faced with a \$2.7 billion budget gap, Gov. Jennifer Granholm and legislative leaders are poised to yet again balance the budget on the backs of vulnerable children, making our state poorer in the long run and putting our kids' futures at risk.

The proposed cuts will virtually ensure that more families will struggle to meet their children's basic physical and emotional needs, more children will be placed in expensive foster care, more kids will enter school ill-prepared to learn, and more teenagers will drop out of school.

## Consider This:

Between 2000 and 2007, there were nearly 2,500 more cases of confirmed child abuse and neglect in Michigan, yet funding for most major child abuse and neglect prevention programs has been cut drastically. We know that severe economic downturns lead to more child abuse and neglect. We should be bolstering these programs not cutting them.

At the same time, the number of Michigan children living in poverty jumped 40 percent to 140,000 - that's 1 out of every 5 kids. Yet the state is considering reducing the already miniscule Family Independence Program grants and reducing the annual clothing allowance from \$88 per child to \$43.

Lawmakers also are considering eliminating Michigan's preschool program for 26,000 at-risk 4-year-olds despite irrefutable evidence that preschool significantly increases school achievement.

Michigan's economic recovery is predicated on young people being ready for post-secondary, work and life, yet lawmakers are considering cutting adult education and educational options and support programs that will leave thousands of young people less likely to graduate.

Also on the chopping block is funding for medical and mental health services to 35,000 kids throughout the state and ending respite services for children with severe emotional disturbances.

Michigan cannot continue to cut spending to match depleted revenues as a result of an outdated tax system based on lost industries and practices. Michigan's structural deficit will continue to choke off progress until it is fixed.

Rather than keep trying to cut our way out of this budget mess by hacking away at vital programs and

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services, we must reform Michigan's tax system to ensure that our children are clothed, fed, protected and prepared to be tomorrow's leaders and workers.

We must create a fair tax system by changing what and how we tax - not necessarily raising taxes, but reforming them. Part of the solution rests in closing tax loopholes, which would restore more than \$400 million in state revenues annually and help avert painful budget cuts.

But we must be open to other solutions as well, and we encourage Granholm and all lawmakers to examine all the options and place them on the table for citizen review and input.

Our children deserve strong leadership in difficult times.

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