

## **New Opportunities to Make Gains for Kids and Families as Lawmakers Return to Work**

*August 26, 2016* – After a summer break from Capitol duties, full of campaigning for themselves and their colleagues, the Michigan Legislature is slated to return to Lansing for their first day of the fall session the week after Labor Day. The House and Senate have, at most, 20 days together before the end of the legislative session to finish everything that has been started this legislative session but much work is still left undone. They have the opportunity to make a real difference this fall in a few key areas.

### **#1 Child Care.**

In a move seen by family advocates as decidedly short-sighted and wasteful, if the state fails to provide its fair share to a program created to help struggling families with child care costs by the end of September – an amount totaling \$6.5 million – it will be foregoing \$20.5 million in federal aid. Despite having one of the worst child care systems in the country, Michigan is one of only a handful of states that has returned federal child care money. What's particularly alarming now is this: Never in the history of the child care subsidy program has a state returned such a sizeable sum of federal dollars.

To forgo federal child care funds of this magnitude by not devoting state matching funds is clearly neither family-friendly nor economically prudent. As the economy continues to improve, the ability of low-income workers to pay for child care – a cost rivaling rent for many lower-wage earners – will continue to compromise their ability to work and fill the demands of a growing economy.

We've written about the importance of [state support for child care subsidies](#) in the [Child Development and Care Program](#) and now it's time to turn on the heat. It's imperative that we save these federal dollars for the important work necessary to help Michigan families and providers of child care. The system is broken with one of the lowest income eligibility levels and subsidy rates in the nation.

### **#2 Early On**

Michigan continues to ignore the needs of the *Early On* program, which supports families of young children (0-3) with developmental delays and disabilities. While the state agreed to increasing support to Flint in the wake of the water crisis, the rest of the state continues to struggle to provide adequate services. Now, Michigan's Children and partners are urging the State to figure out how Medicaid funds can be maximized in Michigan to support *Early On* services – \$25,000 to commission this study was included in the House-passed FY2017 budget but was not included in the final budget. It is not too late to inform urge your lawmakers – particularly your Senators – to support for a Medicaid study to maximize this resource for *Early On*.

### **#3 Foster Care**

The Children's Assurance of Quality Foster Care Act, HBs 4976-4978, introduced last December and passed through the House, has yet to be discussed in a Senate Committee. [The 3-bill package](#) has the potential to provide better support for the 13,000 children in the state's care and their caregivers. This will be the third consecutive Legislative session similar bills have been introduced. While Michigan's Children is working with Legislators on a few needed improvements, with bi-partisan support this time, it will be a major disappointment if these bills aren't approved by the end of the year.

### **#4 Juvenile Justice**

Another package that didn't win final action, one that will change the state's practice of automatically sending 17-year-olds offenders to the adult corrections system, has a good chance of moving through the Senate when the Legislature returns, but the clock is ticking. All but nine states including Michigan adjudicate 17-year-olds into their juvenile justice system. If this legislation doesn't pass through the Senate and move to the Governor's desk by the end of the calendar year, efforts will have to begin again in both chambers in 2017.

As we enter the post-Labor Day phase of the general election, attracting state lawmaker attention will not be a simple feat when most House members are running for re-election, and everyone in the House and Senate campaigning for themselves or for colleagues. But power is in numbers, and as campaigning ramps up after Labor Day and through to November, we must raise these issues where we find Legislators and candidates on the campaign trail. Check out our [Act Now page](#) and send a strong message to Lansing to get the job done!

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