

Action Alert!

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

for Child and Family Advocates



September 23, 2016

Time Is Running Out: Urge Senators to Pass the Children's Assurance of Quality Foster Care Act House Bills 4976, 4977 and 4978

The barriers faced by children, youth and their families currently in the foster care system, as well as foster, kinship and adoptive caregivers are often great; and the dismal educational and life outcomes for too many young people who have been served by that system are unacceptable. Common concerns raised when talking with young people and caregivers include:

- lack of immediate access to essential services, including basic needs like housing and physical or mental health services, and child care;
- lack of educational success because of frequent moves and inadequate support;
- unnecessary gaps in services for young people transitioning to adulthood including homelessness;
- limited recourse for complaints and advocacy for young people in care.

The Michigan House of Representatives has passed a package of bills that are a step in the right direction in addressing some of these barriers and improving outcomes. The [Children's Assurance of Quality Foster Care Act](#) (HB 4976, 4977 and 4978) would make law Department of Health and Human Services policy, and increase state accountability for better service access for children and youth in the foster care system. While these bills aren't perfect, they will provide added protections; and will help give advocates a stronger platform to work from to push for increased investments moving forward.

This is the sixth year that this issue has been discussed in the Michigan Legislature. The current legislative session ends at the end of this year, and anything that has not passed through both the Michigan House and Senate expires. That means the bills would have to be re-drafted and the process through the Legislature would have to start all over again in 2017.

There is still time to get these bills through the Legislature and to the Governor to sign, but we have to act quickly. Before the end of this year, the bills have to:

1. Be discussed and acted on by the Senate Families, Seniors and Human Services Committee <http://www.senate.michigan.gov/committee/families.html>. This Committee is chaired by Sen. Judy Emmons, who is an advocate for this work, but she is running out of time and has competing priorities for work the Committee needs to complete before the end of the session.
2. Be discussed and passed by the full Senate. What the Senate prioritizes is in large part dictated by the Senate Majority Leader, Sen. Arlan Meekhof. Without the support of Senate leadership <http://www.senate.michigan.gov/SenatorInfo/leadership.html>, the bills could pass out of committee, but not be acted on by the full Senate.

3. If the Committee or the full Senate make any changes in the bills, they would have to be agreed on by the full House. Rep. Tom Hooker, who leads the House Committee on Families, Children and Seniors, will have a big role in getting to that agreement, and it would also need the support of the Speaker of the House, Rep. Kevin Cotter, to make it into full House discussion.

This can be done! Because the bills are already through the 1st half of the process, they have a real chance of passing but they need help to make it over the remaining hurdles. There is broad, bipartisan support for these bills, but the Legislature needs to know that you want them to prioritize these bills.

Join Michigan's Children now to give our Legislature the opportunity to finish this critical legislation. The kinds of protections included in this package of bills are a good step in making sure that we are doing the best by all of the children, youth and families who come into contact with the foster care system:

1. Call or email [Senator Emmons](#) and urge her to put the Children's Assurance of Quality Foster Care Act bills on her Committee's agenda as quickly as possible. Michigan's Children staff met with the Senator recently, and she is interested in the bills. With your help, we can move her to action! 517-373-3760; senjemmons@senate.mi.gov
2. Call or email [Senator Meekof](#) and tell him that when these bills move out of Committee, they need to see Senate action as quickly as possible. 517-373-6920; senameekof@senate.mi.gov
3. Call or email [Representative Cotter](#) and let him know to take swift action to concur when these bills pass through the Senate. 517-373-1789; KevinCotter@house.mi.gov
4. Call or email [your Senators and Representatives](#) and let them know that you think that these bills MUST pass before the end of the year, and ask for their support in their own votes and to urge support from their colleagues. Often Legislators are the best allies in getting the support of other Legislators.

Your voice matters. Use it!

If you have any questions, please contact Michele Corey at michele@michiganschildren.org. [Read our testimony](#) on the bills, and let's help our Legislators get the job done on this package of bills.