

State Legislature Finishes Budget, MIECHV Re-Authorization and Health Care Poised to Move in D.C.

After having finally reached an agreement with Governor Snyder on a reform to the Michigan Public Schools Employee Retirement System (MPSERS), the state Legislature has completed its work on the fiscal year 2018(FY18) budget and the bills have been sent to the Governor. As has been the practice for the last several years, individual budget bills were combined into two omnibus bills, HB4323 for General Fund spending and HB4313 for the Education budgets. In general, the final budget bills are seen as an improvement over earlier versions that had emerged from the Legislature, but not quite as good as Governor Snyder's original FY18 budget proposal. The Governor is expected to sign the bills soon with very few, if any, line-item vetoes. Some highlights of the final budget include:

- Over \$39 million in new child care spending including rate increases for providers serving children eligible for subsidized child care payments (\$24.3 million), increasing the eligibility threshold from 125% of the federal poverty level(fpl) to 130% of fpl (\$5.5 million), funding for comprehensive fingerprinting and background checks of all childcare providers and staff (\$7.1 million), technology improvements to DHHS to implement the rate increase and update their system (\$1.5 million) and funding for the TEACH scholarship to increase credit-based educational opportunities for child care providers that are trying to increase their great start to quality star rating (\$1 million).
- \$120 million increase to At-Risk funding for schools and expands the definition of At-Risk to include all pupils who are eligible for free or reduced price lunch, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), or are homeless, migrant, or in foster care.
- \$3.6 million increase to fund the expansion of the Michigan Youth Opportunity Initiative (MYOI) which provides services to youth aging out of the foster care system.

In Washington, D.C., a group of Republican U.S. House members have introduced a bill to re-authorize the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program. MIECHV supports evidence-based, voluntary and locally implemented home visiting models in Michigan and across the country and is set to expire on Oct. 1st and needs to be re-authorized by Congress. The Republican plan re-authorizes the program for five years at a flat funding level, falling short of the phased in doubling of the program that advocates have been calling for. The Republican plan also requires states to match the federal investment with other spending,

which could pose a problem in many states, including Michigan. The House Ways and Means committee is expected to take up the legislation next week and amendments are anticipated.

Also in Washington this week, the much anticipated Senate Republican plan to repeal Obamacare was finally unveiled to the general public and Senate Democrats alike. As expected, the Senate plan is similar to the version that passed the U.S. House of Representatives this Spring in that it will dramatically reduce Medicaid spending in future years. If passed in its current form, this bill would dramatically impact access to health care for children and young adults in Michigan and potentially devastate future Michigan budgets. Michigan's overall state budget is incredibly reliant on the maintenance of stable federal funding, especially in the area of programs that support children and families facing challenges. The health care debate, as well as the federal budget debate that is starting to take place behind the scenes in Congress, will have a lasting impact on virtually every program that supports children and families in Michigan and across the country. It will be essential for advocates who care about kids to engage with their Congressional representatives as these debates continue, especially when your members of Congress are home on recess during these Summer months.

Matt Gillard is the President and CEO of Michigan's Children, the only statewide independent voice working to ensure that public policies are made in the best interest of children from cradle to career, their families and their communities.