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Parents, Kids, Caregivers Call for Improved Social Services in Michigan

Families, professionals, and federal and state policymakers discuss the state of child services

With the prospect of federal cuts to programs that fund health care, foster care, and other social services for youth looming, dozens of families gathered on Wednesday, August 23, at the Judson Center in Royal Oak and at the Children's Center in Detroit to host a group of lawmakers for tours of the centers and a dialogue with families and service providers on the state of social services in Michigan.

Among the state and federal legislators were State Representatives Klint Kesto (R-39) and Hank Vaupel (R-47), who co-chair the bi-partisan House C.A.R.E.S. (Community, Access, Resources, Education and Safety) Task Force, which aims to reform mental health services statewide.

Parents lamented the lack of resources and training programs for foster parents, low wages that drive social workers and mental health professionals to other industries, and the lack of mental health care services for all youth, especially in schools.

Matt Gillard, President and CEO of Michigan's Children, a statewide independent nonprofit advocacy group for children's issues that helped organize the event, says now is the time for Michigan to pay attention to the grass roots. "Policymakers need to engage with kids, families, and those who support them. Their stories provide important feedback about the programs our tax dollars support and can tip off legislators to problems that need addressing."

"I think the families who came out today were very clear: we need more mental health care, we need it in schools, and we need it to be carried out by professionals who are paid competitively. Investing in mental health will help every child in Michigan lead healthier, more productive, and more fulfilling lives, and will save the State of Michigan a fortune down the road."

"We thank our local lawmakers, funders, agencies, consumers and community members for joining us, and for hearing first hand from our families about the need for our services," said Lenora Hardy-Foster, President & CEO of the Judson Center. "Our goal was not only to shine a light on what we do, but also provide insight on how young lives can be positively impacted when provided the essential social services to thrive."

"Our purpose is to improve the lives of children and families in Greater Detroit," said Debora Matthews, President & CEO of The Children's Center. "We want nothing less for the children and families we serve, than any of us would want for our own children and family. They deserve that, regardless of the challenges they face and the circumstances they were born into. It takes all of us working together, from our neighborhoods to the State Capital and beyond."

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Michigan's Children is the only statewide independent voice working to ensure that public policies are made in the best interest of children and their families from cradle to career. Our emphasis is on influencing public policies that close equity gaps and ensure that children and youth who face the most challenges have the supports they need to succeed in school and life.

The Judson Center is a non-profit human service agency that provides compassionate, comprehensive services to children and families throughout southeast Michigan. Since opening in 1924, they now provide services to more than 4,000 children, adults and families each year. Their work changes fates and restores childhoods for children who have been abused and neglected, and others who are challenged by developmental disabilities, severe emotional impairments and autism spectrum disorder. Judson Center has remained responsive to these and other community needs by providing a range of innovative and quality services and serving as a resource for healing and a leader in human services.

The Children's Center was founded in 1929 by former Detroit Mayor and United States Senator James Couzens as one of the first child guidance centers in the United States, The Children's Center has grown to be the Michigan child and family agency offering the largest number of specialized therapy programs for at-risk children and youth. It serves more than 7,500 children and families annually through behavioral, social and emotional health services.