

Michigan's Children 2018 Policy Priorities: Holding the Line & Seizing Opportunities for Michigan's Children and Families



2018 is a critical year for Michigan's future, with continued uncertainty around our nation's and state's long-term priorities. We will continue to prioritize policies driven by research, best practice, and the stories and recommendations of children, youth, families and the programs that serve them well, closing equity gaps and improving the odds for Michigan's future.

A State Budget That Invests in Kids

Michigan's over-reliance on the federal budget to support essential services is particularly worrying with federal disinvestment looming, making our decisions about state investment more important than ever. In 2018, we're calling for investment to ensure healthy transitions from infancy into school, strong pathways into adulthood for youth most in need, and holistic supports for learners of all ages.

- Early On Developmental Services: Statewide funds in Early On would boost the quality and range of available services varies by county and provide families with the tools they need to play positive roles in their child's development.
- Child Care: Michigan's child care subsidy eligibility and reimbursement rates remain among the poorest in the country, restricting access and quality.
- Trauma Prevention: Local initiatives and services funded through the Children's Trust Fund are proven to strengthen families and build resilience to trauma and adverse childhood experiences.
- Student and Family Learning Supports: Students deserve counseling, physical and mental health, and other services that nurture their learning in partnership with families and caregivers.
- Michigan Youth Opportunities Initiative & Fostering Futures: Children and youth in the foster care system require special investment to address their trauma, support their caregivers, bolster their learning, and support their adult success.

A Model for Tax Reform for Kids and Families

Federal tax reform will likely result in limited benefits to families and extraordinary risk to funding for critical programs. Decisions to reduce or return revenues often result in cuts to essential programs and services, essentially a loss for families. But Michigan has its own tax code too. The 2018 elections are an opportunity to shift the conversation about what we can do with our scarce resources in future years – tax credits are an expenditure, and like any other spending item they need to be targeted to where the greatest need is. We can target tax expenditures to children, youth, and families in need:

- Enact a fully refundable Michigan Child Tax Credit (CTC): While federal tax reform included a modest expansion of the CTC, Michigan can become the third state in the US to provide its own child tax credit whose benefits extend to the most underserved families.
- An Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) for young adults currently or formerly in foster care: The EITC is one of America's and Michigan's most effective anti-poverty policies, but its minimum age of 25 for single earners means that youth transitioning from foster care, who are living independently and working, miss out.
- A Workforce Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) for foster care: The federal WOTC is an incentive to hire certain vulnerable groups like veterans, people with disabilities, and ex-felons. Michigan can extend this credit to hire youth currently or formerly in the foster care system, who tend to experience high unemployment rates.

- Child care tax credits: Michigan's child care system remains significantly underfunded, but we can support families, providers, and small businesses with a series of child care tax credits that would drastically improve both access and quality.

Crafting Thoughtful Policy

We're also looking at policy changes large and small to make sure that state investments in child welfare and child care are as effective as possible.

- Pass the "Children's Assurance of Foster Care Quality" Act: For years, youth and families have demanded a #FosterQuality package to ensure that kids have a true voice in the system. We will be working to improve it while it goes through the Senate and then to the Governor's desk.
- Reform the Fostering Futures Scholarship: Young people who have experienced foster care need unique help with post-secondary paths. Streamlining the state scholarship so young people can utilize it to their full advantage and maximize the state's investment.
- Rethink caseload consensus budget adjustments: The way Michigan spends its Child Care and Development block grant, which provides federal support for state child care programs, does not maximize the value of the grant each year. We should allow the Michigan Department of Education more flexibility to invest in access and quality.

We can make change happen. Join us in immediate opportunities to influence public policy debates as well as long-term opportunities to shift the conversations taking place in Lansing and Washington, D.C. Throughout the year, we will work to inform our network on issues that policymakers are debating and effective ways to get involved in public policy discussions impacting the children, youth and their families around the state.

Michigan's Children is the only statewide independent voice working to ensure that public policies are made in the best interest of children from cradle to career and their families. Our emphasis is on influencing public policies that close equity gaps and ensure that the children and youth who face the most challenges have the supports they need to succeed in school and life. By working to reform public policy, we improve the odds for all children, and support the work of those who provide services that help individual children overcome the odds.