



*Public policy
in the best interest
of children*

Contact: Matt Gillard, President and CEO, Michigan's Children
(517) 485-3500 (office)
(517) 488-9129 (cell)

Immediate Release

News Release

**Lansing Area Youth Lead Candidate Forum in 8th Congressional,
23rd and 24th State Senate, 68th and 69th State House Races on Oct. 16 at LCC**

LANSING, Mich. – In a departure from typical election-year forums, Michigan's Children will host a forum for candidates running in the 8th Congressional, 23rd and 24th State Senate, and 68th and 69th State House districts on **Tuesday, October 16th, 2018** with Lansing area youths from juvenile justice and foster care backgrounds serving as questioners.

Participating youth, between the ages of 16 and 20, will represent forum partners -- LCC's Fostering Stars Program, Ingham Academy/ Ingham County Circuit Court, Peckham, Inc., and Fostering Success Michigan. To prepare, they have been taking notes, researching candidate platforms, and practicing their speeches. None have shared their personal stories on a political stage before.

The non-partisan forum is scheduled for **4:00 pm – 5:30 pm** in Michigan Room 1128, Gannon Building Conference Center, **Lansing Community College (LCC)**. Candidates will be given equal time for each answer.

Sarah Britton, Director of Youth Services for Peckham, Inc., said the youth plan to describe how their lives, families and communities have been impacted by the foster care system, the Flint Water Crisis, bullying, and gun violence, among other issues. "These are issues we all care about but they have personal experience with," she said. "The responses from the candidates are important for all of us to hear as we get ready to cast our votes this election."

This is one in a series of forums sponsored by Michigan's Children, a statewide advocacy and public policy organization, and 25 other nonprofits and agencies this election season. Other forums in Bay City, Rochester, Fremont, Wyoming, Holland, Novi, Jackson and Kalamazoo will explore and compare candidates' positions on the shortcomings of the **state's child care system, juvenile justice, family stability** including economic struggles, **childhood trauma and toxic stress, adult and child literacy**, improvements in **K-12 education**, and **access to mental health services**.

The intent is to help office-seekers develop a deeper understanding of the challenges facing today's children and families, and after the election, to connect lawmakers with youth, families and agencies working to make a difference.

“Unfortunately, our state currently fails many of its youngest citizens,” said Matt Gillard, President and CEO of Michigan’s Children, the Lansing-based public policy and advocacy group. “Data in the annual Kids Count reports shows us that Ingham County struggles with high school completion rates, and ranks near the bottom of the state. Michigan ranks at or near the bottom third of states in a range of child well-being indicators, from low reading and math test scores to rising abuse and neglect rates to the sixth-highest rate of children living in high-poverty neighborhoods in the country.

“For this to turn around, we desperately need informed office-seekers to hear from the kids and families they want to serve and to understand there are strong policy solutions in each of these areas.”

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.



Peckham Youth Services provides quality, evidence based services to court involved youth/young adults and other youth facing barriers to employment. Programs focus on vocational planning designed to equip students with the skills, training, education, and opportunities to secure a career and conquer any obstacles in the way. Students can really go anywhere from here. Peckham Inc. works to provide opportunities to maximize human potential for a person searching for independence and self-sufficiency.

Ingham Academy is a day treatment program for court adjudicated youth that is operated by three agencies - Ingham County Circuit Court, Ingham Intermediate School District, and Highfields. Ingham ISD provides the educational program for children placed in the Academy by the Ingham County Circuit Court. Highfields provides behavior treatment and support to the program. This partnership between the three agencies has been in effect since 2007, providing these high risk students a path to learning the life-skills necessary to be productive members of society while earning a high school diploma.



Fostering Students Transforming, Achieving, and Realizing Success, or STARS offers support and resources to foster youth alumni ages 15 to 22 to improve graduation and career achievement rates. The

Fostering STARS program provides life skills coaches, academic support, transportation assistance, specific emergency assistance, and networking opportunities. The life skills coaches are trained in providing guidance, empowerment, and improvement in all areas of life.