

Trifecta of Problems Call for Us to Work Even Harder

With so much focus this week on the health care debate that, as I write this, is still raging in the U.S. House of Representatives in Washington, D.C., it is important to point out that federal budget discussions are underway in Congress as well, and any decisions made on the federal budget have a dramatic impact on children and families in Michigan. We have talked about the dramatic [impact significant changes to the Medicaid system](#) could have in Michigan and this possibility, combined with the simultaneous federal and state budget discussions, create the potential of a nightmare trifecta for children, youth and families in Michigan. Michigan's overall [state budget is incredibly reliant](#) on the maintenance of stable federal funding, especially for programs that support children and families facing challenges.

Last week, President Trump released his "Skinny Budget," or Budget Blueprint outlining his budget priorities for fiscal year 2018. The Administration's full budget is not expected to be released until April or May. The proposal President Trump released maintains the current \$1.065 trillion spending level set by the Budget Control Act of 2011, but increases defense spending by \$54 billion and decreases non-defense spending by the same amount. The budget also calls on Congress to cut current fiscal year funding (which Congress must vote on by April 24th when the stop-gap measure ends) for non-defense discretionary programs by \$18 billion to partially offset proposed increases for defense and homeland security.

This budget recommends extraordinarily large cuts to essential supports for families and children such as health care, nutrition, housing, education, transportation, heating, and after school care that would be devastating to children and families in Michigan. Meanwhile, the budget identified early care and education as one of the "highest priorities" of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), but it does not address either the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) or Head Start directly, and cuts the overall HHS budget by \$15.1 billion or 18%. It will be extremely difficult to adequately fund CCDBG or Head Start with such a large cut to the agency that administers these programs; impossible for the programs to function in the context of extreme cuts in other basic needs services to families; and in reality, far more funding is needed. There is a 13 percent cut recommended for the Department of Education and the recommendation completely eliminates the Department's 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program, Michigan's primary source of public funding for expanded learning programs, which provide critical after school and summer learning opportunities for thousands of school aged children in Michigan.

In the Michigan Legislature, the fiscal year 2018 budget process continues with Appropriations sub-committees expected to vote on individual departmental budgets as early as next week. We haven't seen budget proposals, but indications are, despite the defeat of the income tax cut proposal in the House of Representatives in February, legislative leadership is likely to

significantly reduce the spending proposed by the Governor to lay the groundwork for re-considering the income tax vote.

These three scenarios playing out concurrently in our state and federal legislatures, present an enormous challenge to children and families in Michigan. Now more than ever, it is imperative for constituents who care about kids and families to [let their elected officials at all levels know](#) that, at an absolute minimum, they expect them to hold children, youth and families harmless as they ensure our investments support policy and practice that improve their outcomes.

Matt Gillard is the President & 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 and their families.