

## State Budget Debate in Final Stages

The process to determine how the state of Michigan will spend \$56 billion in the next fiscal year is nearing its completion as both the House of Representatives and the Senate have passed their respective versions of the state's fiscal year 2018 (FY18) budget. The budget bills will now head to Conference Committees where the differences between the House and Senate versions will be worked out. The conference committees will consist of six members of the Legislature, three each from the House and Senate, and are typically filled by chairs and vice-chairs of the Appropriations sub-committees. The May Consensus Revenue Estimating Conference is scheduled for Wednesday, May 17<sup>th</sup>, where leaders from the Senate Fiscal Agency, House Fiscal Agency, and the state Treasurer will convene to determine how much money the state has to spend next year. After the Revenue Estimating Conference, the conference committees will be given final target numbers for what they can spend in their respective budgets. If the rest of this process is any guide, they will then make decisions swiftly with limited public conversation.

From an advocacy perspective, the opportunity now lies with all members of the Legislature, as those that are appointed to the conference committees will be representing their colleagues in the final negotiations. While many of the issues Michigan's Children has prioritized in the budget debate have generally been agreed to by the House and the Senate, including increased funding for child care and At-Risk funding for schools, a few important issues remain unresolved. A big opportunity still under discussion is the Governor's proposed increased funding for the Michigan Youth Opportunity Initiative (MYOI.) Another critical initiative potentially on the chopping block is the Fostering Futures Scholarship Program. Both of these initiatives aimed at providing resources to children in the foster care system as they further their education through and beyond high school. The House budget agrees to Governor Snyder's increase for MYOI, but the Senate plan does not. The Senate maintained funding for Fostering Futures, but the House did not. Now is the time to contact your state Representative and Senator and let them know these programs provide life-changing opportunities to young people who have had to endure difficult situations growing up and urge them to support their funding.

In Washington, D.C., despite all of the distractions being created by the White House, Congress is gearing up for a budget battle of their own. The Trump Administration has promised to present their FY 2018 spending plan to Congress the week of May 22<sup>nd</sup>. This will begin a federal budget process that will need to be completed by October 1<sup>st</sup>. There is a tremendous amount of anxiety from child advocacy organizations across the country as the President has indicated he plans to significantly reduce spending on non-defense programs in order to pay for increased defense spending and the construction of a southern border wall. Stay tuned to [michiganschildren.org](http://michiganschildren.org) and future bulletins as we will bring you information on the federal budget fight as it develops.

*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.*