

A Budget Breakthrough in Lansing

Final negotiations on the FY2018 Michigan budget are now taking place. Legislative leaders and the Governor were at an impasse over whether or not to significantly reform the Michigan Public Schools Employee Retirement System (MPSERS). House and Senate Republicans wanted to eliminate pension benefits for new hires and transition all new employees into a straight 401k type system. Governor Snyder was concerned about the costs to the State to make the transition and resistant to the idea. Finally, on Thursday, an agreement was reached to modify the system but still allow a pension option for new teachers. This breakthrough will now allow the Snyder Administration to participate in the final negotiations on the FY2018 state budget. The Legislature had been proceeding with final negotiations without input from the Governor's team and had reduced overall spending by about \$485 million from the Governor's proposal to offset the costs of a transition away from a pension option. The new agreement is expected to cost significantly less than that amount.

While many of the issues Michigan's Children has prioritized in the state budget debate have generally been agreed to by the House and the Senate, and others no longer in play in this year's discussion, we are still watching how these final negotiations play out. The Legislature and Governor have an opportunity to prioritize programs that provide life-changing opportunities to young people who have had to endure difficult situations growing up like the Michigan Youth Opportunity Initiative (MYOI), and provide needed increased investments to our subsidized child care system and At-Risk funding. Legislative activity on the MPSERS reform and the FY2018 state budget is expected to wrap up next week, as the Legislature is eager to begin their summer recess. There aren't scheduled opportunities for citizen input at this point in the process, but with negotiations continuing, Legislators are still able to act on your recommendations, so keep talking with them.

Despite the controversy that continues to surround the White House and the United States Senate's focus on repealing Obamacare and current damaging budget proposals, there is a potential bright spot for child advocates beginning to emerge from Washington, D.C. The Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program supports evidence-based, voluntary and locally implemented home visiting models in Michigan and across the country. MIECHV is set to expire on Oct. 1st and needs to be re-authorized by Congress. Bi-partisan support, a rarity in Washington these days, is beginning to emerge around MIECHV, and this week a group of Republican members of the House Ways and Means committee introduced a bill to extend the program. It will be imperative for members of Congress to hear from their constituents about the importance of re-authorizing and expanding MIECHV, and adequately funding the program without too much additional burden on states or cutting funding for other critical programs that serve vulnerable families.

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.