



Public policy
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Immediate Release

News Release

Kalamazoo Youths Ask the Questions in Candidate Forum in 20th State Senate, 60th & 61st State House Races on Oct. 29 at Fetzer Center

Kalamazoo, Mich. – In a departure from typical election-year forums, Michigan's Children will host a forum for candidates running in the **20th State Senate District, and 60th and 61st State House districts on Monday, Oct. 29, 2018**, with area youth drawing from their own experiences to ask the questions. The forum is one in a series across the state with youth and families facing off with political hopefuls in the upcoming November General Elections.

The non-partisan forum is scheduled for **6:30 pm - 8:30 pm** at the **Fetzer Center's Kirsch Auditorium on the campus of Western Michigan University at 2251 Business Court, Kalamazoo**. Candidates will be given equal time for each answer. Participating partners include **ASK Family Services** and the **Kalamazoo Youth Development Network**.

Tina Robbins, Executive Director, ASK Family Services, said the forum provides a chance to show that youths' concerns do matter.

"Opportunities for youth to be involved in events like this reinforce that their voices are important and develop leadership skills for their future. Bringing youth and candidates together in a tangible and safe environment allows candidates to be seen as approachable, real people that our youth can relate to," she said.

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. Other forums in Bay City, Lansing, Rochester, Fremont, Wyoming, Holland, Novi, Jackson and Kalamazoo are exploring issues including 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.

"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 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. 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.



ASK is a non-profit (501c3) organization dedicated to supporting families and youth with a goal of improving the system of care for children’s mental health. Through collaboration with families and community partners, we hope to guide this system toward becoming more family-driven, youth-guided, and culturally competent.



KYD Network serves as the intermediary organization for Kalamazoo County’s Out of School Time (OST) sector. Our vision is to ensure that all Kalamazoo county youth are college, career, and community ready by the age of 21.