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Supporting Parents in the Michigan State Budget

Common sense and strong research demonstrate that the well-being of parents matters to their children's well-being, to their children's educational and life success, and to the strength and stability of families. Too many families face barriers to opportunities, including poor mental health, violence, and economic instability, making it more difficult for their children to graduate from school, enter the workforce, and support families of their own.

The Michigan Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is an effective poverty-fighting tool for struggling parents. Michigan's EITC is currently worth about 6% of the federal EITC, about \$145 on average to families, but this is a cut from its former level of 20% of the federal EITC in 2011. Many young working parents also cannot access the EITC because the minimum age for qualifying for this tax credit is 25.

Child abuse or neglect is costly to both kids and society –abuse and neglect experienced in 2016 alone will cost Michigan taxpayers approximately \$2.5 billion in lost productivity and increased need for services. Local child abuse and neglect programs funded by the Children's Trust Fund (CTF) support parents by coordinating community stakeholders to increase access to evidenced supports like home visiting, parenting classes, counseling, child care, transportation and prenatal care for families.

Michigan's problem-solving courts provide mental health and substance abuse services for parents and early intervention services for infants and children, leading to a reduction in incarceration, fewer children removed from their families, and more rapid treatment and rehabilitation for adults experiencing mental health issues.

Most children involved with the foster care system are on a path to be reunified with their parents. Youth in foster care experience better outcomes when they maintain connections with their birth families, especially if there is an intention to reunify. However, birth families are often unable to access the support they need while their kids are in foster care.

Recommendations:

1. Increase the Michigan EITC and lower the minimum age to 16 to support young adults and parents in the foster care system.
2. Increase state funding for community –based child abuse and neglect prevention through the CTF to \$3 million to expand the capacity of prevention councils and services across the state.
3. Increase funding for problem-solving courts, including resources directed specifically to expand efforts targeting families with infants and toddlers (Baby Courts) and Peacemaking Court models.
4. Increase funding for programs that keep birth parents connected with their children who have been in foster care to assist in reunification efforts.