

Ensuring A Healthy Start in the Michigan State Budget

Raising Michigan's children isn't rocket science—it's brain science. Research shows that healthy brain development and good mental health are critical for the growth and wellbeing of children and for the stability of families. Unfortunately, not every parent has the opportunity to develop skills and access services to promote their young children's healthy growth. Without them, kids enter kindergarten behind their peers, and stay behind.

Ensuring a child has a healthy start means ensuring that infants and toddlers are growing and developing physically, socially, and emotionally before they start Kindergarten. *Early On Michigan* provides screening and services to all Michigan families whose infants or toddlers have or are at risk of acquiring a developmental delay, equipping families in their homes with skills to help their children., *Early On* prevents the need for future costly K-12 special education services because many developmental delays, including speech and motor delays, are treatable, and relieves stress on parents by helping them better understand their child's development.

A healthy start also relies on preparing child care providers to appropriately respond to the mental health needs of children, including children have experienced trauma and are in foster care. Michigan's Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant (IECMHC) program is proven to help child care providers support infant mental health, but is only available in some counties. IECMHC programs also help parents learn about their children's mental health and acquire parenting strategies to promote mental health. IECMHC has been found to reduce parent stress and increase parents' ability to work, to improve child care provider job retention as well as their skills, and to ultimately reduce instances of "challenging" child behavior.

Current Situation: The Governor and Senate have finalized their budget recommendations in these areas, but a House K-12 School Aid budget has not yet been released. Once the House K-12 School Aid Appropriations Subcommittee, the Appropriations Committee, and the full House have all voted to approve this budget, and then both chambers will go to a Conference Committee to iron out differences. Even though major changes don't typically happen once all sides have weighed in, citizen voices need to be heard throughout the budget process. Telling elected officials how to prioritize spending our tax dollars must be a year-round endeavor.

Recommendations:

1. **Support the Senate's increased appropriation for *Early On*.** The Governor did not recommend any increase for *Early On*, and the House has not released a draft K-12 School Aid budget, but the Senate proposed increasing funding for this program by \$2.15 million.
2. The Governor and Senate and House Education Appropriations Subcommittees have all set aside funding to improve child care quality that can be used for expanding IECMHC. **Support these investments, which can help in expanding the IECMHC program statewide, which would cost \$6.6 million total.**