

Date: March 2020
To: Michigan's Congressional Delegation Legislative Directors
From: Matt Gillard, President & CEO
matt@michiganschildren.org or (517) 485-3500



Re: Ensuring Health and Safety for Michigan's Children and Families in the Federal Budget

As you move your legislative priorities forward in the federal budget during this unique time, I write on behalf of Michigan's children, youth, and families, whose interests are uniquely tied to the future of the federal budget. The changes made by government and society to slow the spread of COVID-19 have exposed many ways that our children, youth, and families, especially those who shoulder significant challenges, rely on collective efforts, often including public support, to meet their needs, including shelter in order to maintain safe social distancing, nutrition outside of school buildings, health care to maintain a strong immune system, and child care and educational opportunities that help parents focus on working and maximizing the time they spend supporting their children's education. While we support recent emergency actions to increase supports for families, the next waves of federal response to the crisis must include:

- **Significant cash assistance for families and young people who struggle to afford basic household costs**

Families still have to pay for many basic costs and other necessities during this crisis. Media-worthy event cancellations like the cancellation of athletic tournaments signal a big problem for many working parents, especially low-income parents who do not have guaranteed income during this time – where will they find the funds to continue to provide for their families if their jobs are affected by the crisis? Cash assistance will help families flexibility to meet their immediate and long-term needs

- **Health care service access for families and expanded paid sick leave benefits for individuals not currently covered by federal law**

Research shows when families have access to health care, they and their children are more likely to receive preventative care. Increasing federal medical assistance for health care access will ensure that more families receive the preventative care they need and reduce numbers of citizens with compromised immune systems. Building on recent federal action to expand paid sick leave benefits to include more workers and more situations will ensure that families can make decisions that have the most positive long-term impact on their own health and future productivity, as well as their community's health and long-term prosperity.

- **Housing support for struggling families regardless of housing situation**

Social distancing is one of the most effective measures against the spread of a disease, but Michigan has the sixth-highest population of homeless K-12 students in the country. It is hard keep a safe and healthy distance from affected areas when a family has no stable housing of

their own to return to. We must expand housing support for families at risk as an investment in their future health and economic productivity.

- **Short- and long-term plans to ensure internet access for young people and families**

During outbreaks, the public needs access to information in order to make healthy decisions, and when schools close, students deserve access to online learning resources that they otherwise could only access in school. Unfortunately, gaps in broadband access persist across our state for low-income students. According to the National Digital Inclusion Alliance, in Detroit, up to half of households lack broadband internet access. And according to Michigan State University's Quello Center, the most rural and socioeconomically disadvantaged students in Michigan are least likely to have broadband Internet access at home. Their study suggests that only 47 percent of students who live in rural areas have high-speed Internet access. Of those who do not have home access, 36 percent live in a home with no computer and 58 percent live on a farm or other rural setting.

- **Supports for businesses and nonprofits, including human service providers, child care providers, and afterschool programs, that employ and/or serve children, youth, and families that may be harmed by the crisis' economic effects**

Research and lived experience show that we can most proactively support families during a large-scale unforeseen crisis by ensuring that families can access critical resources at all times, including when life's other crises strike. To that end, a host of vital, effective programs, all of which are essential to the daily lives of thousands of Michiganders and to the future of our great state, rely considerably on federal funds. Due to state budget constraints for the foreseeable future, you are in the strongest position of any elected official to make investments into the following supports and systems:

Child Care

Child care providers are heroically staying open to provide care for those on the front lines of health and public safety, but often, the same people serving the public during a disease outbreak also struggle to find child care during "normal" times. This crisis also threatens the bottom lines of many child care providers, who must stay in business for when individuals return to work. Michigan's growing workforce needs positive early learning environments and their parents need peace of mind knowing their children are safe while they work. The value of Michigan's child care subsidy would collapse without federal support through the Child Care and Development Fund and, without expansion, thousands of working families will continue to negotiate impossible child care access and affordability problems.

Child Welfare and Foster Care, including Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment

This outbreak has thrown many families involved with the child welfare system in limbo, reminding us that the more quickly we can help families experience stability, the better for our

public systems during times of crisis. The Michigan Department of Health & Human Services receives three of every four dollars from Washington. More than half of births are Medicaid-supported. Virtually all of the state's efforts to prevent child maltreatment and care for children and youth who have been removed from their families are funded through federal sources including the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, the Social Services Block Grant, and Titles IV-B and IV-E of Social Security. Federal funds also provide the vast majority of support for many critical safety net programs including income support, WIC, SNAP, and TANF programs.

Early On (IDEA Part C)

Many families whose children have a disability or learning need will face challenges figuring out the next few weeks of their child's education. If more families could access early developmental services, more families might have the chance to learn how to best prepare for their children's educational disruptions. Children with developmental delays, together with their families, go to *Early On* for strategies and services to overcome whatever obstacles may lie between them and reaching their fullest potential. Early screening and services through *Early On* are proven to reduce the need for costly K-12 special education supports, but Michigan lags the entire Midwest with its modest appropriations for *Early On*, which are quite inequitably distributed across counties, and less accessible to those of lower socioeconomic status.

Afterschool

With school out, many children will not attend their afterschool programs, which operate thin margins and will struggle to maintain their existing programs if dollars need to be stretched further, all in the face of recent declining investment in afterschool programs in Michigan. While these programs contribute to improved student learning and developmental outcomes and serve a critical child support function for families in our state. Michigan currently dedicates no state funds for afterschool programs, which receive nearly the entirety of their support from the 21st Century Community Learning Centers grant program and, to a lesser extent, through child care reimbursement funds. Despite recent increases, Michigan has lost 21st Century Funding and is in need of significant reinvestment.

Runaway and Homeless Youth

Children, youth, and families cannot effectively socially distance without stable housing of their own. Many families will struggle to afford a housing payment if they lose wages soon, and Michigan has the sixth-highest K-12 student homelessness rate in the country. The bulk of runaway and homeless youth (RHY) services federally funded. While rising costs have forced program closures across the entire Upper Peninsula, parts of the northern Lower Peninsula, and Muskegon County, the Michigan state budget has increased its share of funding for RHY services by \$500,000 over the past two decades, while student homelessness rates persist.

Adult Education

When the economy recovers from the COVID-19 outbreak, many parents will still find themselves without a job. Michigan receives \$14 million in federal funding through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, which supports high school equivalency education, skill-building, and family literacy programs for adult learners in Michigan. Adult education

program closures in recent years due to rising costs and lagging revenues have left many of Michigan's 36,000 adults who lack a high school diploma with fewer options to earn a credential and entering the workforce.

I hope you will consider the future of these and other essential programs for children and families when making any federal spending decisions and fight for:

- \$5 billion increase for CCDBG and \$1.3 billion for Head Start, including \$500 million to expand Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships
- \$500 million increase for IDEA Part C and \$290 million for IDEA Part B Section 619
- \$100 million increase for 21st Century Community Learning Centers
- Fully fund Runaway and Homeless Youth services with a \$55 million increase and increase funding for McKinney-Vento education services for homeless youth
- Continue to increase Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act funding, especially for Title II Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention activities, to support expanded programs and services for families.
- Provide increased funding for adult education through WIOA Title II
- Hold the line on critical funding sources for essential supports for children, youth, and families, including Medicaid, Social Security, WIC, SNAP, and TANF

The youth and families of Michigan rely upon these life-changing supports that can only be provided at scale right now in Michigan with the partnership of the federal government, and you can make sure these programs last for the long haul. We are thankful for your leadership, and we thank you for considering the best interests kids and families.