



April 28, 2020

To: Michigan Congressional Staff

From: Matt Gillard, President and CEO, Michigan's Children

RE: Federal Investments Remain Critical for Children, Youth and Families

Recent necessary decisions to stem COVID-19 have exposed how the most vulnerable children, youth, and families rely on collective efforts, including public support, to meet their needs and thrive. Federal efforts so far have made a difference to some, but have left others out. And while flexible funding to states and localities is critical, some programs are not likely to have the support required to respond to increasing needs without direct funding from the Federal government. This problem will only be exacerbated by falling state and local revenues over the coming months. Congress and the President urgently need to do much more for struggling families and state and local governments, and should ensure that the next bipartisan coronavirus relief package moves quickly and includes the following:

#### **Support for Family Basic Needs**

- Improve access to WIC and WIC-allowable purchases. Unlike SNAP benefits, pregnant women and families with young children cannot use their WIC for curbside pickup, online ordering, or delivery. They have to be present inside the building to use WIC benefits. Many WIC clinics are closed, and WIC limits families to certain brands of products that they may or may not be able to access in their own grocery stores.
- Expand Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT) through the summer. This program has successfully connected families with needed food support, and should not end at the end of the typical school year. Funding could be combined with other summer feeding programs that typically have low uptake and will have even less ability to provide food in the current crisis.

#### **Support for Child Welfare and Foster Care**

With increased family stress exacerbated by high unemployment, close proximity and a lack of service access for children and youth with disabilities, delays or mental and physical health needs, it is unlikely that the funding appropriated, both specifically for child welfare purposes, and with more flexibility to state and local governments will be enough to fully support families, including formal and informal relative caregivers, foster and adoptive parents as well as struggling birth families. A comprehensive Dear Colleague letter was circulated recently, and we've attached it here. Thank you to all members of our Michigan delegation who signed that letter. The range of supports mentioned are all critical.

- Support for abuse and neglect prevention programs through Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP) Grants.
- Increased support for Kinship Navigator Programs where many caregivers are at high risk.
- Further support to stabilize families through Title IV-B Part 2.
- Increase supports for child welfare agency functioning through CAPTA Title I.
- Increase supports to help court functioning to continue critical hearings, family reunification activities and other critical supports through the Court Improvement Program.

- Support older youth in and leaving foster care allowing states to draw down Title IV-E resources through age 21 and by increasing Chafee funding, removing some individual spending caps and extending eligibility.

### **Target Additional Educational Supports**

- Support the technology investments like those being put forth in the Closing the Homework Gap Through Mobile Hotspots Act. These technology investments should help increase short- and longer-term capacity to expand access wherever possible; they must support access for all family members, including adult learners and other home-based service provision; and support local innovations and explore scaling and expansion.
- Focus additional investment on learning opportunities for students who will need support to catch up with their peers who were ahead before the crisis and were better-positioned to take advantage of online learning opportunities or other learning resources in their homes or communities. Additional resources devoted to the following is required:
  - o Summer learning opportunities.
  - o Access to physical and mental health supports.
  - o *Early On* services to infants and toddlers.
  - o Postsecondary transition services for youth with IEPs or 504 plans.
  - o Coordination with other agencies including students experiencing foster care, homelessness, and juvenile justice.
- Support Parent Skill Building. Parents participating in adult basic education, GED and other high school completion programs are most adversely affected in the current crisis because they lack key foundational literacy skills and the educational attainment to leverage new resources in these changing times. Specific resource is necessary for maintenance and expansion of adult education and family literacy programs.

### **Support for States and Localities**

- Direct Financial Supports. Michigan, like other states, is facing significant revenue challenges due to this crisis. Critical public services, and supports for those services that go to nonprofits and other agencies can't continue without strong state and local governments to support them.
- Federal Medicaid Assistant Percentage (FMAP). The state match required for many critical federal programs supporting health and child welfare services is governed by Michigan's FMAP rate. Any decrease in the state mandated contributions for those programs is helpful to struggling state and local resource needs.

Thank you for your work on behalf of the public health and safety of our citizens. We will continue to be in touch with more information from the field and recommendations stemming from that information.