

April 17, 2020

State Opportunities to Maximize CARES Act Funding for Vulnerable Children, Youth, and Families

The bipartisan federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act addresses some needs of children, youth and families identified by our network outreach and communication. While CARES Act funds are still not adequate to meet the current need, and Michigan is struggling with its own fiscal crises, our state leaders need to ensure that CARES relief is leveraged to provide services for children, youth, and families who shoulder the greatest challenges, and to close existing inequities in access to critical services. The following is not a comprehensive list of all of the CARES funding coming to Michigan, but these provisions present opportunities for state leaders to layer on spending and policy decisions that will protect public health and safety and improve child, youth, and family outcomes:

Child Care and Development Block Grant – An Estimated \$100 million for Michigan. In addition to stabilizing the child care workforce, which are essential, some of new resource could be utilized to:

- Expand access to child care services to additional “essential” workers, including foster, kin and adoptive parents who are caring for our most vulnerable children and youth and often face additional physical and financial burdens themselves.
- Improve access to caregivers of children with special needs by expanding capacity of child care providers able to provide quality care for these families. These families are in need of respite, and in the best of times face barriers to child care access.
- Expand access to trained early childhood mental health professionals to act as behavioral consultants for all providers during the crisis, due to the high stress of the current situation.

Education Stabilization Fund – An Estimated \$130 million in Discretionary Spending for Michigan. In addition to ensuring that the over \$380 million aid to local school districts and the nearly \$350 million aid to post-secondary institutions will not contribute to current service inequities, the discretionary funds can be targeted toward specific crisis needs that could lead to better service access afterwards.

- Ensure services for families with IEPs and IFSPs, including infants and toddlers through *Early On* as well as other families in the Special Education system through individualized, tele-intervention services. Support the technology needs, training and coaching and other resources necessary for all service providers, school employees or others, and families they are serving.
- Prioritize other services that families have accessed at school, like early childhood education, physical and mental health, social work, school counseling and other supports for learning.
- Dedicate funding for high-quality afterschool and summer programming, which connect families and students with both their schools and their larger community. They are trusted sources of support, and effective in dealing with socio-emotional needs as well as closing skill gaps.
- Increase support for adult learners. Adult foundational skill building is more important than ever to parents’ economic, educational and career success and for help with children’s learning.
- Intentionally reach out and support those most likely to be behind – homeless students, students with experience in the foster care system, migrant students and others with individual or family language barriers who are disproportionately impacted by the crisis.

- Direct post-secondary resources to assist parents who are students, homeless and foster youth, and others without stable housing. Increased resource should be given to Community Colleges and trade schools who serve the majority of students facing life and educational challenges.
- Leverage technology resources provided to students to support distance learning to help all family members access critical resources and learning activities. This includes those offered by the early childhood system, such as through Home Visiting and Early Intervention and those offered for adult learners, like adult basic education and high school completion/GED.

Child Welfare Spending – \$1.4 million to Michigan. This is an increase in Title IV-B, Subpart 1 funding, which states use for investigating child abuse and neglect, caseworker activities, counseling, emergency assistance and arranging alternative living arrangements, in addition to family preservation services, time-limited family reunification services, and family support or prevention services.

- Provide better technology, crisis support and financial assistance to families struggling to meet children's needs, particularly families struggling to reunify with their children.
- Support urgently-needed family reunification efforts by prioritizing runaway and homeless youth, who are not well-protected from COVID-19 in congregate settings where PPE and quarantine options are lacking, and find temporary substitute care where reunification is not possible while keeping families and youth out of the foster care system where possible.
- Provide training and technology access to child welfare workers in public and private agencies so that they can maintain quality support for the families they are serving.

Runaway and Homeless Youth - Michigan's programs will receive a small increase in funds. County-wide gaps in Michigan's runaway and homeless youth service infrastructure existed prior to this crisis, and even existing service providers are facing closure.

- Support statewide planning for ensuring shelter options for young people. Infrastructure gaps by geography existed before the crisis, and existing shelters face impossible choices between their own safety and continuing services. Homeless youth face additional barriers to other housing options, and are facing increased difficulties with family reunification efforts.
- Shore up homeless providers for long-term viability. For shelters forced to close, providers who have laid off staff are concerned about retaining and rebuilding their workforce for reopening.

Additional Recommendations:

- Shore up Michigan's unemployment system to deal with Pandemic Unemployment Assistance claims. Now that the crisis has been going on for nearly a month, many people who qualify for federal direct assistance and expanded unemployment are in dire need of that assistance, but are still facing delays.
- Support service providers in small nonprofits and LLC roles to access Payroll Protection Program loans. Many workers providing direct services to children, youth and families through nonprofit agencies or contractual work cannot be paid for services that they have not been able to provide and would benefit from some help and connections to institutions that can help.
- Outreach for direct federal cash Recovery Rebates for Individuals to mobile populations, including homeless youth and families, and young people with experience in foster care who may not have filed taxes but who participate in other systems like YAVFC, Healthy Michigan and SNAP.