



September 2, 2020

To: Governor Whitmer
From: Matt Gillard, President/CEO
RE: A Budget That Supports Children, Youth and Families at Their Most Vulnerable

As you continue negotiations with the Legislature on the state budget in the midst of current uncertainty, financial constraints and increased need, we urge you to closely look at how those decisions may impact the children, youth and families who are facing the most significant challenges to their success.

Some areas have received significant investment over the last few months, including child care and funding to help support the K-12 system, so we have not focused on them in this letter. It will be important to ensure, however, that those funds have been utilized to improve the equity in those systems, and do not result in expanding gaps in access and outcomes.

Even in the midst of some significant investment in needed programs over the pandemic, funding for some programs critical to the most vulnerable children, youth and families were removed through actions of your administration and many others continue to be left off the negotiating table.

We've been communicating to our members of Congress about many necessary investments left out of COVID relief efforts, and have been communicating to you and the Legislature about how discretionary funding could have been used to support some of those investments. These initiatives are not pork or partisan, and all are evidenced practice with proven impact. Of course, we are still hopeful that there will be some additional federal funding to support these and other supportive programs, but regardless of eventual Congressional support, we ask that they are not left out of your FY21 budget negotiations. Should there be additional federal investments, some of these items need to be restored or increased as soon as possible.

Skill building supports for families and young adults. Investing in skill-building in FY21 is going to be crucial, especially as we continue to require more and more from parents to further their children's education. With high unemployment rates and experience permanent shifts in many industries, young people and parents without a high school diploma are most at-risk of being left behind.

Previously funded items that need to be restored:

- \$9.7 million cut from Marshall Plan for Talent CTE programs, including competency grants, cyber security programs, curriculum integration, and the Going Pro Campaign. Reinvestment in all of these programs more critical now than ever before.

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Other items requiring attention:

- **Adult Basic Skills:** Increased support for adult education through School Aid and the Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity is needed now, coupled with a comprehensive needs assessment of parent basic skills, and regional coordination to determine gaps and needs to ensure improved access to quality programming statewide. Intentional coordination of other services, like child care subsidies, are also needed.
- **Early Literacy Supports:** Continue funding for Early Literacy Coaches and tie investment to read-at-home plans and the needs of parents and other caregivers to support their children's reading and other skill building at home.

Supports for children, youth and families impacted by the child welfare system. These supports are more essential than ever with more and more families finding themselves in stressful and precarious circumstances and unsure how to provide stability for the children and youth in their care. Now is not the time to back off of investments that strengthen caregiving of all types.

Previously funded items that need to be restored:

- **Adoption Supports:** Restore \$250,000 for the Adoptive Family Support Network, to allowing their operations in support of adoptive, foster, kin and birth parents to be reinstated.
- **Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA):** Support \$500,000 to begin state expansion, ensuring access in Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties.
- **Relative Caregivers:** Reinstate relative caregiver incentive payments to become licensed foster parents and support legislatively proposed expansions of the kinship navigator program and the establishment of a kinship advisory committee also need appropriations.

Previously proposed items that need to be championed:

- **Expanded Home Visiting Options for Families At-Risk of Entering the Foster Care System:** Funding increased services through your proposed Maternal Infant Health Program (MIHP) pilot for high risk mothers and additional access for high risk families remain more important than ever. Continuing to improve consistency and quality through an Integrated Home Visiting System for all families is also critically important.
- **Preventing Child Removal and Family Reunification:** Implement your plans for Sobriety Treatment and Recovery Teams, SafeCare, Parent-Child Interaction Therapy, Functional Family Therapy and Multisystemic Therapy and Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy that take advantage of different allowable use of federal funding to support children and youth remaining with their families.
- **Community Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention:** The \$3 million funding need established to support local child abuse and neglect prevention councils and service providers, funded through the Children's Trust Fund remains.

Other items requiring attention:

- **Problem-Solving Courts:** Increased investments are needed now more than ever on efforts focused on stabilizing parents and families, including investment in the Baby Court and Peacekeeping Court models and increased investment in Mental Health Courts.
- **IECMHC Supports for Early Systems:** Pairing mental health consultants with families and adults who work with infants and young children in the different settings where they learn and grow. Consultants need to be universally available to child care providers, as well as others to build adults' capacity to strengthen and support the healthy social and emotional development of children—early and before intervention is needed.

Supports for the most challenged youth. As with so many issues, the pandemic has exposed significant gaps in services for young people trying to make successful educational and life transitions to independence.

Previously funded items that need to be restored:

- **Alternative Diploma Paths:** Restore the \$2.3 million for strict discipline academies and dropout prevention programs, both viable pathways to receiving a high school diploma.
- **Homeless and Runaway Youth Services:** \$800,000 increase for Runaway and Homeless Youth service providers to start toward a system where any young person in crisis can find help within an hour of where they live.
- **CASA Fostering Futures:** \$50,000 to pilot a program targeting older youth aging out of foster care.

Other items needing attention:

- **Michigan Youth Opportunity Initiative (MYOI):** An additional \$2 million would help to ensure consistent and comprehensive access now when young people experiencing foster care are as vulnerable as they have ever been.
- **Fostering Futures Scholarship:** An additional \$750,000 would double investment in this post-secondary support for young people leaving foster care and added flexibility can help address their often complicated needs.
- **Expanding the Age-Based Eligibility for the Michigan EITC:** Lower the minimum age for young people in and existing foster care to 16 and basing the credit on what would be available through the federal and state EITC combined if the current age threshold of 25 was met.

Supports for struggling learners. Learning gaps have intensified over the past few months, and despite additional federal funding and some targeted efforts, the needs of many learners remain unmet with the return to school this fall.

Previously funded items that need to be restored.

- **Afterschool and Summer Learning:** \$600,000 to support wrap-around services for out-of-school time providers and progress made toward the established \$50 million needed to provide adequate services throughout the state.
- **Integrated Student Services:** Restore \$525,000 in funding for Northeast Michigan Community Service Agency's School Success Partnership Program, and consider additional support for Pathways to Potential and other community partnerships that are becoming even more essential in connecting

academic, health and other services between schools, service providers, parents, and community partners.

- Social-Emotional Learning: \$500,000 to pilot a social-emotional learning program in at least five districts.
- School mental health and support services: Restore \$10 million cut from unspent school safety grants that could be used to build out school-based mental health services. Increased needs require more, not less, investment in adolescent health centers and expanding access to mental health professionals through 31n in the School Aid Act.

Previously proposed items that need to be championed:

- Four-year old pre-school: Proposals to increase the per-pupil grant for Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP) and expanding eligibility for “GSRP-style” programs for 5,000 4-year olds with families in select high-poverty, academically low-performing school districts are still steps in the right direction.

Other items needing attention:

- Support for *Early On*: Increasing support for early intervention services for infants and toddlers through *Early On* needs to continue to be able to provide recognized levels of services to all eligible infants and toddlers.

We are glad to provide more information about any of these initiatives, and look forward to working together to rebuild the budget for the remainder of the fiscal year.