



Post-Election, Advocates for Children and Families Regroup and Pledge to Fight On

The 2020 national and state and local races are over, and child and family advocates who partner with Michigan's Children in key priority areas are taking a breath and formulating their next advocacy moves. The lame duck period will soon give way to the start of new terms for members of the state Legislature and Congress and we begin again. Read how some of our advocate partners size up the challenges and opportunities ahead, and why the new year is an important time to re-vigorate one's outreach to elected leaders.

'We're going to try again'

The Kinship Care Coalition of Michigan suffered a setback this year when two bills it actively supported, winning unanimous support from both chambers, were vetoed by the Governor. When the new session begins, two of their long-standing champions, Republican Rep. Kathy Crawford, and Democratic Rep. Frank Liberati, won't be there to pick up the fight. (Crawford wasn't able to run again this month because of term limits and Liberati decided not to seek another term.) Debbie Frisbie, Co-Lead of the Coalition's Policy and Advocacy Group, said the group will seek to have the legislation reintroduced in the new term. "We've started talking to those who are going out of office to make sure that they pass on the work that we've done, and explain how close we were to having those bills passed," she said. "The work we have to do right now is get the list of new legislators and begin talking with them about kinship."



Debbie Frisbie

Underscoring their urgency: The pandemic has left many Michigan families upended by illness and financial troubles, and Frisbie worries that more children will enter foster care and kinship care. "These bills had all the markings of the best policymaking ever. It came from constituents. We raised awareness. We worked with legislators. This was a collaborative effort at its best over four years. We've gained a lot of steam with this coalition. We're going to try again," she said.

'Don't stop speaking up and standing up for children, families . . .'

As Executive Director of the **Michigan Association for the Education of Young Children (MiAEOC)**, Erica Willard said their advocacy work is more critical now. Regardless which party is in power, they will continue to push for federal help to gain a \$50 million investment for child care in Michigan as well as support for boosting compensation of the early childhood workforce, which is critical for its survival. "If we don't invest in the field now, we're going to continue to lose programs at an even more alarming rate than before the pandemic hit," she said. "We have so many talented individuals working in the field who often have to make the gut wrenching decision to leave because they simply cannot afford to stay."



Erica Willard

The new calendar year will bring two new statewide policy events when members and lawmakers come together in the spring and fall. They will continue to push their messages on social media and in policy alerts seeking member action. “Don’t stop speaking up and standing up for children, families and the early childhood workforce in Michigan!” she tells advocates. “It’s important to share the message across all levels of elected officials from local school boards, and city officials, up to state, and federal elected officials. The more policy makers who are informed of the issues, the more chance we have to make both small and large impact on decisions that are made across the state and country that impact children, families and the early childhood workforce.

‘Families need many adults supporting their kids’ learning’

The end of the election season brings new opportunity for advocates to come together for improving the future of Michigan’s children and families, said Sara Plachta Elliott, Executive Director of the **Youth Development Resource Center**, which advocates for afterschool and out-of-school time programs in Detroit. “Afterschool programs offer youth safe havens and critical skills for navigating life. COVID has revealed that learning happens in all of the places where kids spend time. Families need many adults supporting their kids’ learning,” she said.



Sara Plachta Elliott

Plachta Elliott credits strong movements such as Black Lives Matter for invigorating civic engagement over investing in communities and improving the lives of youth. “Youth are leading us today toward a better future,” she said.

“The Black Lives Matter movement has helped us, particularly white allies, see the depths of white supremacy culture and structures more clearly,” she added. “Now we, the adults, need to make deeper investments in all of the places and spaces where kids learn and positively develop, and disrupt and dismantle the systems that divide and discriminate.”

Standing Ready to Help Inform and Engage

High voter turnout in the recent elections has been encouraging, signifying that a large swatch of the electorate wants to be engaged, informed and active, said Director Patrick Brown of the **Michigan Association of Community and Adult Education (MACAE)**. That bodes well for issues his group advocates for – education and career training to help adult learners achieve educational success and improved economic outcomes. To achieve that, MACAE across the state will be standing ready to help inform and engage all interested persons about the value of education and training opportunities, he said.

With elected leaders returning and taking office for the first time, he said he hopes they come to prioritize adult education and alternative education services needed by thousands of Michiganders a year. “We hope that in their leadership they will be voices for understanding the intersectionality of education and integrated education and training for our state’s most vulnerable populations,” he said. “At the federal level, we hope to see lawmakers on both sides of the aisle recommit to growing a strong, educated workforce coupled with providing access to affordable childcare, equitable transportation and accessible housing for the populations we serve.”



Patrick Brown