



Were Lawmakers Naughty or Nice in Stiffing Afterschool, Adult Education and Others this Holiday?

December 17, 2021 - When General Motors suggested they might want to build a new battery manufacturing plant on property they own in suburban Lansing, state Lawmakers this week didn't break a sweat giving away **\$1.5 billion** in federal relief dollars for business tax incentives. Our elected leaders are all too often extremely eager to hand out massive corporate tax breaks ("corporate welfare") even when it's shown time and again to be truly less incentivizing than say, a better educated workforce, strong, healthy families, and desirable communities that attract and retain people who want to live there. Wouldn't it be nice if turning Legislator's heads was that easy for priorities we fight for every day, priorities that improve quality of life and future outcomes for our kids, youth and families?

Afterschool/summer programs, adult education/skill building, and shelters for homeless and runaway teens. These were all among the top priorities on our holiday list before lawmakers headed home for their holiday recess. To be clear, investments in human capital are never wishful wants but essential needs for strengthening the lives of our children and youth. Michigan families desperately seek safe and enriching places for school-age children when school's out, but the scarcity of these programs is staggering with the state offering darn little help. Michigan's [ratio of youth to provider](#) is seriously 376 to 1, and the children least able to access it are Black, Indigenous, or people of color. The reality is that our children are missing out on homework help to overcome learning loss, exposure to career opportunities, mentoring, and other opportunities to connect with caring adults and their peers when parents aren't with them. The state investment "ask" was \$100 million this year.

Another missed opportunity? Our friends at the [Michigan Network for Youth and Families](#), a volunteer association that speaks up to prevent homelessness among youth in our state – and for crisis intervention and beds when homelessness occurs - have tried for years to win favor from lawmakers and boost the number of shelters and service programs statewide. The chasm is wide: available beds in Michigan number in the hundreds versus the thousands of youth known to be couch surfing or worse every year. Helping to bridge the gap would cost around \$20 million over three years, advocates believe.

Lawmakers also took a pass this year on helping adult learners seeking better career opportunities by earning a high school diploma or other basic skills needed to move up. One in 10 Michiganders over 18 do not have a high school diploma, and over 1 million Michiganders without a college education are working, but earning less than the living wage. Compared to General Motor's ask, this one should have been an easy yes. Advocates were asking for [\\$4.5 million in American Rescue Plan Act \(ARPA\) dollars](#) to adequately fund programs statewide.

The bottom line is that state lawmakers went home for the holidays this year and left lots of unfinished work, namely the fair distribution of billions upon billions of unallocated federal dollars and surplus state funds. The people we send to Lansing must better prioritize these issues and others that matter to you in your communities. When lawmakers return to their desks in the New Year, let's

not let them off the hook. Let's not leave money intended to help people sit idle while so many suffer. In January, Legislators must resolve to take responsibility for all citizens of Michigan, not just the corporate ones. After all, it will be a New Year, and new start. Happy holidays to one and all.

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