

Expanded child tax credit should be on Congress's wish list

Matt Gillard and Monique Stanton For the Lansing State Journal

Ralphie's Red Ryder BB gun in "A Christmas Story." The Turbo Man doll that Arnold Schwarzenegger and Sinbad battle over in "Jingle All the Way." Michael's Real Huf Board in "Elf." Teddy Ruxpin. Santa Bear. Tickle Me Elmo. Furby. In the movies and in real life, kids' minds are often dominated by the desire for "one big thing" during the holiday season.

While our kids may be very different ages, as parents, that is a feeling we know well. And this December, the need for "one big thing" goes double for us as child advocates. And it will bring smiles, warmth and happiness to more than half a million Michigan kids.

The federal Child Tax Credit is a proven, effective program that helps families with children by providing more money in their pocket when they file their taxes. That's more money to help meet rising costs and cover basics, such as housing, food, medicine, clothes and school supplies.

Last year's American Rescue Plan Act temporarily expanded the federal CTC, giving millions of families with low incomes a boost and driving child poverty down to a record low. But Congress allowed the CTC expansion to lapse this year, putting 19 million children across the country at risk of being pushed into poverty or facing greater hardship.

Right now, Congress has a real chance in its Lame Duck session to prevent greater hardship for the 554,000 Michigan children who do not receive the full \$2,000 Child Tax Credit because their families' earnings are too low. And it will have a significant impact locally as well.

In Ingham County, expanding the CTC will help 29,000 families whose incomes are so low that they currently receive only a partial credit or no credit at all. The expansion would benefit Ingham County kids of all races and ethnicities. Among children who are currently missing out on the full credit, 57% are white, 14% are Black, 12% are Latino, 6% are Asian and 11% are of another race or are multi-racial.

With this need, potential impact and ticking clock in mind, the Michigan League for Public Policy and Michigan's Children are partnering with child advocates across the state on an advocacy campaign to include the CTC expansion in the end-of-year federal spending bill.

The campaign will include billboard and digital advertising, and billboards will appear across the state at several locations in Lansing, Detroit, Flint, and Grand Rapids over the coming weeks.

And there is a precedent set for this particular gift for Michigan's children. Back in July 2021, both of our organizations attended a press conference at Foster Community Center with U.S. Rep. Elissa Slotkin and U.S. Sen. Debbie Stabenow to discuss the recently expanded CTC and its impact on kids and parents in Lansing and around the state. Now Michigan's congressional delegation has a chance to revisit these significant improvements and make them permanent during the Lame Duck session – and before a new House Majority and a much different priority list take over.

Poverty and unstable housing, hunger, and the hardships that come with it can take a heavy toll on children, such as lower levels of educational attainment and poorer health and reduced incomes in adulthood. And the CTC can and should do more to help reduce child poverty.

For too long, a flaw in the credit's design leaves kids in families with the lowest incomes behind by giving them only a partial credit or no credit at all, even as children in wealthier families receive the full benefit. By correcting this flaw, ARPA lifted millions of the poorest kids out of poverty—but only temporarily. Further action is still needed, and now more than ever.

This season, we hope Congress will check Michigan kids' wish list twice, and deliver the gift of a permanent expanded CTC that will benefit families now and forever.

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