

Copper Country Great Start Collaborative

July 27, 2009



Michigan Senate Move Would Eliminate Preschool Opportunities, Local Jobs

The Michigan senate has approved a budget that eliminates early childhood and school readiness programs, impacting almost 400 local families and cutting the equivalent of 20 full-time area jobs. Details of the action are at www.CCGreatStart.org.

The cuts will eliminate the state's pre-kindergarten program for four-year-olds, reduce child care support for low-income working families, eliminate three programs aimed at the prevention of child abuse and neglect, and eliminate all funding for the Early Childhood Investment Corporation that supports increasing the quality of child care and school readiness in Michigan.

Locally, these budget reductions would eliminate services for at least 400 children, including reducing the number of preschool slots for 4-year-old children served through BHK Child Development Board by 273. An additional 105 children from birth to 3-years-old, and their families, will also lose services. Programs that provide resources for parents of newborns, as well as distribution of welcome baby bags, would also be eliminated.

The state senate's proposed budget also would eliminate funding for sixteen families who receive infant mental health services and programs like Playtime in the Park. The cuts also would affect summer literacy programs and toy libraries maintained by BHK.

"There are a significant number of children and families who would lose services in our area," said Emilie Krznarich, executive director of the Copper Country Great Start Collaborative. "Most parents, for example, want their children to go to preschool. These cuts mean fewer and fewer children will have that opportunity. In terms of childhood development, the 0-4 year-old age group is a critical time for brain development, making these cuts even more distressing."

The cuts also mean elimination of the equivalent of 20 full-time jobs, including teachers, teaching assistants, bus drivers and other positions.

"When early childhood services are eliminated it ends up costing us much, much more in the long run," said Denise VanDyken, executive director of BHK Child Development. "Higher rates of special education, school failure, juvenile delinquency and teen pregnancy are much too high a price to pay for failing to invest wisely in our young children, even in tough times. Cuts are unavoidable, but complete elimination of programs that will be extremely difficult to reinstate is much too extreme. The proposed cuts will hurt children and communities for many years after the economic crisis is over."

The senate version of the budget includes elimination or significant reduction in early childhood programs, including:

- Elimination of pre-K programs for 30,500 Michigan 4-year-olds, totaling \$103 million.
- Reductions in child care supports for low-income working families (\$135 million).
- A reduction of \$25 million to Medicaid providers for work with children 0-5.
- Elimination of three programs to prevent child abuse and neglect – 0-3
- Secondary Prevention, Nurse-Family Partnership and Great Parents, Great Start totaling \$14 million.
- Elimination of all funding (\$14.3 million) for the Early Childhood Investment Corporation. Thirteen million of those dollars go for programs and supports that increase the quality of child care in Michigan.
- A reduction of \$750,000 for the ECIC's 55 Great Start Collaboratives across Michigan. The collaboratives study local problems facing young learners and their parents then make a community plan to maximize resources, minimize waste, eliminate duplication of services and develop programs to fill the gaps in early childhood services.

“These cuts will have a significant impact on our children and parents,” Krznarich said. “The state House and the Governor’s office have yet to act on this budget. We urge people who care about children, child care, and school readiness to contact state legislators and Governor Granholm to express their opinions. These cuts will have long-lasting negative impacts on our children and on the future of our state.”

For additional information, go to www.CCGreatStart.org