

Children's Agenda 2008 Update: **Investment in Family Support and Economic Development**

- Increase the state Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) to 25 percent of the federal credit: The state EITC will be available for the first time for tax year 2008 at 10 percent.
- Expand access to job training and education for career advancement and “good” jobs for low-income parents. In 2007 the Jobs Education and Training (JET) program became available statewide, and No Worker Left Behind was launched. While this latter program provides low-wage or unemployed workers an opportunity to get training for a better job, the program already has long waiting lists due to inadequate funding. It is not yet clear whether the JET program is providing increased support for education and training or is focusing primarily on stricter enforcement of job search requirements and penalties for noncompliance.
- Increase access to health care for children and parents in low-income families enrolled in Medicaid by ensuring an adequate supply throughout Michigan of medical providers, including dentists and medical specialists, who accept Medicaid.
- Raise eligibility for the Family Independence Program cash assistance and family Medicaid to all families with incomes below 100 percent of the federal poverty level. Currently, a working parent with two children is ineligible for Low Income Family Medicaid when her gross earnings reach \$812 per month –58 percent of the federal poverty level. Many needy families with children cannot qualify for the programs.
- Increase the Family Independence Program cash assistance grants, which are set at about 33 percent of the federal poverty level (\$489 per month for a family of 3) and no longer even cover the average cost of a two-bedroom unit (\$635) in any Michigan county.
- Increase the portion of child support payments that go to and are retained by the child without lowering other assistance payments. Absent parents are more likely to make child support payments regularly when they know the support reach and benefits the child.
- Provide reasonable accommodations and supports to families with children or parents with disabilities so that they have an equal opportunity to benefit from government programs. Such accommodations usually involve modifying the rules or providing extra help that persons with disabilities may need to access programs.
- Increase the supply of decent, affordable, and energy-efficient housing for low-income families: Energy efficient housing, including appliances and windows, remains out of reach for many low-income families, and rising energy costs are consuming larger portions of family budgets.
- Expand opportunities for asset development, such as Individual Development Accounts (IDA), and financial literacy training: Although there is growing awareness about IDAs and financial literacy in many Michigan groups/agencies, it is not a state level policy issue yet.
- Ensure adequate staffing levels, manageable caseloads, and training at the Department of Human Services and other state agencies to meet federally-mandated standards of promptness and provide acceptable levels of customer service, including appropriate customer assistance and timely processing of applications for needs-based programs.

*Other current economic security issues worth mentioning- Final installment of raise in minimum wage to \$7.40 will happen in July 2008

