

Stabilizing Children, Youth, and Families in the Federal Coronavirus Response

To reduce COVID-19 spread, federal and state governments have made difficult choices to protect long-term public health and economic strength by ordering the closure of schools, large events, and other public gathering places. These changes have exposed many ways that our children, youth, and families, especially those who shoulder significant challenges, rely on collective efforts, often including public support, to meet their needs, including shelter, nutrition, health care, and child care and educational opportunities that help parents focus on working. Public policy responses going forward must prioritize ensuring families can access these critical resources at all times, including when life's other crises strike.

A Look At the First COVID-19-Related Supports and Next Steps

So far, Governor Gretchen Whitmer issued executive orders to waive testing costs for Medicaid patients, expand telemedicine, and expand unemployment benefits, and the Legislature is passing support for hourly school employees. Congress passed a *Families First Coronavirus Response Act* with \$8 billion to:

- Dramatically expand testing for COVID-19.
- Expand Family Medical Leave benefits, currently 12 weeks of job-protected leave, for employees at firms under 500 employees who did not work due to illness, exposure, caring for someone ill or exposed (with including of kin), or caring for a child whose care or school was disrupted.
 - After 14 days, the employer must pay at least 2/3 the employee's regular rate
- Create 14 additional days of paid sick leave for employees of a business under 500 employees if they miss work for the same reasons outlined above.
 - Employers would be required to pay at least two-thirds of an employee's regular pay, and would receive a quarterly tax credit meant to help smooth over the cost.
- Expand nutrition assistance through WIC, SNAP, emergency food assistance to students at home who would have received school lunches, and prohibit tougher food stamp work requirements.
- Help unemployment insurance handle increased need, including where rates grow by 10%.

These steps set the stage for further action. Many low-income workers, including parents and young adults, will experience income loss but not qualify for existing support. Furthermore, responses to the outbreak have not yet addressed the housing instability, health care and internet inaccessibility that make it harder for many families and young people to weather major life disruptions. Many firms that employ or serve families, including human service agencies, child care providers, and small businesses, are also risk shuttering due to economic loss.

The next steps in the COVID-19 response must be to enact:

- Cash assistance for families and young adults at risk of falling behind financially
- Housing support for struggling families regardless of housing situation
- Health care service access for families
- Supports for businesses and service agencies that employ and/or serve kids and families
- Short- and long-term plans to ensure internet access for young people and families