

**What's There, What's Missing for Children, Youth, and Families in the Federal
Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act**

Recent necessary decisions to stem COVID-19, including school closure and shelter-in-place orders, have exposed how our children, youth, and families, especially those who shoulder significant challenges, rely on collective efforts, including public support, to meet their needs and thrive. Public policy responses to this crisis must prioritize ensuring families can access these critical resources at all times, including when life's other crises strike. After [initial federal and state action](#) to provide the most immediate needed resources to respond to the disease outbreak, Congress agreed on over \$2 trillion in spending including:

- Direct one-time payments of \$1,200 to adults making \$75,000 or less, based on past tax filings, with an additional benefit of \$500 for every child in their household. Eligible individuals are those who filed a tax return in 2018, 2019, or 2020, or who received a social security benefits in 2019.
- \$950 billion in funding for COVID-19 research and vaccine and treatment development
- \$500 billion in loans for businesses, including \$367 billion in loans for small businesses
- A Pandemic Unemployment Assistance program for individuals who do not qualify under their state's current Unemployment Insurance rules, guaranteeing access to benefits for part-time, self-employed, and gig economy workers. Individuals on state UI are also eligible for an additional 13 weeks of unemployment benefits. For individuals on either state unemployment or the Pandemic program, benefits will increase by \$600 a week for four months.
- \$150 billion in direct aid for state and local government budget shortfalls. Michigan's allocation is estimated at [\\$3.87 billion](#) to be split between large municipalities and the state.
- \$100 billion in direct aid for hospitals
- \$14 billion for higher education to directly support student needs, continuation of work-study payments, and extended eligibility for Pell Grants and federal loans to make up for COVID-19
- \$13.5 billion in aid for K-12 schools, including meeting immediate student and teacher needs, technology, and making up for lost learning time, distributed to school districts based on Title I-A formula allocations
- Over \$9 billion in aid for tribal governments and tribal health systems
- Housing and homeless assistance, including \$4 billion in homeless assistance, \$2.25 billion in rental assistance, \$65 for Persons with AIDS, and \$25 million for runaway and homeless youth services
- \$5 billion in Community Development Block Grant funds to states to respond to economic and housing impacts, including expanding community health facilities, child care centers, food banks and senior services.
- \$3.5 billion in assistance to child care for essential workers and \$750 million for Head Start, of which \$96 million in child care assistance will flow to Michigan
- \$3 billion in discretionary funding to states to divide between K-12 and higher education
- \$1.3 billion in funding for Community Health Centers
- \$900 million in heating and energy payment assistance for lower income households
- \$450 million for The Emergency Food Assistance Program to fill food banks
- \$425 million to increase mental health service access including emergency response including \$250M to certified community behavioral health clinics, \$50M for suicide prevention, and \$100

million in flexible funding to address mental health, substance use disorders and provide resources to youth and the homeless.

- \$400 million for elections, including vote-by-mail, early voting, and online voter registration
- \$125 million for distance learning, telemedicine, and broadband expansion in rural communities
- \$45 million for family violence prevention emergency programming including \$2 million for the National Domestic Violence Hotline.
- \$45 million for states to support the child welfare needs of families. This is an increase in Title IV-B funding, which provides grants to state for abuse and neglect prevention, support for family preservation and reunification, adoption supports and professional development for child welfare staff. These funds are not used to support children, youth or families in foster care.
- Allowing employees laid off on March 1, 2020 or later to access paid family and medical leave if they are re-hired by their former employer and if they worked at least 30 days prior to layoff
- Provisions allowing for in-person, by phone, or online unemployment assistance applications

This substantial investment will provide support to many people experiencing difficulty, including many individuals who are shouldering especially significant burdens. In order to take full advantage of this package, Michigan legislators and state administrators must act quickly to do the following:

Spending the federal funds for state costs addressing the epidemic

Congress is already considering another supplemental, and there will be many actions the Michigan Legislature will need to take to operationalize the federal funding, and decisions to be made about how much of it is allocated through the state as well. Additionally, based on what we are hearing from youth, parents, and service professionals on the ground, many critical needs and questions appear to have been left unmet and must be addressed in future state and federal legislative responses:

Connecting All Families with Internet Access

While the legislation increases broadband access for some rural areas, the support will both not cover all rural need nor will it support closing the digital divide in more urban areas. According to the National Digital Inclusion Alliance, in Detroit, up to half of households lack broadband internet access. And according to Michigan State University's Quello Center, the most rural and socioeconomically disadvantaged students in Michigan are least likely to have broadband Internet access at home. Their study suggests that only 47 percent of students who live in rural areas have high-speed Internet access.

We must explore not only systemic changes in access, but also increasing locals' short-term capacity to expand access wherever possible. Some schools are coordinating with local employers to offer free internet access opportunities for kids and families, and others are "boosting" their internet access to include school parking lots so that families can access or download documents. We must support local innovations and explore scaling and expansion.

Financial Support Lacking for Key Groups of Parents and Youth

It is unclear whether the support provided by Congress will adequately protect families from financial crises, or if rental assistance will meet the needs of working families. Even then, certain classes of vulnerable workers, which include very low-income parents and younger workers, immigrant families, and individuals with disabilities who are classified as dependents, fall outside of the eligibility limits for the recovery check. Tax returns are not required for incomes below a certain threshold, so the concern is that people with very low incomes – who desperately need cash rebates – will not receive them. Individuals who are mobile may also miss out on the support, as the IRS will send a notice to a person's

last known address. Furthermore, previous stimulus payments took longer than initial projections to reach citizens. When many families have at most resources to last a month or two, the timeliness of financial support delivery is critical. Citizens are also experiencing crashing unemployment application systems, more investment in capacity may yet be needed.

Parents and young adults who work for companies with employees larger than 500 also still are not eligible to benefit from paid sick leave and paid family medical leave benefits that were recently passed in response to the coronavirus crisis. We must ensure that all working parents and young people have equitable access to tools that will keep themselves and their communities healthier in the long run.

Flexibility for Families With Few Options

When it comes to providing support for families at this time, making it as easy as possible for families to meet their basic needs will improve public health and economic outcomes in the long run, which is why restrictions on available benefits that reduce equity of access be eliminated. Unlike SNAP benefits, pregnant women and families with young children cannot use their WIC for curbside pickup, online ordering, or delivery, they have to be present inside the building to use WIC benefits. These families should be able to practice the same social distancing that others can, and shouldn't be made to go into stores. WIC offices are now able to enroll families remotely, and resources needs to be available that reflect increased use.

Foster Youth Supports

So far, the federal response has not included any specific supports to young people in foster care, or recently exiting care, even though as a population they are extremely at risk during times of crisis. They have poor educational outcomes, high mental and physical health needs, lack a high school diploma and high likelihood be unemployed before the crisis. It is critical to ensure that existing measures, like increased unemployment benefits, housing supports and income supports actually make it to these often mobile young people.

Increased Family Instability and Lack of Service Access

With increased family stress exacerbated by high unemployment, close proximity and a lack of service access for children and youth with disabilities, delays or mental and physical health needs, it is unlikely that the funding appropriated, both specifically for child welfare purposes, and with more flexibility to state and local governments will be enough to fully support families, including formal and informal relative caregivers, foster and adoptive parents as well as struggling birth families. Actions that court systems around the state are taking that include postponement of critical hearings impacting family reunification or child placements are making the situation worse.

Skill-Building for Parents

With millions of Americans experiencing work stoppage, the COVID crisis provides an opportunity to meet parents and young adults who have not completed high school, especially underemployed and hourly workers, as they move through the unemployment system and provide them with opportunities to gain educational credentials and build skills. This population of parents and adults be the most adversely affected because they lack key foundational literacy skills and the educational attainment to leverage new resources in these changing times. This means increasing support not only for adult education programs, which provide intensive education and training opportunities for adult participants to accelerate quickly into high need, in demand jobs, but also for supports like child care and transportation that will ensure consistent access.

Equity of Educational Opportunity

Michigan is functioning 100 percent in “out of school” time for the foreseeable future. As our state moves quickly to ensure that as many students have a path forward to engage in learning that will be recognized as meaningful, our students who were falling behind before this, and/or who are falling behind their peers even further due to disparities in access to learning resources that exist when students are home, deserve significant attention and support in order to catch up and build academic progress. This includes students with disabilities receiving the services required by their educational plans, from *Early On* services to infants and toddlers and their families, to postsecondary transition services; and students for whom providing the highest quality educational support will require coordination with other agencies, including students experiencing foster care, homelessness, and juvenile justice.

Similar to how nutrition assistance is being marshalled, equal attention needs to be turned to other limited services and lost development and learning. A focus on learning opportunities for students who will need support to catch up with their peers who were better-positioned to take advantage of online learning opportunities or other learning resources in their homes or communities is necessary. Afterschool and summer learning programs will be a necessary partner in this effort due to their high quality and experience.

Stability for Providers Serving Children, Youth and Families

Nonprofits make up a large share of the workforce in key areas for the most vulnerable children, youth and families, including homelessness and housing, mental and behavioral health, child care, a range of home visiting programs, educational support programs, as well as services for child abuse and neglect prevention and intervention, kinship care, foster care and adoption. Recent federal funds passed for runaway and homeless youth services, child care industry support, mental health care, and small business (including nonprofit) support, do not come close to meeting the full service needs being experienced by these communities. And traditional ways of service reimbursement is not adequate for changing service delivery methods.

Before the crisis, there were workforce shortages in all of these areas, but stabilization of the provider system is needed now to prevent immediate and long-term harm. Layoffs and limited access to traditional funding sources will add to service access gaps during a time when families and young people are less stable than ever. Adjustments must be made to available funding sources to reflect the current crisis and additional support is also required.