



MEMORANDUM

TO: Members of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee for Health and Human Services
FROM: Gilda Z. Jacobs, President and CEO
DATE: February 20, 2018
SUBJECT: Human Services Budget for 2019

I am pleased to offer for your consideration the priorities of the Michigan League for Public Policy for the human services portion of the 2019 state budget.

The League is very concerned about the decline in support for families who have not yet been able to benefit from the state's recovery since the depths of the Great Recession. Current caseloads for the Family Independence Program (FIP) are at their lowest levels since the 1950s—despite increases in child poverty.

More than 1 of every 5 children in Michigan lives in poverty, and rates are particularly high for children of color. A history of systemic barriers to economic security for families of color in this state has resulted in nearly half of African-American children and approximately one-third of Hispanic children living below the federal poverty line. Michigan must begin to address these inequities head-on. As a first step, we encourage you to use data on the disproportionate impact of budget and other policies on children of color, and have attached a fact sheet on this recommendation in your packet.

We know that children who live in homes stressed by poverty, frequent moves, homelessness and hunger cannot learn to their potential. Michigan must address the issue of child poverty if it is ever to realize its goal of becoming a top state for educational achievement—the clear foundation of economic growth.

For 2019, we offer the following recommendations for human services:

- **Support increases in basic income supports for children living in extreme poverty.** We support the governor's recommendation to increase FIP grants to begin to halt the inflationary erosion of families' purchasing power. However, because FIP grants have been largely flat since 1996, more will be needed to help families remain stable while receiving temporary assistance. To that end, we also recommend that you also expand the school clothing allowance as originally proposed by the governor for the current fiscal year.
- **Support the continuation of the "heat and eat" policy.** The League thanks you for your support of this important policy that helps prevent hunger among children, the elderly and persons with disabilities. We support the governor's decision to continue the policy in 2019 and urge your support as well.

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- **Remove the asset test for food assistance.** The League further believes that the asset test for federal food assistance should be reconsidered. Approximately 35 states have eliminated their asset tests—a policy that can discourage families with low incomes for savings for emergencies, and that can actually increase state administrative costs.
- **Expand access to healthy food.** The League supports efforts to ensure that families and children have access to healthy foods, and urge your support for the Michigan Corner Store Initiative that was considered during last year’s budget deliberations but not funded, as well as the Double-Up Food Bucks program.
- **Provide appropriate justice for juveniles.** The League urges you to fund implementation of “Raise the Age” legislation to ensure that 17-year-old youths are not treated as adults in the criminal justice system. Michigan is one of five states that automatically charges 17-year-old youths as adults.

Please contact me if you would like additional information. We appreciate your consideration of our recommendations.