



Michigan League FOR Human Services

September 23, 2009

Dear lawmaker,

Much of the current budget debate over the state's safety net is focusing on Medicaid, a critically important program to provide health care coverage to low-income families, the disabled and elderly.

But there's far more to consider in setting budget priorities.

In voting on a very difficult budget, please keep in mind the 143,000 children in Michigan who depend on the Family Independence Program to meet their most basic needs.

Only one-third of Michigan's children living in poverty now receive cash assistance. These are kids in the state's poorest families. A cut, as proposed by the state Senate, of \$10 per month per person is not just shared pain – it is devastating to a family that is already challenged to make ends meet.

The FIP is our last-resort income support for families living well below the poverty line. This is the money that covers the rent, utilities, transportation, clothing, additional food needs beyond Food Assistance Program and other expenses. It is \$492 a month for a family of three.

Those children also receive a back-to-school clothing allowance, which would be chopped in half, under proposed cuts. The \$84-per-child clothing allowance is small but for kids in struggling families, it makes a world of difference in boosting self-esteem and preparing them to learn.

And cuts target child day assistance for low-income families. This program allows parents to get into the workplace and earn their way to self-sufficiency, while making sure children are safe. Do we really want to return to the days of the latchkey child, forcing parents to choose between keeping a job and making sure their children are cared for?

For the elderly, threats to the safety net include eliminating state funding for Meals on Wheels. A hot meal delivered by a friendly volunteer is a small cost, but again it means keeping our seniors healthy and, for some, it is key in allowing them to stay in their own homes. The \$14 per month SSI cut in the Governor's Executive Order in May may seem small, but it is a huge blow to the elderly poor in independent living. Likewise, the proposed reduction in the state disability grant would be a further blow.

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A UNITED WAY AGENCY

These are our Michigan folks who have the least resources to weather this terrible economic storm. We need a balanced approach in setting our state priorities. There are reasonable tax reforms that the public will support that will help balance this budget and reduce the need for devastating cuts to the safety net.

Please contact me if I can be of any help.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sharon Parks".

Sharon Parks
President & CEO