

March 22, 2021

Dear Michigan Legislators,

We write as retired generals and proud Michiganders to urge you to support high-quality child care programs in our state. As military leaders, we appreciate the difficult decisions you must make to allocate limited resources to a large number of important programs. However, we believe that protecting funding for child care programs is essential to the health and development of Michigan children and an issue of national security.

In our state, **71 percent of young adults ages 17 to 24 are ineligible for military service**, primarily because they are too overweight, too poorly educated, or have a disqualifying record of crime or drug abuse. In order to protect our future national security, we must do more to ensure that those who answer the call to serve are eligible to do so. One way to address the primary disqualifiers for service is to provide children with access to high-quality early child care. Research shows that high-quality programs lay the foundation for successful learning, encourage children to live active and healthy lives, and promote cognitive, social, and emotional development that prevents behavioral problems later in life.

Over the past year, we have seen the COVID-19 pandemic greatly exacerbate the challenges facing Michigan children and their families. The pandemic has only further highlighted how critical it is for our state to invest in high-quality child care programs. Therefore, we urge you to consider the following concerns as you work on passage of the FY21 supplemental budget and when negotiating the Fiscal Year 2022 budget:

- **Child care – particularly for infants and toddlers - is important for setting kids up for success and as a support for working families.** Yet, Michigan’s child care system did not meet the needs of families who struggle to both access care and afford it when it’s available. Infant care in a center averages \$10,287 per year, nearly the cost for public college tuition. Additionally, nearly half of Michigan’s population live in a child care desert and only half of children eligible for subsidies are currently in care. Infant and toddler child care is especially important because it's a critical time for brain development and lays the foundation for later learning.
- **Currently, child care reimbursement rates fail to provide adequate pay for providers.** The current financing system for child care is not sustainable because it does not cover providers’ actual costs, or ensure adequate wages for child care workers. *Provider reimbursement rate increases and payment reforms could remedy this.*

- **Many of our most disadvantaged families do not qualify for quality care due to low eligibility rates for subsidies.** Michigan's eligibility threshold is one of the lowest in the country. *Increasing it to 200% of poverty would serve almost 150,000 more children statewide.*

Our national security depends on the men and women who are ready, willing, and qualified to serve in the armed forces, and putting more children on the path towards school readiness and academic success can grow that number. We hope that you will consider these outcomes when making important budget decisions for the remainder of FY21 and as you deliberate on the FY22 budget.

Thank you for your hard work on behalf of Michigan's children and families. If you are available to discuss these issues further, please contact Mission: Readiness Deputy Director Megan Adamczewski, at madamczewski@missionreadiness.org.

Very respectfully,



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