

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Wednesday, August 5, 2009

Contact: Dave Maluchnik, MCC
(517) 372-9310
dmaluchnik@micatholicconference.org

Judy Putnam, MLHS
(517) 487-5436
jputnam@michleagueforhumansvs.org

Human Service Advocacy Groups: The Price of ‘Shared Pain’ Too Costly

(Lansing) – Because of the disproportionate cuts the state’s social safety net has already experienced, any “shared pain” approach to balance the state’s \$1.8 billion budget deficit constitutes a moral and legislative failure, several human service advocacy groups explained today at a State Capitol press conference.

“Our message to the public and the Legislature is ‘enough is enough’, the state can no longer continue to tear apart the state’s social safety net to resolve the budget deficit,” said Michigan Catholic Conference Vice President for Public Policy Paul A. Long. “It is our common understanding that the moral strength of a society depends on the assistance it provides its most vulnerable population, and we hope the Legislature would share that position as well.”

In a letter sent yesterday to the governor and all legislators, some 27 of the state’s leading human service advocacy organizations called on the Legislature to oppose any proposal that seeks to balance the state’s budget deficit on the backs of Michigan’s poor population. Earlier this year, the advocacy groups explained, over half of the cuts that were included in a \$304 million budget cutting Executive Order came from the Department of Community Health and the Department of Human Services, two departments primarily responsible for ensuring critical human services to Michigan’s low-income children and families. Additional proposals have called for making the 48-month time limit on cash assistance retroactive, and freezing the full implementation of the Earned Income Tax Credit, a proven tax policy that serves to lessen the uneven tax burden levied on the working poor.

“The cuts proposed to date affecting low-income families are simply too harmful,” said Michigan League for Human Services President and C.E.O. Sharon Parks. “We cannot balance Michigan’s budget on the backs of poor families – we need to paint a brighter future for our kids.”

Among the enacted or proposed budget cuts addressed at today’s press conference included those in the Senate-passed version of the fiscal year 2010 Department of Human Services budget, which cut some \$330 million, or 29.4 percent of the DHS general fund. These cuts, if enacted, will eliminate nearly one in every three dollars spent on social services in Michigan. A few of the more alarming of those proposed cuts include:

(Over)

- A \$10 per person per month cut in the Family Independence Program, dropping the maximum grant for a family of three to \$462 per month. If such a proposal were signed into law, a family living on FIP, with no other income, will be living at 72 percent below the federal poverty line. When Michigan faced similar economic distress in the early 1980s, families receiving FIP were 23 percent below the federal poverty line.
- A cut in the children's clothing allowance from \$88 per child to \$43 per child. These are limited funds that low-income parents need to ensure their child or children have adequate clothing for school and for Michigan's frigid winters.
- A series of cuts in the child day care program that will eliminate \$80 million by cutting hours and provider rates. This leaves working parents with fewer options in a terrible economy trying to ensure proper childcare.
- A \$14 per month cut to Supplemental Security Income, which, in part, provides assistance to the elderly and people with disabilities who live independently.

“These budget cuts are not fair to children and they will put many kids at significantly higher risk of maltreatment, of poor health outcomes and of school failure. Let's make children a priority in our budget-making process – and find other, fairer ways to balance our state budget,” said Jack Kresnak, President and C.E.O. of Michigan's Children.

The U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics earlier this year reported that 10 percent of all families in Michigan and nearly one out of every five children are in poverty, and many other families are in an “economically precarious” position. “Our organizations witness first-hand the “street level” effect enacted and proposed budget cuts will have on destitute children and families, and we are increasingly concerned for what lies ahead as fewer and fewer program dollars are appropriated to vulnerable communities,” the 27 human service advocacy organizations state in their letter.

The organizations that signed onto the letter include the Michigan Catholic Conference, Michigan League for Human Services, Michigan's Children, Michigan Nonprofit Association, Michigan Association of United Ways, Michigan County Social Services Association, Michigan Public Health Association, Lutheran Social Services, Michigan Federation for Children and Families, Michigan Coalition for Children and Families, Food Bank Council of Michigan, Michigan Protection and Advocacy Service, Michigan Community Action Agency Association, Michigan Statewide Independent Living Council, Michigan Association of Area Agencies on Aging, National Association of Social Workers, Michigan Chapter, Michigan Council on Crime and Delinquency, Catholic Charities West Michigan, Michigan Head Start Association, Michigan 4C Association, PHI, Michigan Prevention Association, Center for Civil Justice, High Scope Educational Research Foundation, Michigan Association for Infant Mental Health, Michigan Association of Community Mental Health Boards.