



Capitol Corner
An ECIC Legislative Update
May 9, 2008

Around the Capitol

Blueprint for Fighting Crime Emphasizes Early Childhood Education

On Monday, several law enforcement representatives unveiled the first step in developing a comprehensive plan to reduce crime in Michigan. A report entitled “Blueprint For a Safer Michigan” offers a variety of crime prevention strategies including early childhood education.

The blueprint backed early childhood education as a proven way to combat criminal acts. According to Kent County Commissioner Nadine Klein, since 2000, her county has spent \$1.8 million into pre and post-natal care, early education, truancy prevention, after-school programs and other programs designed to steer children away from hard lives that can lead to future criminal behavior.

The blueprint is intended to stimulate community groups, universities, foundations, victims organizations businesses and education groups into working together to reduce crime and protect the public. Sponsoring organizations include the Michigan Association of Chiefs of Police, Michigan Association of Counties, Michigan Sheriffs Association, and the Prosecuting Attorneys Association of Michigan.

Michigan Children Benefit From Reading First Program

A federal report released by the Institute for Educational Sciences in the U.S. Department of Education shows the impact of the Reading First Grant Program. According to Mark Coscarella, who oversees the program in Michigan, our state has seen significant improvements in reading scores because of the federal grants.

Mr. Coscarella noted that when Michigan first received grant monies in 2002, the average reading proficiency in recipient schools was 19%. That average rose to 36% in 2007. Michigan’s emphasis on smaller facilitator to student ratios meant more time in each school to assist with reading program development and implementation.

Unfortunately, under the current federal budget proposal, Michigan is expected to see a 61% cut in grant monies.

A final federal report is due out in 2009.

DHS Audit on Daycare Providers

A 2007 internal audit conducted by the Department of Human Services on daycare providers and clients made news this week. The audit showed that less than 17% of the 2,000 daycare providers audited kept attendance records required to be filed with the state. Another 41% failed to respond to the department's request for documentation.

More than 67% of clients who requested daycare funding from DHS had no reported earnings according to the state Unemployment Insurance Agency. The clients had requested the funding because they were working but could not afford the cost.

When a day care provider does not respond to department requests they are taken off the list of eligible providers. As a result of the audit, 840 providers were dis-enrolled. Penalties will also be imposed on clients for misusing funds provided by the state.

In the News

Congressmen Call for Ban on Harmful Chemical In Infant Formula Packaging

Two members of Michigan's Congressional delegation, John Dingell and Bart Stupak, are calling on prominent infant formula manufacturers to discontinue the use of Bisphenol A in their packaging.

According to a joint press release, the Congressmen are responding to heightened health concerns that have mounted in recent weeks.

"Given the dangers posed by this chemical and the public's growing unease, infant formula manufacturers should play it safe and reassure parents and families by discontinuing use of this chemical," Dingell stated.

Letters calling for the ban were sent to: Mead Johnson & Company; Nestle USA, Inc.; PBM Products; and Ross Products Division of Abbot Labs.

Racial Disparity Remains in Infant Deaths

According to a report released on Tuesday, while statewide infant mortality rates are down, African-American infants are three times more likely to die than white infants.

“We’ve made progress in reducing some risks, but infant mortality remains a very troubling problem in Michigan, particularly among African-American families,” stated Jane Zehnder-Merrell, director of Kids Count in Michigan.

The report, “Right Start in Michigan-2008: Targeting Disparity in Infant Mortality,” was commissioned by the Michigan League for Human Services.

Foster Care Board & Trust Fund Announced

In another step to improve Michigan’s troubled foster care system, Representative Craig DeRoche and Senator Bill Hardiman, have announced a plan to form a state foster care advisory board and foster care trust fund. The lawmakers said legislation would be introduced in the coming weeks that would create both entities in order to immediately address system problems.

The fund and the board are both aimed at reducing caseloads, instances of abuse and neglect and helping older foster children transition into adulthood after their foster care eligibility ends. Both will be modeled after the Child Abuse and Neglect Board and Children’s Trust fund. Funding will come through an income tax check-off and charitable donations.

Under the Dome

Senate Passes Workplace Ban on Smoking

Despite a ‘No’ vote from the Majority Leader, Senator Mike Bishop, the Republican controlled State Senate passed a ban on smoking in bars, restaurants and other indoor areas on Thursday. While the State House had passed a similar bill last December, the common perception amongst Capitol insiders was that the Senate would not act on the legislation.

The bill is expected to move quickly through the House and onto the Governor’s desk. The Governor is on record as willing to sign a smoking ban bill.

The Senate version of the bills does not allow exemptions for the three Detroit casinos or bingo halls.

House Committee Hears Testimony on Bill to Limit Lice Rx

For the second week in a row, the House Great Lakes and Environment Committee heard testimony on a bill that would limit the use of the lice treatment lindane. The bill would limit the availability of the treatment to use in doctors offices. Proponents of the bill say lindane is an environmental and health risk if not used properly.

Former U.S. Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders testified in opposition to the bill saying that limiting the use of lindane would hurt the very people that benefit from the treatment.

More testimony is scheduled for next week.

Joint Custody Mandate Debated

Advocates from both sides of a bill that would require custody of children to be split between both parents testified Wednesday at the House Judiciary Committee hearing.

Proponents testified that currently, custody is overwhelmingly awarded to one parent. They expressed that children need to be able to spend time with both parents.

Those opposing the bill talked about some of the dangers of mandating joint custody including a child under the care of a parent with a substance abuse or a situation where domestic abuse has occurred.

Those speaking in favor of the bill included the Family Rights Coalition, National Family Justice Association, DADS of Michigan, MOMS of Michigan, and American Coalition for Fathers and Children.

Opponents of the bill included the Family Law Section of the State Bar of Michigan and the Michigan Coalition Against Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence.

The committee did not vote on the bill.

Infant Mortality Summit

On Monday, May 12, the Michigan Department of Community Health is hosting an infant mortality summit in Lansing. "Reducing Infant Mortality in Michigan: Lessons Learned From the Field" will share ideas about reducing infant mortality in the state.

Other News

Star Power Rally and Legislative Day at the Capitol, May 21, 2008

On Wednesday, May 21, parents, teachers, advocates – and kids – from all around the state will join the Early Childhood Investment Corporation and the Great Start Collaboratives in Lansing to educate state legislators on the value of investing in early childhood development, education and care. Join ECIC on this star-filled day as we salute the champions of early childhood initiatives – our rising stars. We will also have an opportunity to engage our state lawmakers and help to further their education on how they can impact early childhood services and programs for all of Michigan's kids.

Register online at: http://www.ecic4kids.org/star_power.cfm

Plug into the ECIC Policy Center to Get Involved

The ECIC web site has a new and improved policy center where you can stay informed and get involved.

http://www.ecic4kids.org/policy_advocacy_center.cfm

From the Policy and Advocacy Center you can review the current and all past editions of Capitol Corner. Use our Advocacy Center to get involved:

- Send an [email to your legislator, senator, and the governor](#)
- Send a "[letter to the editor](#)" email to your local media & newspapers
- Get more information on [early childhood issues, bills, legislation](#)

You can also sign-up for our new Action Alerts at:

http://capwiz.com/ecic4kids/issues/alert/?alertid=10904976&type=ML&show_alert=1

and much more. Take the time to see what this site has to offer and how you can be involved.