# Capitol Corner
# An ECIC Legislative Update
# May 30, 2008

## Star Power Rally Takes Capitol by Storm

A special thanks to everyone that attended the 2nd Annual Star Power Rally. It was a smashing success. Despite abnormally cold May weather we still had over 500 parents, children, teachers and early childhood advocates attend the rally and meet with their legislators.

At the Rally, representatives from Consumers Energy, the United Way, and Dr. William Miller were recognized and honored for their hard work and efforts to increase the build a state and local Great Start system. They were all saluted as our "Rising Stars," and applauded by the crowd.

Speaker of the House, Andy Dillon, and Senate President Pro Tempore, Randy Richardville, both addressed the crowd during the rally and applauded everyone for their hard work and stressed that the legislature understands the importance of early childhood development.

Following the rally, attendees fanned out across downtown to meet with their elected officials. During these meetings they educated lawmakers and staffers about the importance of Governor Granholm's proposed increase in early childhood spending in the 2009 Budget.

By the end of the day, the sun was shining, and the Capitol overflowing with yellow "Star Power" advocates educating their elected leaders on the importance of investing in early childhood development.

## House "Re-Votes" on Smoking Ban Bill

This week the House approved a smoking ban bill that they had already passed in December. The bill carves out an exemption for the three commercial casinos in Detroit,

cigar bars, hooka bars and bingo halls. The move was in response to a bill that had recently been passed by the Senate that does not include any exemptions.

Proponents of the House bill argue that Native American casinos would have an unfair competitive advantage if the Detroit casinos were not exempted. Proponents of the Senate argue that the issue is about public health and the ban should be implemented across the board.

Lansing insiders are uncertain whether the Senate will take up and approve the House bill although signals seem to indicate that they will.

## Foster Care Reform Debate To Be Decided in Court

For the second time in the past year, negotiations between the Department of Human Services and the advocacy group Children's Rights have broken down. The two parties had been trying to reach an agreement over proposed reforms to Michigan's foster care system outside of the courtroom. Acknowledging that the negotiations have failed, DHS has publicly announced that it will take the issue to court.

## Michigan Dropouts Cost State Billions

This week, the Columbia University's Teachers College confirmed what those in education and state government had long speculated, dropouts are costing the state a lot of money. In fact the Columbia study estimates they are costing Michigan taxpayers about $2.5 billion a year. Every student who drops out of high school costs the public $127,000 in tax revenues, public health costs, crime and welfare payments.

As early childhood advocates, we all are aware that there is a growing body of research that shows that by investing in early childhood care, education and development you can prepare a child to succeed in school and avoid some of these costs. ECIC will continue to educate lawmakers about the importance of reaching children early in life.

## Policy Conference on Mackinac Island

The Detroit Regional Chamber of Commerce's annual public policy conference took place this week on Mackinac Island. Leaders from government and the business community united to discuss the future of Michigan and policies to get the state back on track. During the three-day conference discussions and policy symposiums focused on a number of topics including reforming term limits to repealing a surcharge tax on businesses to prison reform.

## Take Action

Lawmakers are weeks away from finalizing the 2008-2009 state budget. As we learned from the recent Revenue Estimating Conference, Michigan once again is facing a significant revenue shortfall. Our elected officials will be forced to make tough decisions

about what to spend money on. It is very important that you make a phone call, write a letter or send an email to your Representative or Senator and educate them about the importance of early childhood development. For more information please visit the Policy & Advocacy Center on the ECIC website.  Click here to sign up for Action Alerts.