

## 2022 Policy Priorities: Improving Access to Free- or Low-Cost Child Care

In the fall of 2021, Michigan made a historic \$1.4 billion investment into the child care system. To help additional working families with child care costs, eligibility for child care assistance was expanded to 185% of the federal poverty level. As of 2021, about 42% of children in Michigan under age 5 income-qualify for the child care subsidy program, however, only 5% are enrolled.<sup>i</sup>

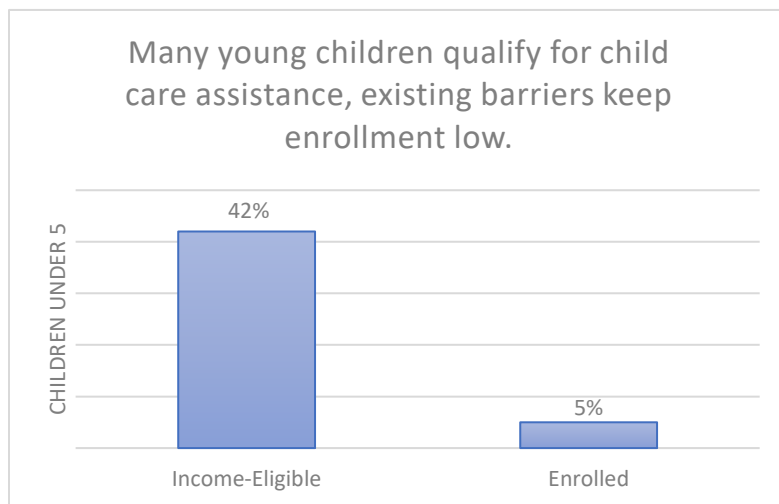
To further increase access and enrollment in free- or low-cost child care, the following action can be taken:

Remove the child support cooperation requirement for families applying for the child care subsidy. Michigan is one of only 13 states with this policy, which deters families from applying for free or low-cost child care at a time when eligibility has been expanded to help more families access the care and support needed to participate in the workforce.

### Removing the Child Support Cooperation Requirement

To receive the child care subsidy, parents in Michigan must cooperate with the child support agency. Meaning, to receive assistance for child care, parents must work with the Friend of the Court to implement a formal child support order with the non-resident, or non-custodial, parent. If they do not comply with this requirement, their application for the child care subsidy program can be denied.

More than 1 in 4 children in Michigan live in a single parent household,<sup>ii</sup> and the child support program provides additional financial security to these children and families. However, there is no evidence that requiring cooperation with child support as a part of participation in public programs, such as the child care subsidy, results in additional resources for the child as intended when these policies were put into place.<sup>iii</sup>



In fact, the requirement to cooperate with child support often deters parents from seeking assistance for child care, which can impact their ability to find care while they work or attend school. Families with low incomes may not want formal child support if they already have informal child support arrangements. Parents often prefer informal arrangements to avoid government involvement in private affairs or to promote involvement of the non-custodial parent.<sup>iii</sup> Nationally, 12.1% of single parents have an established informal child support

agreement.<sup>iv</sup> For these parents, opening a formal child support case would create unnecessary tension and may damage an otherwise working co-parenting relationship. Some parents may also fear getting involved with the court system, and mothers may not want to go through paternity testing, which often provokes feelings of shame, trauma, guilt, and/or fear.

Further, states are not federally required to impose this policy, and many states have changed their subsidy policies to remove this requirement. For example, in 2018, there were 23 states that required compliance with child support to receive child care assistance.<sup>v</sup> As of December 2021, Michigan is one of only 13 states with this requirement. One of the more recent states to end the policy is Virginia, which eliminated the child support requirement in one simple sentence at the end of an early childhood care and education bill: “The foregoing provisions of this section shall not apply to applications for the Child Care Subsidy Program.”<sup>vi</sup>

---

<sup>i</sup> Isaacs, Yona, Michigan League for Public Policy, *Michigan Birth to Five Fact Sheet*, August 2021, accessed March 14, 2022: <https://mlpp.org/PDG%20FACT%20SHEETS%202021/ STATEWIDE.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> Kids Count Data Center, Child population by household type in Michigan, 2019, accessed March 11, 2022: <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/10916-child-population-by-household-type?loc=24&loct=2#detailed/2/24/false/1729/4290,7800,4291,4292/21213,21214>

<sup>iii</sup> Llobrera, Joseph, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, *Child Support Cooperation Requirements in SNAP Are Unproven, Costly, and Put Families at Risk*, February 5, 2020, accessed March 11, 2022: <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/child-support-cooperation-requirements-in-snap-are-unproven-costly-and-put>

<sup>iv</sup> Wolf, Jennifer, Very Well Family, *U.S. Child Support Statistics*, May 14, 2020, accessed March 15, 2022: <https://www.verywellfamily.com/us-child-support-statistics-2997994>

<sup>v</sup> Palmer, Jennifer & Rifkin, Cameron, National Conference of State Legislatures, *Child support enforcement and child care assistance*, December 2021, accessed March 14, 2022.

<sup>vi</sup> Howell, Janet, LIS: Virginia’s Legislative Information System, *2020 Session: SB 578 Early childhood care and education; establishment of system, definitions, licensure*, 2020, accessed on March 14, 2022: <https://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?201+sum+SB578>