



## MEMORANDUM

TO: Members of the Michigan Poverty Task Force

FROM: Gilda Z. Jacobs, President & CEO

DATE: February 5, 2020

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Since the organization's founding more than 100 years ago, the Michigan League for Public Policy has advocated for public policies that eradicate poverty and its long-term effects on the state's children, families and economy. We are very gratified by Gov. Whitmer's decision to create the Michigan Poverty Task Force, and on behalf of the Board of Directors of the League, I wish to extend our offer to assist you in your mission.

I am enclosing a copy of the [Owner's Manual for Michigan](#), the culmination of more than a year's work by the League and its local partners to create a clear and comprehensive plan to address poverty and create stronger families and communities. The League's staff toured the state, holding focus groups with communities both big and small. After talking with hundreds of people about what they think will help drive Michigan forward, we came up with a final plan that is informed by both people and data. To make a better Michigan, we collectively have some tough work ahead. Racial inequities are holding our state back. Unacceptable public policies that limit employment, housing and educational options for people of color continue to exist, leaving families and children further behind. Our plan seeks to promote policies that can create equity at all levels, including:

- A top-notch education for all Michigan children regardless of race, place or income.
- Investments in early education and care as a key lever for improving literacy.
- Access to high-quality healthcare including behavioral health services.
- Improvements in public health, and justice for families exposed to environmental toxins.
- Protections for immigrant students, workers, neighbors and business owners in Michigan.
- Supports for Michigan workers, including affordable child care and policies that allow justice-involved residents to get back into the community and working.
- Access to affordable housing and healthy food.

In 2019, League staff revisited the communities that had contributed to the development of the *Owner's Manual for Michigan* to see if we got the policy agenda right. The overwhelming response was positive, and our community partners ranked the following as the top five priorities in creating more economic justice in this state: (1) affordable housing; (2) high-quality healthcare; (3) healthy food; (4) a high-quality education for all; (5) affordable child care.

The League urges you to consider the work that you do through a two-generational (2Gen) lens. Government interventions to address economic mobility have often focused on the needs of parents separately from their children, rather than on the success of the whole family, and have consequently fallen short. A number of states, including Colorado, Maryland, Connecticut and others, have adopted this approach. The key components of a 2Gen approach include:

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- **Organizational change, rather than new programs.** States that have had success have started with a key leader/champion who had authority to direct resources and staff. After consultation with a wider constituency, many moved from 2Gen pilot programs to systemic, integrated approaches across multiple state departments/programs.
- **Realignment of existing programs and funding streams.** While some new funding needs will likely be identified, the realignment, blending and braiding of funds—including limits on funding “shell games”—are an important component.
- **An effective interdepartmental decision-making body.** 2Gen approaches generally cut across departments or other systems, and interdepartmental decision-making and communication are critical. Effective states usually have an identified coordinator to ensure that this occurs.
- **Meaningful public/private partnerships.** It is important that statewide leadership for this work includes parents, service providers, local collaboratives, policymakers, advocates and philanthropic organizations.
- **A family-focused approach.** 2Gen approaches rely on the input of parents and families, and the delivery of services is geared to families’ needs. Examples include: (1) the out-stationing of state workers in community-based organizations and schools; (2) the colocation of services in places families live and raise their children—including public housing; (3) a shift from “eligibility determination” to “strength-based case management/coaching”; (4) continued efforts to ensure that families can build assets and do not face “benefit cliffs” as they transition off assistance; and (5) policies that presume eligibility and align verifications across programs.

Again, we are grateful that the important work of addressing poverty and economic inequality in Michigan is underway with new leadership. We stand ready to help in any way we can.