



Date: October 8, 2024

To: Chair Cherry and Members of the Senate Committee on Labor

From: Monique Stanton, President & CEO

Subject: Support for SB 963-965 (Santana, Cavanagh, Camilleri)—Strengthening protections for working children

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The Michigan League for Public Policy is pleased to support Senate Bills 963-965, sponsored by Sens. Santana, Cavanagh and Camilleri, which will strengthen protections for working children. These bills, collectively, create a clear process for youths to apply for and receive a work permit, set safe, realistic standards for youth employment and strengthen penalties for employers who do not comply.

The League is a nonpartisan research and advocacy organization that promotes economic opportunity for all and analyzes the impact of public policy and budget decisions on the lives of Michiganders who have been systemically left out of prosperity. The League is also the state's Kids Count organization working as a part of a national effort to measure child well-being at the state and local levels and use that information to shape public policies and programs to improve the lives of children and their families.

Michigan is home to nearly 640,000 kids aged 15 to 19. These are young people who spend about seven hours a day attending school, many of whom then go on to spend several hours playing sports, practicing an instrument, participating in theater or attending another extracurricular activity, and then finish up homework. We provide for safe educational environments throughout the day by requiring certain standards be met, from basic building safety requirements to fire drills and active shooter drills to background checks on substitute teachers, coaches and other volunteers, among others.

On top of everything we currently expect our high school students to do, many are also either employed or are looking for work. Our laws should ensure that these youths have safe, age-appropriate environments to work, earn a wage and learn important life skills for their future. And with federal laws setting an important but weak floor, states—like Michigan—need to stand in to protect our future. Unfortunately, a disproportionate number of children who are Black, brown, immigrants or from low-income backgrounds get caught by weak child labor laws, and they may feel like they cannot refuse or leave an unsafe working environment or feel like they have no choice in their workplace, as employers set shifts and schedules.

Using data to educate, advocate and fight for policy solutions that undo historic and systemic racial and economic inequities to lift up Michiganders who have been left out of prosperity.

1223 TURNER STREET • SUITE G1 • LANSING, MICHIGAN 48906

P: 517.487.5436 • F: 517.371.4546 • WWW.MLPP.ORG

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Over the past five years, there has been a significant rise in the number of child labor law violations nationally, and more states are looking to weaken their child work permit protections. What's more is that the child labor law violations are likely an undercount, as these often go unreported and uninvestigated. Recently, Michigan was in the spotlight when the New York Times ran a report about widespread child labor practices across the United States in the manufacturing sector, and a quick search turns up other reports from things like simply working during the school day to possible safety violations.

Children who want to work, and those who need to work to help support their families, should be able to rely on the fact that they are entering a safe working environment. They should not be faced with risk of injury, death or even missing out on their own education. If we value our children, our laws should reflect that, and clarifying work permit procedures and strengthening protections for youth labor violations, as in Senate Bills 963-965, is one important step we can take to protect some of our most vulnerable workers.

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