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Press Release

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Senate Democrats Defend Vital Services for Michigan's Struggling Workers and Families

Republican budget proposal for Department of Human Services severely cuts funding for clothing, education, food, job search and shelter assistance for vulnerable citizens

LANSING-Senate Democrats fought today against drastic cuts to the Department of Human Services budget introduced by Senate Republicans that would deplete funding for child care and early childhood education and important support services for struggling workers and their families. Senate Democrats introduced eight different amendments to restore funding for vital programs, all of which were defeated on a party line vote.

"These cuts are just awful. We need to work together to balance the state budget, but certainly we can do so without pulling the rug out from under the children and families already being hit the hardest by this economic crisis," said Senator Martha G. Scott (D-Highland Park). "This funding that we sought to restore today would help clothe, feed and shelter Michigan families, and also assist those looking for work with training and support services."

More than 20% of Michigan's population now gets some form of assistance from the Department of Human Services (DHS). DHS caseloads are overwhelming, having gone from just over 300 per worker to almost 600 per worker in the current year. Unemployment levels continue to rise significantly, recently reaching over 14 %, and about 90,000 people are expected to lose their unemployment benefits by the end of this year.

As our economy struggles, the need for DHS services is more important now than ever, yet Senate Republicans proposed over \$147 million in cuts to essential programs today. Senate Democrats sought to protect some of the most important initiatives supported by the Department of Human Services budget, including:

- Restoring \$13.5 million to train laid off workers for the new economy jobs and to fund clothing, transportation, and other support for people looking for jobs. This program would help people get off of assistance and get back in to the workforce.
- Protecting for Local Office Emergency Funds that help keep children in their homes and assist families in paying their bills, especially as unemployment funds begin to run out on tens of thousands of residents.

- Restoring almost \$54 million to avoid severe cuts to child care, before and after school programs, and early childhood education programs, which make it harder for parents to find steady work and endangers early education opportunities that have proven critical to a child's development and ultimate success. These cuts also jeopardize \$58 million in federal stimulus and another \$200 million in federal funding that support these DHS services.
- Fighting for \$29 million to provide \$14 per month to assist disabled individuals living independently with the costs associated with paying rent, buying food and purchasing medical supplies.
- Restoring \$3.9 million to continue the Clothing Allowance at \$75 per child per year to allow families to provide for their children.
- Preserving funding to avoid laying off 100 DHS workers and upholding FIP grant funding to offer modest support for Michigan's most vulnerable families.

"Studies continue to show that early childhood education and support have a significant impact on a child's development down the road," said Senator Deb Cherry (D-Burton). "These budget cuts attack programs that help prepare our kids for academic and professional success, which is key to developing the workforce the industries of the future demand. We need to make difficult decisions, but not ones like this that only further cripple our state's chance at rebounding."

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