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Guest: Michigan program offers support to pregnant women

By Rebecca Mastee Sep 16, 2019 Updated 20 hrs ago



Pregnancy is a beautiful gift, but it can also be overwhelming. The feeling is often magnified for women who struggle to make ends meet, face limited family involvement, receive a poor prenatal diagnosis, or experience abuse or other challenges. Public policies can do more to offer care to pregnant women. No mother should have to go through her pregnancy alone, especially when a helping hand can make a world of difference.

For the past five years, Michigan has prioritized women and children in our various communities through the Pregnancy and Parenting Support Services Program. This policy partners with existing pregnancy and social service agencies to provide comprehensive support and alternatives to abortion, offering assistance through the baby's

first birthday. This assistance comes in many forms, including counseling, adoption information, parenting classes, and referrals for pre or post-natal care. The program also offers items such as baby clothing, formula, diapers, and furniture.

When facing obstacles during pregnancy, many women understandably question if they are able to handle it. Others feel pressured by a loved one to have an abortion. This Michigan initiative, however, demonstrates the importance of wrapping mother and baby with support, as abortion should never feel like a woman's only option. In fact, after benefitting from the program's services, approximately 85 percent of women who felt pressure to abort later changed their minds and gave birth to their babies (2019 statistics).

Since June 2014, this pro-woman, pro-life effort has served 8,393 clients statewide through 32,595 visits. Its results include overwhelming health outcomes: 98 percent of women were connected to a healthcare provider for prenatal care, 94 percent took their child to pediatric appointments, and 93 percent kept their child's immunizations updated. Through two local providers alone—Catholic Charities of Southeast Michigan and Pregnancy Aid—over 2,600 women in southeast Michigan have received support services, all at no cost to mothers or their families.

During Fiscal Year 2019, the Michigan Pregnancy and Parenting Support Services Program received \$700,000 in the state budget. The funding is a small fraction of the state's \$58 billion budget, but its impact has made a statistical difference within this area. The assistance has helped providers form genuine relationships with their clients, encouraging and celebrating their accomplishments. It has also empowered women to care for their children and to overcome obstacles.

*Katrina's experience demonstrates how this initiative helps women succeed. When Katrina found out she was pregnant, she had no access to permanent housing. After reaching out to her local provider, she received a temporary place to stay, maternity clothing, personal hygiene items, and bus passes for transportation to medical appointments. Katrina felt "safe, encouraged, and cared for" by staff, who helped her develop goals and confidence. Today, she is looking at colleges, living in safe and affordable housing, and planning a wedding to the baby's father. Many in society regrettably tell women that motherhood will conflict with their goals, but a more compassionate relationship offered by Michigan's pregnancy and parenting services assisted Katrina in achieving them.

The Michigan Legislature has approved funding to continue offering a helping hand for pregnant women and their babies. Unfortunately, Governor Whitmer eliminated the item in her Executive Recommendations, and it is unclear whether she will retain the appropriation included by the Legislature in the final budget. Pulling the funding, especially at a time of great need in our communities, would be unnecessarily divisive and harmful. Instead, Michigan should continue to lift up and care for its pregnant women and children.

Regardless of where Michiganders stand on abortion, they can take pride in the work carried out by well-trained and highly capable volunteers and staff at various pregnancy centers across the state. Even in the most difficult circumstances, the Pregnancy and Parenting Support Services Program offers compassion, assistance, and hope. Michigan women and children deserve no less.

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To learn more about the Michigan Pregnancy and Parenting Support Services Program, visit www.realalternatives.org/. To obtain services under the program, call 1-888-LIFE AID (543-3243) or go to www.1888LifeAid.com.

* Name changed for privacy reasons.



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