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State budget cuts to close preschools, lead to job losses

Nearly 200 at-risk children across mid-Michigan may be told their preschool has closed and 16-20 staff may lose their jobs in an area already devastated by unemployment and job loss.

The state is currently in discussions regarding the budget, and part of that discussion involves eliminating funding for the Great Start School Readiness Program as well as other early childhood programs. These cuts will result in preschool closings, job losses, and most importantly, lost opportunities for young children.

Mid Michigan Community Action (MMCAA) operates 10 preschool classrooms in Clare, Gladwin and Mecosta Counties. If the state proceeds with the proposed budget cuts four of these classrooms will close as they are dependent on state funding.

Between 16-20 staff will be laid-off resulting in \$436,000 of lost wages and fringe benefits. Many of these staff will not only lose their job but their access to health insurance for themselves and families. In addition, MMCAA subcontracts transportation and lunches with the area school districts; program closure will result in the loss of these contracts.

“The impact of these cuts will be devastating to young children not just in mid-Michigan, but throughout the state, Joleen Golden, MMCAA Early Childhood Services Director, said. “It is impossible to calculate the long term consequences of eliminating these vital programs.”

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The recommendation for cuts, a part of House Bill 4447, has been approved by the Senate, and is in negotiations in the House of Representatives. Those interested in voicing their opinion on the matter should contact their representative's office as soon as possible.

MMCAA's preschool program is a free service with preference given to children who qualify as "at-risk" based on a list of criteria developed by Head Start and Great Start.

Mid Michigan Community Action Agency is a non-profit, human services agency serving Bay, Clare, Gladwin, Mecosta, Midland and Osceola Counties since 1966.

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