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OPINION

Jacques: Dems target pregnancy support centers

Ingrid Jacques, The Detroit News

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A program to help Michigan women facing unplanned or crisis pregnancies is seeing real results for its clients.

Yet funding for the network of clinics around the state is in jeopardy, largely thanks to ideological debates over abortion.



Funding for a statewide network of pregnancy support centers is in jeopardy. (Photo: Timothy Sloan / Getty Images)

It would be a shame if this resource for women in need were to disappear.

Michigan's Pregnancy and Parenting Support Services Program is funded through the state Department of Health and Human Services and is [administered by a nonprofit called Real Alternatives](#), which operates similar programs in Pennsylvania and Indiana.

Michigan's 16 service locations have aided around 8,000 women from 48 counties since the program's inception six years ago. The centers offer women a range of services, including prenatal care, counseling and assistance in caring for the infant. Other services include help with food, clothing and furniture — all at no cost to the women.

According to the Michigan Catholic Conference, which is advocating for the continuation of the program, "By empowering women in a crisis pregnancy with this comprehensive support, they no longer feel compelled to choose abortion out of a sense of helplessness, hopelessness and of being completely alone."

The program is funded at very little cost to Michigan taxpayers. According to the state health department, in fiscal year 2019, total funding for Real Alternatives is \$700,000, with \$650,000 of that coming from federal TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) grants — and \$50,000 from the state general fund.

The \$750,000 needed to continue the same level of service is still in the Republican-controlled Legislature's budget for 2020. Yet it's not in Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's budget, and her office is noncommittal about how she'll handle that funding during budget negotiations.

[State Sens. Erika Geiss](#), D-Taylor, and [Adam Hollier](#), D-Detroit, proposed amendments to block the funding for the Real Alternatives program, but they were defeated.

The senators should take a closer look at the program, which could be a lifeline for women in their districts. [Reports in recent years](#) have drawn attention to the horrific levels of infant mortality in Detroit -- rates that rival the Third World.

In addition, [black women receive the majority of abortions](#) in the state. Of the 26,716 abortions reported in Michigan in 2018, 50.1 percent were obtained by black women. [Yet only 14 percent](#) of the state's population is black, so those numbers are troubling.

The pregnancy and parenting program seeks to address these concerns, including infant mortality, through better prenatal care, as well as care for newborns.

Bob Wheaton, a spokesman for the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, says the Legislature-created program has been of "questionable benefit to families, and it's been difficult for us to get data on the program to gauge its effectiveness."

The state should track how the money is being spent and used, as it should with any taxpayer investment. But there don't appear to be any egregious abuses among the centers.

Whitmer should look to Pennsylvania, where the Democratic governor there has committed much more in state funding — more than \$6 million the past year, in addition to \$1 million in federal dollars — to a similar program.

And as pro-life Democrats [gather in Lansing](#) for their national Democrats for Life of America conference this coming weekend, they should advocate for the preservation of Michigan's pregnancy centers.

Regardless of where you stand on abortion, helping women through difficult pregnancies — and giving them and their babies a brighter future — seems like a no-brainer.

ijacques@detroitnews.com

Detroit News intern Alexis Nester contributed.

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