GRAND RAPIDS AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

To: House Families, Children and Seniors Committee

From: Chris Glass, Director of Public Policy

Subject: Support House Bill 5572 and Save Millions by Investing in Michigan Families

Date: May 22, 2012

Thank you Mr. Chair and members of the Committee. My name is Chris Glass and I am the Director of Public Policy for the Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce. On behalf of the Chamber and our 2,800 members, we ask for your support in the passage of House Bill 5572.

Businesses in Michigan need a 21st century workforce to compete and prosper. We also need a state government that spends our tax dollars wisely on cost-effective programs that are proven to work.

For both of these reasons, the Grand Rapids Chamber supports legislation to strengthen voluntary, early childhood home visiting programs, which provide information and coaching to new mothers and fathers during pregnancy and through their baby's early years.

These programs help parents get answers from trained professionals to the numerous questions that accompany a baby, in the privacy of their home. Topics include proper nutrition, interactions that stimulate brain development and how to avoid potential health risks. Home visiting often incorporates prenatal and postnatal checkups for the mother and child, and can assist parents in addressing special challenges such as learning disabilities and developmental delays.

In government as in business, careful implementation and accountability are essential to the effectiveness of any initiative. When well designed and administered, home visiting helps families thrive and improves the likelihood that both parent and child will make positive contributions to Michigan's economy. And these services save taxpayers money down the road by preventing costly problems later in life.

House Bill 5572, introduced by Representative Lisa Posthumus Lyons, would give our state the strong home visiting accountability measures we need to ensure the best results. The bill would direct public dollars to programs that have a record of success. Importantly, this bipartisan legislation would establish an efficient, comprehensive and fair system to monitor the child and family outcomes achieved by all home visiting providers contracted by the state.

Home visiting programs are particularly important to help at-risk children get a solid start toward a healthy and productive life. With the system of goals and standards proposed in Rep. Posthumus Lyons' bill, legislators and taxpayers would have the necessary information to know

if a home visiting provider is getting results for families and delivering a strong return on our state's investment. Without this legislation, state-funded providers may determine for themselves the families they serve, the outcomes they seek, and the performance measures they report. This type of relationship between the state and its vendors limits accountability for the use of public dollars and is at odds with policy makers' fundamental duty to promote fiscal discipline.

Success in business depends on making smart decisions based on data about what works. Decisions about how our tax dollars are used should be made in the same way. At a time when budget priorities are being debated and dollars are scarce, this bill will help ensure the state invests in programs that produce real benefits for our children and families, the business community, and our state economy.

This legislation is an important step forward in strengthening early childhood in Michigan and we ask for your support of House Bill 5572.