



**Michigan's  
Early  
Childhood  
Courts**



**Affectionately known as Baby Court**

# Michigan's Early Childhood Courts State Leadership Team

**Kim Batsche-McKenzie, Project Director, MDHHS**

**Demetrius Starling & Rachel Willis,  
Children's Services Administration**

**Kelly Wagner & Casey Anbender,  
State Court Administrative Office**

**Patty Neitman & Ali Cosgrove,**

**Bureau of Children's Coordinated Health Policy & Supports**

**Dr. Debra Pinals, MDHHS**

**Dr. Ann Stacks & Dr. Bryan Victor, Evaluators,**

**Wayne State University**

**Michele Hall, Statewide Coordinator**

# Welcome and Introductions

- Introducing the State Leadership Team
- Introducing State Advisory Group Members



- Head- What do you know so well that you could teach us about?



- Hands- What are you really good at?



- Heart-What are you most passionate about?



# What is a “Court for Babies”

- Michigan’s Early Childhood Courts (ECC) are specialized problem-solving courts to support infants and toddlers, along with parents and siblings, who are in the child welfare system.
- This collaborative, non-adversarial approach often involves assisting parents in overcoming various obstacles.

# HRSA'S Maternal & Child Health Bureau

## Mission

To improve the health and well-being of America's mothers, children, and families.

## Vision

Our vision is an America where all mothers, children, and families thrive and reach their full potential.

## MCHB Goals

### ACCESS

Assure access to high-quality and equitable health services to optimize health and well-being for all MCH populations.

### EQUITY

Achieve health equity for MCH populations.

### CAPACITY

Strengthen public health capacity and workforce for MCH.

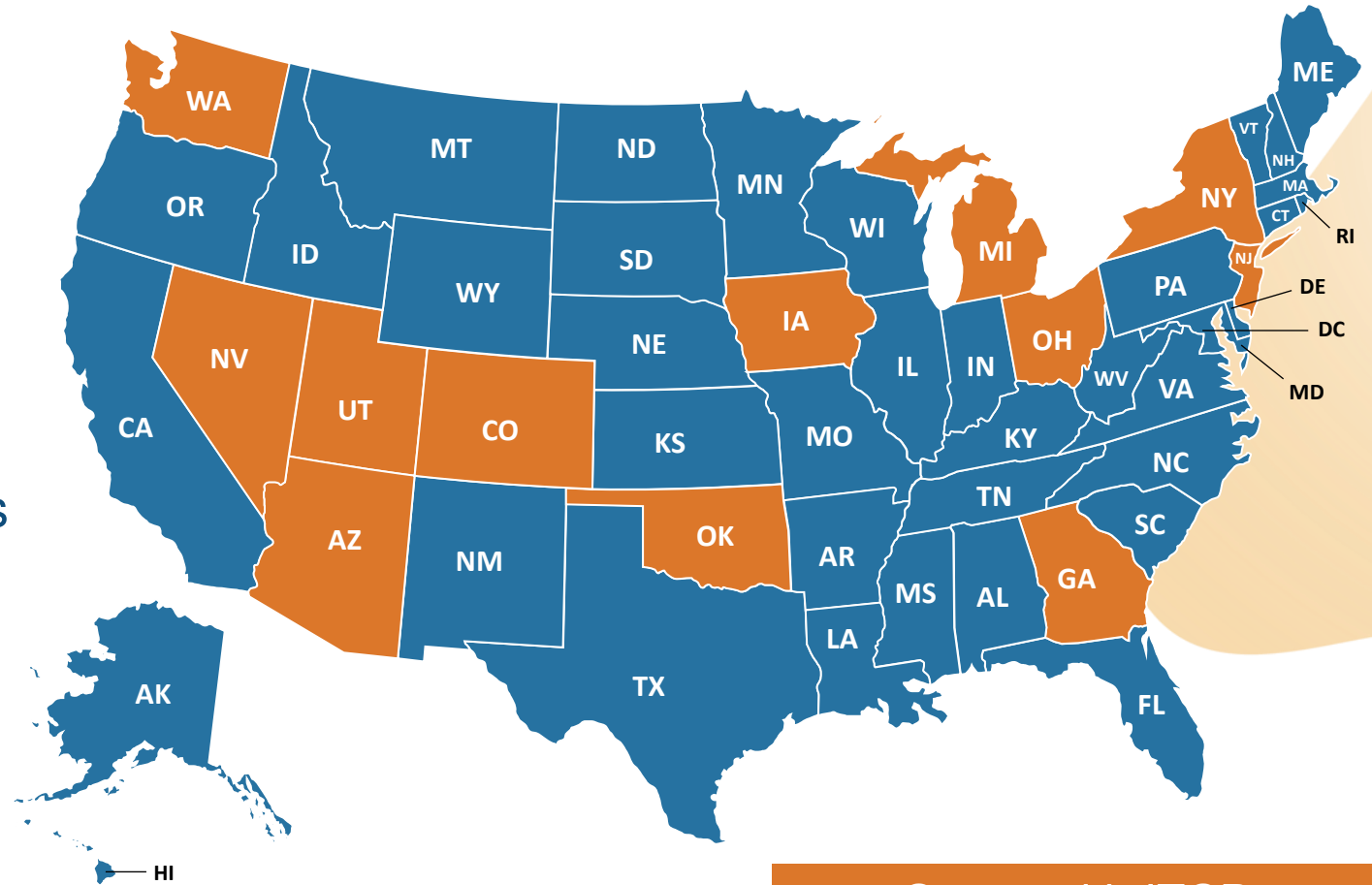
### IMPACT

Maximize impact through leadership, partnership, and stewardship.

# Infant Toddler Court Program Overview

**Goal:** *Change child welfare practices and improve the early developmental health and well-being of infants, toddlers, and their families*

- Spread and scale ITC approach
- Improve knowledge and practices that support development & prevent maltreatment
- Increase timely access to services
- Reduce disparities for priority population



States with ITCP

Learn more at <https://mchb.hrsa.gov>

6





# Safe Babies Focus

- Safe Babies works upstream on crucial promotion and prevention efforts within communities.
- Safe Babies keeps families together by preventing the need for babies and toddlers to enter out-of-home care.
- Safe Babies strengthens the services and supports families need so they can experience healing and less involvement with courts and the child welfare system.
- Parents with lived experience inform all levels of Safe Babies as Parent Leaders. Parent Leaders are integral members of the team, creating systems change through their engagement and leadership.



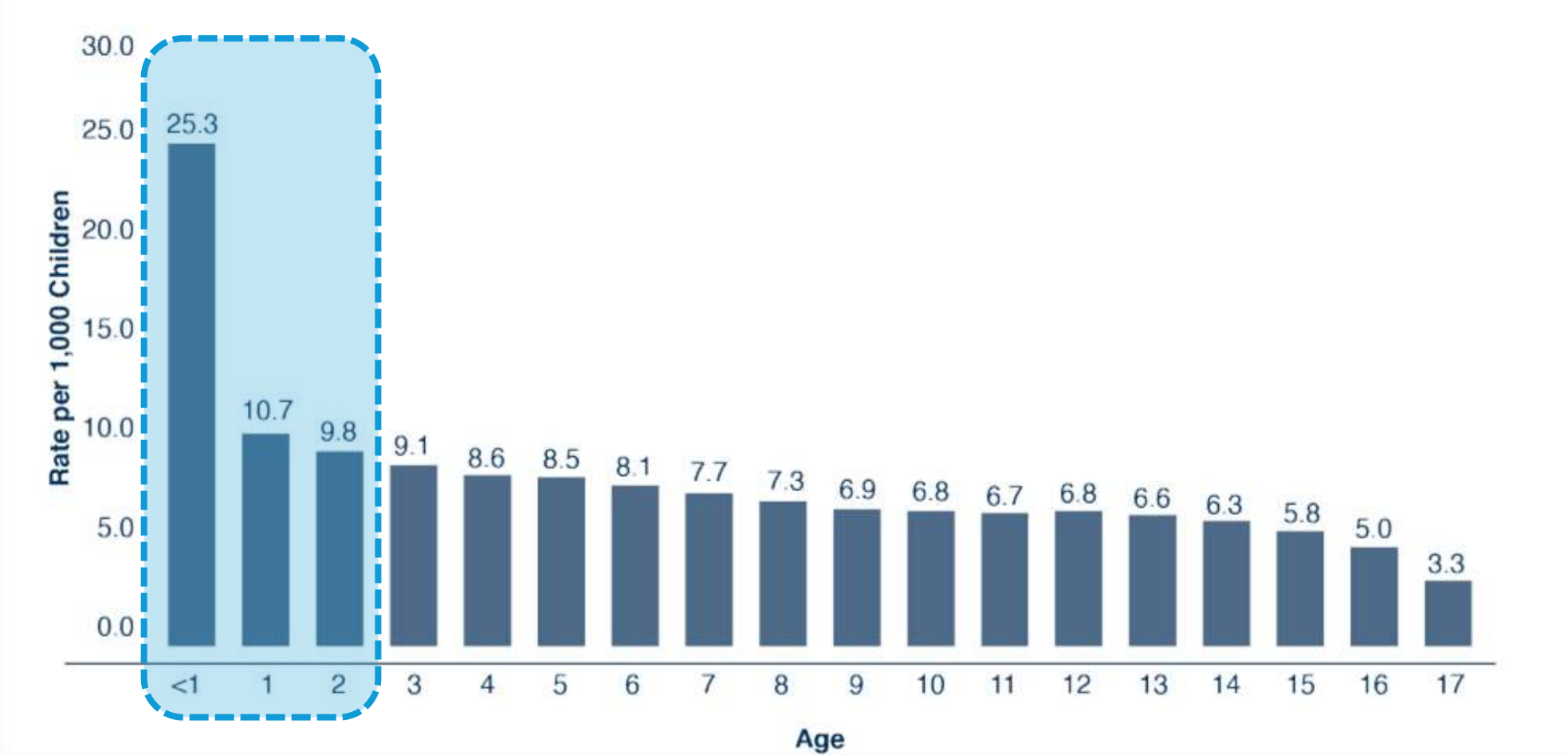
# Why Safe Babies Matters

- 🌿 In the United States, every 7 minutes a baby or toddler is removed from their parents due to maltreatment and neglect and placed in out-of-home care.
- 🌿 Our brains grow faster between the ages of 0 and 3 than any later point in life, forming more than 1 million new neural connections every second.
- 🌿 Safe Babies meets the urgent needs of babies and toddlers by applying the science of early childhood development through its innovative team-based approach





# Children Under 3 Years of Age, Highest Rates of Maltreatment



U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children’s Bureau. (2023). *Child Maltreatment 2021*. Available from <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/data-research/child-maltreatment>.

# Michigan Early Childhood Courts Grant Goals



Develop

Develop statewide and local infrastructure to support the implementation and expansion of the Safe Babies approach



Use

Use data to measure knowledge and needs, inform continuous quality improvement (CQI), and evaluate project outcomes



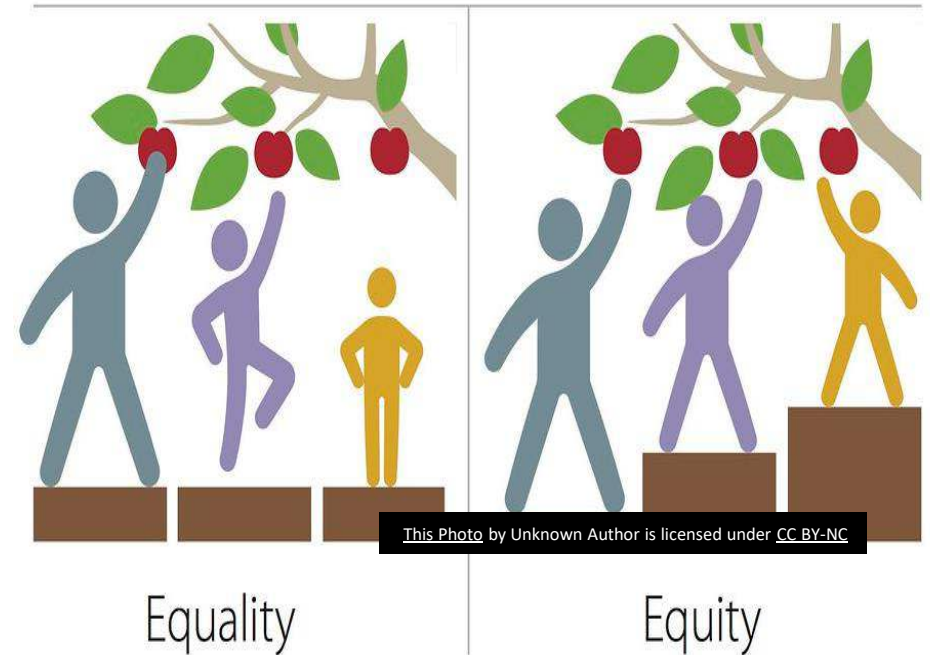
Advance

Advance partnerships across systems and programs to support the health and well-being of the priority population



# Michigan Early Childhood Courts Priority Population Disparity Impact Statement

- Children prenatal to three years of age and their caregivers who are in the child welfare system due to lack of equitable services and health disparities.
- We intend to identify the root causes of racial disparities in child welfare, including access to health and mental health care.
- We will focus on addressing health equity and racial disparities in access to and receipt of behavioral health services.

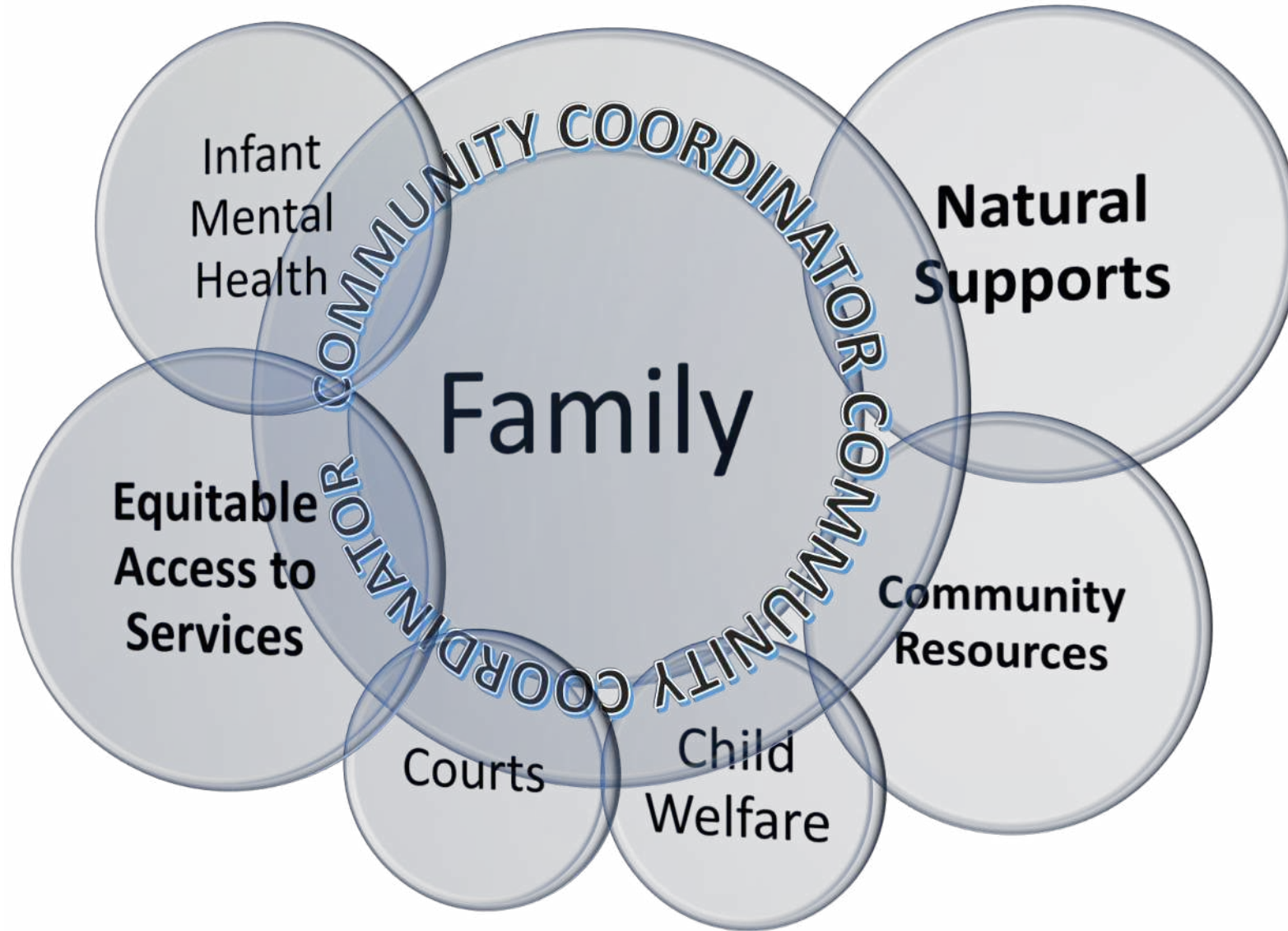


# Michigan's Approach

## Essential Functions and Roles of the ECC Team:

- Science-informed judicial leader
- Community Coordinator
- Infant Mental Health Home Visiting Treatment
- Attorneys (Prosecutors, Guardian Ad Litem, and parent attorneys)
- Child Welfare Specialist
- Frequent Non-adversarial & collaborative court hearings
- Trauma lens and understanding of attachment
- ECC team cross-trained to support values & behaviors
  - Attachment
  - Equity
  - Collaboration
  - Prioritizing family needs
- Implementation/Core Leadership group: policy & support for front-line team







# Michigan's Early Childhood Courts Implementation Criteria

## **Data driven criteria:**

- *Large number of infants and toddlers who are in-home wards or in foster care. Each county or county cluster must be able to serve a minimum of 20 families per year.*
- *Poor child welfare outcomes for children and families and/or high level of risk based on social determinates of health.*
- *Low-resourced and geographically diverse communities.*

## **Essential roles/functions each County must have:**

- **Commitment of Judge/referee**
- **Commitment of Children's Service Agency/DHHS Local Director**
- **Commitment of Community Mental Health Director/Children's Services Director**
- **Commitment for a pathway to sustainability**
- **Community Coordinator**
- **The evaluators from Wayne State University will collect data to evaluate Baby Court and its outcomes in each community. The evaluation will focus on addressing disparities and determining the effectiveness of the program.**

# Early Childhood Courts Evaluation Activities



Ann Stacks, Ph.D. IMH-E®  
Bryan Victor, Ph.D.  
Ashley Rousson Ph.D.



# Evaluation Activities Take Place at the State and National Level

- **National Evaluation**

*James Bell and Associates*

*Meet with each state's evaluation team*

*All state and national evaluators meet monthly*

- **Michigan Evaluation**

*Wayne State University*

*Work in partnership with State and County Leadership Teams,*

*Support Continuous Quality Improvement*

*Work with the Data and Evaluation workgroup (to be established)*

- Data sharing agreements and not burdening families or professionals

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# National Evaluation Activities

- **Two goals:**

*Test the effectiveness of the Infant Toddler Court Program across the states  
To understand the impact of the Infant Toddler Court Program*

- **Three Phases:**

1. *Gather information: (understand each site and determine evaluation readiness)*

- Review documents, state & local teams completes a readiness assessment

2. *Formative evaluation: (Is the program being implemented as intended, are outcomes trending in the right direction)*

- NRC Database, court observations, surveys with community partners, interviews with state teams, parent survey

3. *Summative Evaluation: (Assess the site-level implementation process & achievement of outcomes)*

- NRC Database, court observations, surveys with community partners, interviews with state teams, parent survey

# State Evaluation

- **Goals**

- 1. Impact:** *Do children/families who participate in ECC have higher rates of reunification, spend less time in care, have lower rates of re-reports and re-entry. Are there differences in these outcomes by race, ethnicity, SES, and/or rurality*
  - MISACWIS data; retrospective evaluation (Wayne); prospective evaluation (all counties starting in 2024)
- 2. Document Implementation:** *How many children were served, what type of services did families receive, where were children placed, what share of eligible families were not assigned to the docket, how equitable is access to ECC in terms of race, ethnicity, SES and rurality; How many professionals were trained?*
  - Training sign in sheets; NRC dataset
- 3. Continuous Quality Improvement:** *What are the barriers to effective implementation and advocacy? What drives and/or gets in the way of incorporating parent voice? Other questions TBD by local and state teams.*
  - Interviews



# Lessons From The Field

# Wayne County Baby Court

Christie Spudowski, Community Coordinator



**“If we value our  
children, we must  
cherish their parents.”**

John Bowlby



# Integrating Parent Voice in Our Work

Anthony Queen, Parent Leader



**Michigan's Early Childhood Courts**

# State Level Wins

## State Sustainability

- ✔ **Florida's** legislature appropriated \$1.86M to support 35 infant toddler courts statewide, including funding for 20 new Community Coordinator positions. Florida started with a three-site pilot program and expanded statewide over eight years of implementation.
- ✔ **Tennessee's** legislature appropriated funding to support 14 infant toddler courts, using state and federal funding.
- ✔ **South Carolina** is funding 2 sites with a Blue Cross Blue Shield insurance company grant and 1 site through a Federal Rural Health Grant.
- ✔ **Arkansas** is using CCDF Block Grant to fund 4 sites through a strong partnership between Child Welfare and Early Childhood Education.



# State Advisory Group and Its Workgroups

## **PURPOSE:**

The Department will convene a State Advisory Group that is comprised of key stakeholders and community agencies to:

- support the Early Childhood Courts
- support the development of statewide and local infrastructure for the Early Childhood Courts, including pursuing legislative activities for sustainability
- advise the Leadership Team about how the Safe Babies approach could be aligned with and improve state/local system integration efforts that also aim to strengthen families and prevent child maltreatment and/or child welfare involvement
- ensure that the Early Childhood Courts expansion will promote equity, holistic family support and protective factors.



# Workgroups

- Legislation and Sustainability
- Evaluation, Data, and Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI)
- Preventing Maltreatment
- Implementation (Key Leaders/Partners from ECC sites)



# Legislation and Sustainability Workgroup

Workgroup is ready to convene.



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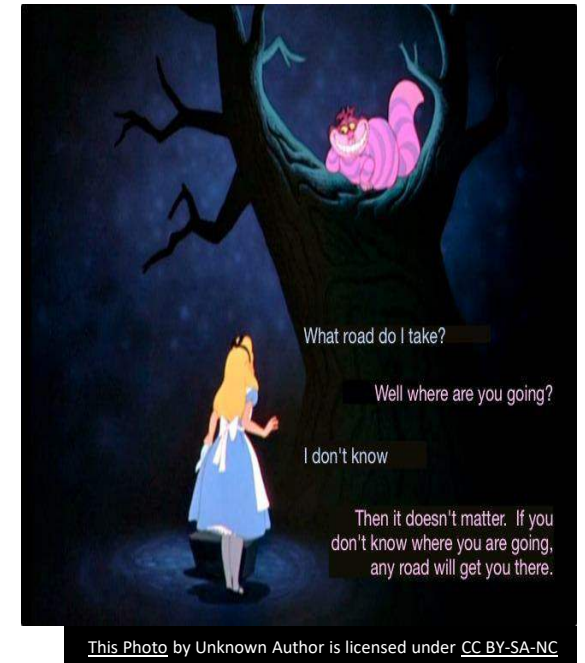
- Focus on plans to sustain the core components of the Safe Babies Approach.
- Incorporate ECC into ongoing statewide system integration and policy efforts that aim to address structural barriers and inequities.
- Sustain the online training
- Workgroups will consider use of additional funding and policy changes to fund coordinators.
- The Workgroup will develop legislative activities to codify Early Childhood Courts (No Lobbying with HRSA funded project)



# Data, Evaluation, and Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI)

- Help local and national evaluators develop meaningful research and CQI questions in order to make meaning of the findings.
- Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycles to build capacity, inform ongoing CQI, and meet the goals of the grant.
- qualitative and quantitative data to capture strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and barriers to
  - Implementing and sustaining Baby Courts.
  - Equitable access to effective services that promote well-being and protective factors for the priority population.

Questions: email [amstacks@wayne.edu](mailto:amstacks@wayne.edu) or [bvictor@wayne.edu](mailto:bvictor@wayne.edu)



# Preventing Maltreatment Workgroup

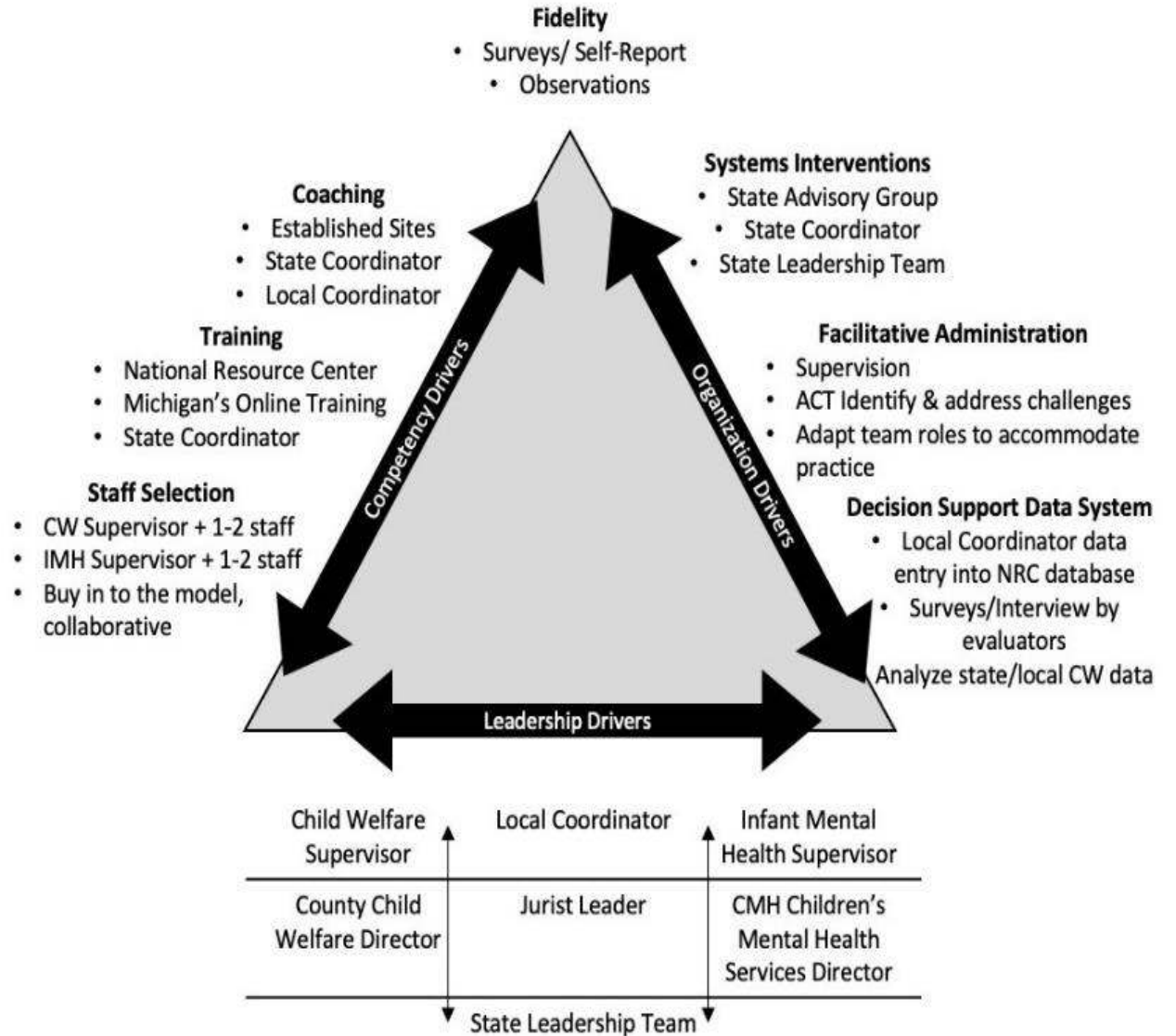
Ready to Convene within the next 6 months

- Review policies to determine if we are utilizing an equity lens to prevention
- DHHS has cross trained employees in both CPS and foster care, which allows the Baby Court team to serve in-home wards.
  - Can we expand services to pregnant and/or parenting foster youth as a way to interrupt the intergenerational cycle of maltreatment?
- To grow the Local Active Community Team to include parents and representatives from mental health, Part C early intervention, public health, substance abuse, and early care and education to understand what preventative measures may be missing in policies and procedures.
  - Data monitoring and tracking to inform CQI



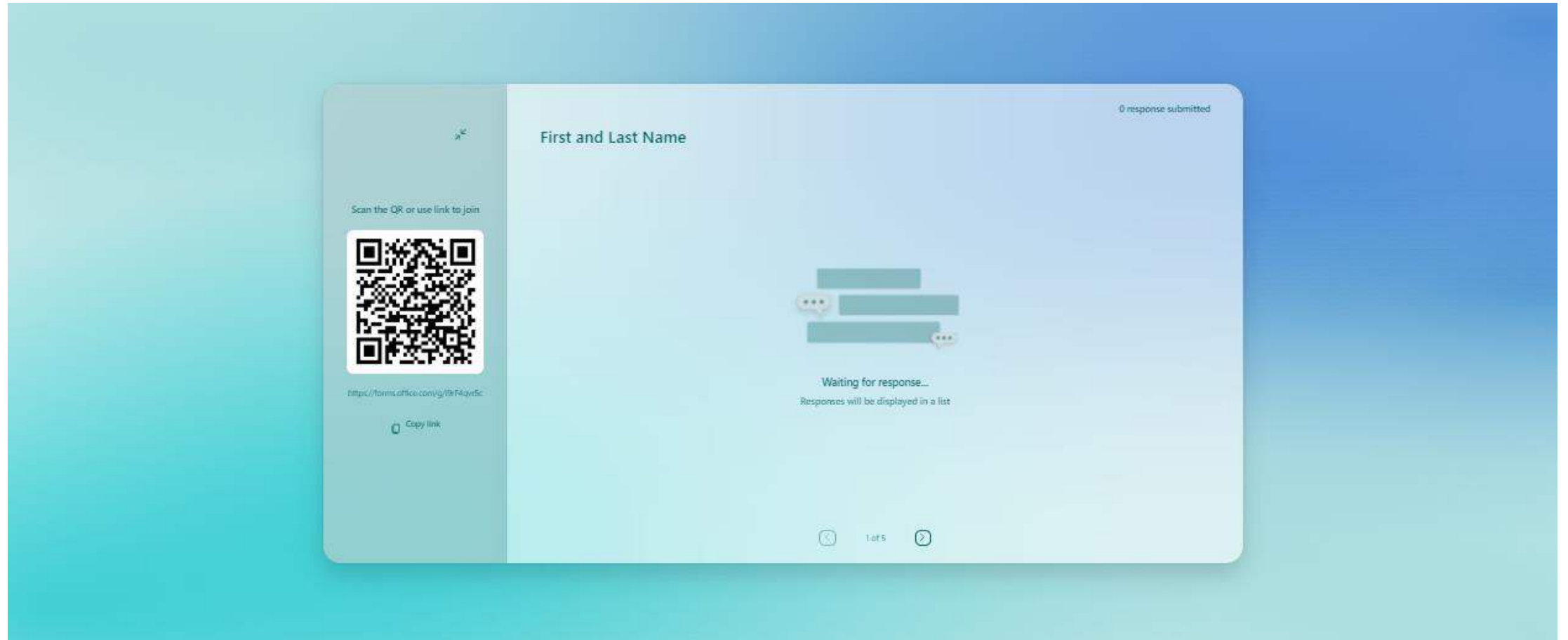
# Implementation Workgroup

- Develop local leadership composed of a judicial leader, community coordinator, county child welfare director, and CMH children's mental health administrator.
- Build fidelity to the Safe Babies Approach.
- Utilize data to explore disparities, barriers, and health equity across the community.
- Develop local procedures to ensure the sustainability of the local Baby Courts.



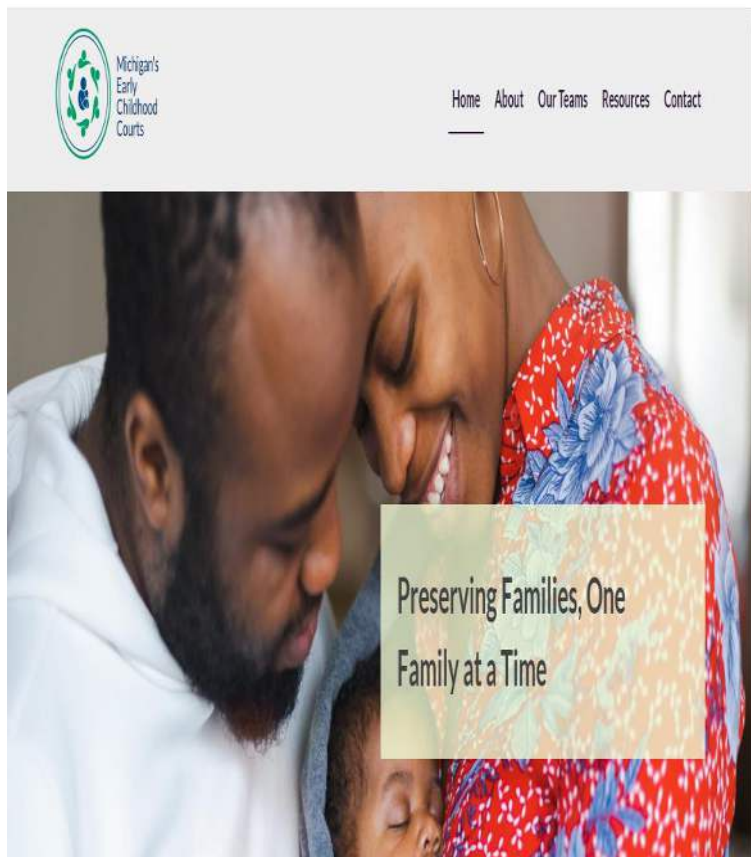


# Register for Workgroups



# Websites and Resources

<https://michiganec.org/>



Michigan's Early Childhood Courts

Home About Our Teams Resources Contact

Preserving Families, One Family at a Time



FLORIDA COURTS  
ACCESSIBLE | FAIR | EFFECTIVE | RESPONSIVE | ACCOUNTABLE

Florida Courts Resources & Services Administration & Funding Publications & Statistics Self-Help Information

Home Resources & Services Office of Problem-Solving Courts Early Childhood Courts

### Early Childhood Courts

#### Background

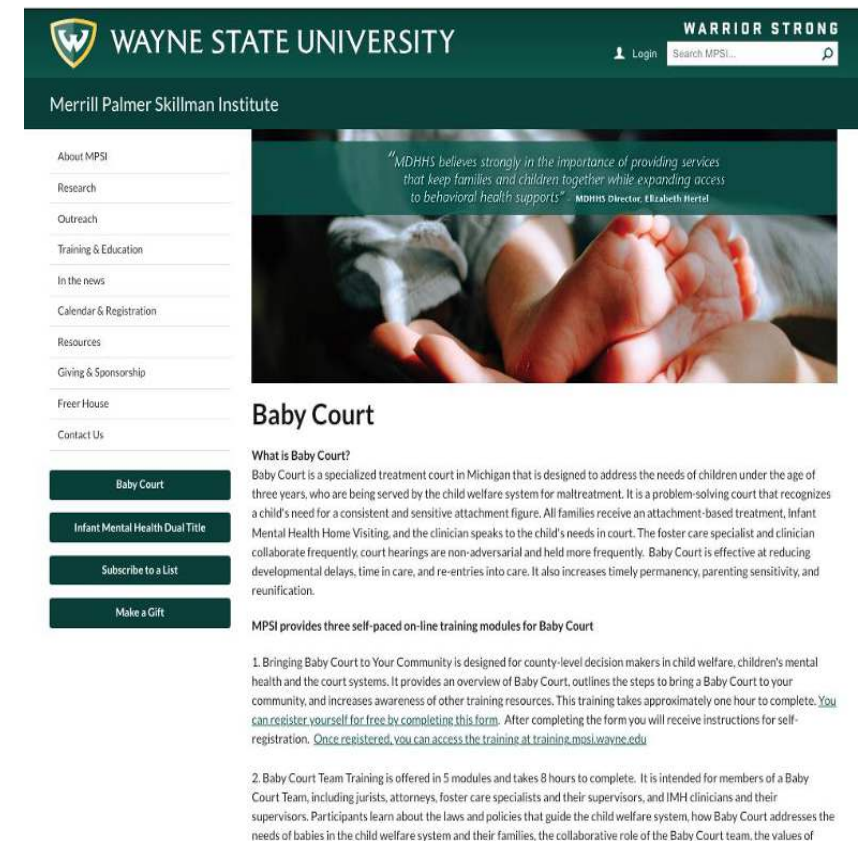
Using the National ZERO TO THREE organization's Safe Babies Court Team approach and the Miami Child Well-Being model, Florida's early childhood court emerged in 2014 and is the primary initiative within the Dependency Court Improvement Program. Early childhood court addresses child welfare cases involving children under the age of three. It is a *problem-solving court* where legal, societal, and individual problems intersect.

Healthy attachment and early brain development, from birth to age three, is crucial to a child's future social-emotional health, school-readiness, and life-long well-being. Infants and toddlers in the child welfare system are at extraordinarily high risk for developmental delays, non-optimal attachment relationships, trauma, and toxic stress that can affect their adjustment and well-being for years to come – often, tragically, for a lifetime. Early childhood court allows courts to take what is currently known about the appropriate services and practices for early brain development and make them available to the most vulnerable children. For additional information view the [Safe Babies Court Teams video](#).

The multidisciplinary Dependency Court Improvement Panel developed best practice standards which are based largely on research and analysis that has been conducted on Safe Babies Court Team sites in other states as well as research and analysis of specific early childhood evidence-based interventions. The Florida Supreme Court adopted the [Early Childhood Court Best Practice Standards](#) and [Commentary](#) in November 2019. The Steering Committee on Problem-Solving Courts is in the process of finalizing a certification program for all problem-solving courts with best practice standards in place. Core components of early childhood court include judicial

<https://www.flcourts.gov/Resources-Services/Office-of-Problem-Solving-Courts/Early-Childhood-Courts>

<https://mpsi.wayne.edu/babycourt>



WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY  
WARRIOR STRONG

Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute

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### Baby Court

*"MIDHHS believes strongly in the importance of providing services that keep families and children together while expanding access to behavioral health supports."* MIDHHS Director, Elizabeth Hertel

#### What is Baby Court?

Baby Court is a specialized treatment court in Michigan that is designed to address the needs of children under the age of three years, who are being served by the child welfare system for maltreatment. It is a problem-solving court that recognizes a child's need for a consistent and sensitive attachment figure. All families receive an attachment-based treatment, Infant Mental Health Home Visiting, and the clinician speaks to the child's needs in court. The foster care specialist and clinician collaborate frequently, court hearings are non-adversarial and held more frequently. Baby Court is effective at reducing developmental delays, time in care, and re-entries into care. It also increases timely permanency, parenting sensitivity, and reunification.

MPSI provides three self-paced on-line training modules for Baby Court

1. Bringing Baby Court to Your Community is designed for county-level decision makers in child welfare, children's mental health and the court systems. It provides an overview of Baby Court, outlines the steps to bring a Baby Court to your community, and increases awareness of other training resources. This training takes approximately one hour to complete. [You can register yourself for free by completing this form.](#) After completing the form you will receive instructions for self-registration. [Once registered, you can access the training at training.mpsi.wayne.edu](#)
2. Baby Court Team Training is offered in 5 modules and takes 8 hours to complete. It is intended for members of a Baby Court Team, including jurists, attorneys, foster care specialists and their supervisors, and IMH clinicians and their supervisors. Participants learn about the laws and policies that guide the child welfare system, how Baby Court addresses the needs of babies in the child welfare system and their families, the collaborative role of the Baby Court team, the values of



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Thank you for  
joining the  
Early Childhood  
Courts  
State Advisory  
Group



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