



Proven Solutions for Infants, Toddlers and Families

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.

Did You Know?

- The first three years of life shape brain development, cellular health, and lifelong physical and mental well-being.
- Infants and toddlers in child welfare are 5x more likely to experience developmental delays. If delays remain unaddressed, school readiness can be compromised and there are increased costs for education, health, and social services.
- Michigan's infants and toddlers face maltreatment at a rate of 22.2 per 1,000 children. This rate is far higher than the national average of 15.5.



Evidence Informed Solution: Early Childhood Courts

Michigan's ECCs provide specialized, science-driven support for infants, toddlers, and their families by implementing the Safe Babies™ approach, a program of ZERO TO THREE, to embed what infants and toddlers need most; stability, nurturing relationships, and timely intervention into every step of the child welfare, behavioral health, and court systems.

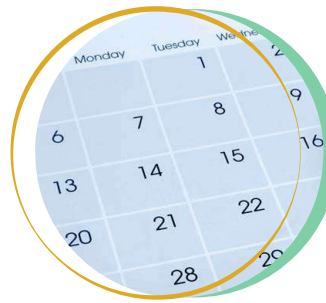
Key Practices in ECCs

- **Infant Mental Health Services:** Every family and foster family receives Infant Mental Health Services.
- **Child-Focused Court Oversight:** More frequent hearings ensure infants, toddlers and their family's needs are prioritized.
- **Cross-System ECC Court Teams:** Jurists, foster care workers, clinicians, Community Coordinators, and attorneys work together with parents to provide coordinated support for their families.
- **Trauma-Responsive Practice:** Professionals reduce re-traumatization and strengthen parents' capacity to provide safe, nurturing care.
- **Active Community Team:** The Community Coordinator builds and sustains community relationships by engaging partners in dialogue that strengthens relationships and aligns community resources to better support families involved in ECC and ensuring that family voice is integrated in planning and service delivery.

Proven Results in Michigan and Nationwide



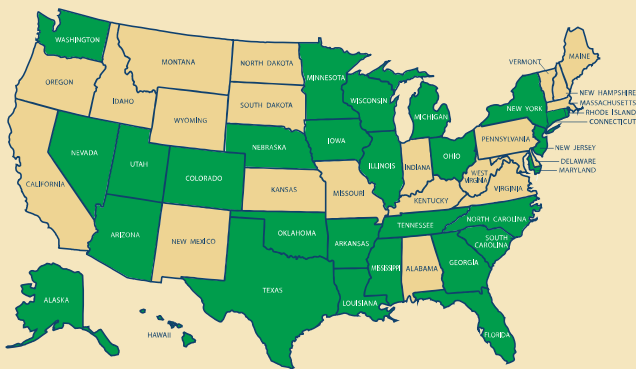
84% of ECC infants and toddlers are reunified with their parents; twice the rate of comparison groups (*Stacks, Rousson, Kondor, Perron, Ryan, & Victor, 2025*).



ECC achieves these outcomes without extending time in foster care (*Stacks, et. al. 2025*).



Infants and toddlers show measurable gains in language and social-emotional development (*Stacks, Wong, Barron, Ryznar, 2020*).



Do Other States Have Early Childhood Courts?

Yes, 30 states have Early Childhood Court programs, and some states have the program in every county. Florida, Washington, and Tennessee, for example, have legislation in place that codify best practices of the Safe Babies approach.

Early Childhood Courts change the trajectory for Michigan's most vulnerable infants and toddlers, helping families reunify, thrive, and contribute to stronger communities.

References:

1. Stacks, A. M., Barron, C. C., & Wong, K. (2019). Infant mental health home visiting in the context of an infant-toddler court team: Changes in parental responsiveness and reflective functioning. *Infant Mental Health Journal, 40*(4), 523–540. <https://doi.org/10.1002/imhj.21785>
2. Stacks, A. M., Wong, K., Barron, C., & Ryznar, T. (2020). Permanency and well-being outcomes for maltreated infants: Pilot results from an infant-toddler court team. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 101*, 104332. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chia-bu.2019.104332>
3. Stacks, A. M., Rousson, A. N., Kondor, L., Perron, B. E., Ryan, J. P., & Victor, B. G. (2025). Infant Toddler Court Teams, reunification, time to permanency, and placement stability: Evidence from a study using matched controls. *Child Maltreatment, 0*(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/10775595251363456>
4. <https://www.zerotothree.org/resource/safe-babies-evidence/>



MDHHS-Pub-2289 (10-25)

This project is supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) under grant #5 U2ZMC46639-02-00, Infant Toddler Court Program as part of an award totaling \$3,199,364 with 0 percent financed with state government resources. This information or content and conclusions are those of MDHHS and should not be construed as the official position or policy of, nor should an endorsement be inferred by HRSA, HHS, or the US government.

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) does not discriminate against any individual or group on the basis of race, national origin, color, sex, disability, religion, age, height, weight, familial status, partisan considerations, or genetic information. Sex-based discrimination includes, but is not limited to, discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, sex characteristics, and pregnancy.