

September 20, 2021

Dear Board of Commissioners for Leelanau County,

As members of our Leelanau County community for nearly 45 years who has raised our family in the County, sent our kids to school here, and availed ourselves of community-based services, we are very concerned with the Board's impetus toward defunding Early Childhood Services (ECS). There are three issues that concern us.

1. *Overriding the will of the people:* The voters cast their ballots. The will of the majority of the residents of Leelanau County who voted were in support of the millage to increase their property taxes to support Early Childhood Services. While Board members certainly have the authority to interpret and implement county policies and programs, Board members do not have the moral authority to change the results of a legal and certified election. **The Board of Commission should implement the will of the people as evidenced by the passage of the ECS millage.**
2. *Favor facts over opinions about what is best for families:* Overwhelmingly, literature on the topic of ECS state these facts: foundations for future learning are laid in the earliest years of a child's life, and early childhood programs (from birth to five years old) are in the best interest of children, families and communities. Millage-related services are not connected to the educational system; they are considered developmental for children and supportive for parents; and they are intended to fill gaps in existing services, not duplicate or compete with them.

Some of the Commissions have stated they are dissatisfied that the Health Department was awarded the contract to provide Early Childhood Services. Yet at this point the fact is: to change providers would result in starting over, disrupting established relationships with families, and foregoing the advantages to families of receiving multiple services from one organization.

The Board of Commission should not manipulate the ECS-millage to force the Health Department to change a position, and should continue to invest in our children and families.

3. *Support Parenting Communities:* We have an unprecedented opportunity to provide a proven program (Parenting Communities.) It is about investing in our children not about securing the cheapest services. We can be a pro-family county by supporting parents in being the kind of parents they aspire to be. Parenting Communities has a long history of successful work with parents. **We urge you to let this program play out for a full year of in-person services, evaluate outcomes, and then make a decision about future budgeting.**

In closing, as voting members of this community we urge you to: honor the will of the people; favor facts over opinions; and support Parenting Communities. Please do the right thing: continue to fund the Early Childhood Services via the millage that Leelanau County residents supported. In particular, we urge Melinda Lautner, Commissioner for Kasson Township where we live, to support the millage.

Thank you.

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Kasson Township residents
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