

September 20, 2021

Dear Leelanau County Commissioners,

What every parent (and grandparent) wants for their child/ren is to be successful in life. In the county, many of us voted for the Early Childhood Mileage in 2019 for that very reason. We care about the children. We know that our children are important and how we care and raise them in the early years, especially those first six years of life, is a large determining factor in how well they will do later in life. Data tells us time and again that what we invest in our youngest population brings the best return-on-investment for our communities and includes our local priorities of reducing substance abuse rates, criminal arrests; lowering divorce rates, depression numbers, and teen pregnancy rates and increases graduation rates, problem-solving skills, and leads to greater likelihood to attend college and higher lifelong earning potential. Early Childhood programs are exactly what we need and want in the community.

I credit you with carefully overseeing the budget for the county and working to ensure that our money is being well spent. Especially during the pandemic, this cannot be easy and decisions do have to be made. However, I would ask you to please reconsider zeroing out the budget for Early Childhood Mileage at this point in time. Your oversight of the money's use and plans for future expenditures is essential to ensure that funds are well spent and there isn't duplication of services. I agree wholeheartedly that careful use of resources is necessary and prudent. But I also recognize that for programs that were just starting when the pandemic hit, many had difficulty getting off the ground and may need some more time to find their bearings, especially given that the health department, as the body in charge of the programs, fully had its hands full throughout this pandemic.

I have high hopes for what could happen for Early Childhood in Leelanau County. Every child in this county matters. I would hate for us to miss our opportunity to be the county that cares for its children. Please reconsider and give the Early Childhood work being funded by the mileage a chance to get moving. It may be a time to lend a hand to the project to help it along. Taking away the funding at a time when 48% of the families are reporting more stress in general life seems like a missed opportunity.

Thank you for your consideration. Please include my letter in public comments.

Gratefully,  
Kara Murphy Gregory, Ph.D.