



Leelanau County Family Coordinating Council
Sharon E. Vreeland, Coordinator
1758 Black Bark Ln.
Traverse City, MI 49696
lcfcc@leelanau.gov
(231) 649-8334

September 20, 2021

Leelanau County Board of Commissioners
boc@leelanau.gov

Michelle L. Crocker, Leelanau County Clerk
mcrocker@leelanau.gov

Dear Commissioners and Ms. Crocker:

I plan to be present at today's meeting at 1:00 and offer public comment. Please also make this letter a part of the record of the meeting.

The Leelanau County Family Coordinating Council (LCFCC) respectfully requests that the Board of Commissioners levy the full voted amount of the Early Childhood Development millage as scheduled. We have a particular interest in the matter, as we gave birth to the Parenting Communities program it funds.

Over 100 stakeholders came together in 1995 to study the Leelanau County community, identify needs, and develop a plan to meet identified needs. This group became the LCFCC. The concept of Parenting Communities was set forth in that initial plan and implementation began in 1996. In 2013-14, Parenting Communities management was handed off by the LCFCC to the Leelanau Early Childhood Development Commission (LECDC). After many years of study and hard work, they persuaded the Board of Commissioners to place an early childhood millage request on a ballot. The issue was well-publicized and hotly debated, and in the end those who felt strongly enough about the issue to make their voices heard cast their ballots and the millage was approved.

Prior to the millage, Parenting Communities was funded through ongoing grant writing efforts. As anyone who has been remotely connected with grant funding is aware, grant writing – and reporting regarding grants awarded – requires a considerable amount of time and effort. Funding is relatively insecure from one year to the next, which can hamper continuity and growth planning. Having the community choose to fund these services for a knowable period of time relieves those threats to programming and allows more staff time and capacity to be dedicated to excellent service provision.

Over the years, many stakeholders have demonstrated their belief in the value of the Parenting Communities program with their dollars. Grant funding has come from organizations including but not limited to: MDHHS, The Children's Trust Fund, United Way, Rotary Charities, state education funds through the Traverse Bay Area Intermediate School District (now NorthEd), Hudson's Circle of Giving, the former Tri-County Coalition for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (TCCPCAN).

Parenting Communities has also received national recognition. In 2000 in Los Angeles, the LCFCC received the United Way of America Organizational Community Builder Award for Parenting Communities.

I could recite for you all the reasons why Parenting Communities is an excellent, evidenced-based program for helping adults be the parents they want to be, identifying issues that children may be

"Doing Business Differently to Achieve Better Things for Leelanau County Families"

having so that they can be addressed early and the children may thrive and grow into a happy and productive adulthood. However, in her update to this body through August 31, BLDHD Director of Health Michelle Klein laid out what Parenting Communities is and is not in a clear and informative manner. Likewise, Family Court Administrator Joseph Povolo explained thoroughly and eloquently why programs like Parenting Communities are appropriate and needed in his letter to you. I'd like to incorporate both of their input to you by reference. Joe is the LCFCC Chairman, and Michelle is a member of our Executive Committee as well.

A related topic that is near and dear enough to the BOC that funding for a coalition is in the annual budget is substance use disorder (SUD.) There is an abundance of evidence that preventing drug use and other unhealthy behaviors can be significantly influenced from pregnancy through age eight. Detailed resources about this "ounce of prevention, pound of cure" connection can be found at <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/principles-substance-abuse-prevention-early-childhood/chapter-1-why-early-childhood-important-to-substance-abuse-prevention>, and many other places. Increased protective factors and early intervention can affect the trajectory of a person's life tremendous in every way. In summary, Parenting Communities programming is one tool that the county can use to address root causes and reduce future cases of SUD in our community.

The taxpayers in our community fund universal public school education starting at age 5, regardless of ability to pay for services. It's not an enormous logical stretch to fund universal supports for parents and children from prenatal to school age regardless of ability to pay during the time when their future health and ability to function well in school and society is being set.

Parenting Communities is almost entirely a face-to-face program. Therefore, its ability to operate has been severely impacted by COVID-19 protocols from shortly after initial millage funding. There are currently about half a year's worth of unexpended millage proceeds on hand for this reason. If the millage collection is entirely cut to zero for the coming year, it follows that staffing and programming offerings would need to be cut back severely or entirely discontinued within the year. Valuable trained staff would be lost, and it would be challenging to rebuild the program and a staff as well-qualified in the short term.

The primary function of family is to perpetuate society, both biologically through procreation and socially through socialization. The primary function of community and society is to be a framework in which its members can participate and thrive in ways that are individually and mutually beneficial. Regardless of socioeconomic status, knowing how to parent well is largely a learned skill. We all benefit when the members born to our community and the people who most directly raise them are supported with evidence-based information and skills, are helped to meet and become natural supports for one another, and when we can intervene early if youth need additional assistance to thrive. Parenting Communities checks these boxes and more.

Please continue to collect the Early Childhood Development millage this year, preferably in whole but at minimum enough to provide full funding as budgeted through fund balance and new collections until the following year's millage collection. Parenting Communities is a long-standing, locally innovated, nationally recognized, evidenced-based program that can provides the proverbial ounce of prevention to pounds and pounds of future cures.

Sincerely,



Sharon E. Vreeland
LCFCC Coordinator