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September 20, 2021

To: Leelanau County Board of Commissioners

Re: Early Childhood Millage and Program Options

Dear Commissioners,

The Committee of the Whole Session scheduled for Monday, September 20, 2021, provides an important opportunity for the community to address the recent recommendation to reduce the Leelanau County early childhood millage rate to zero. Within the larger context of this discussion, the focus of this communication is centered on one specific aspect, the issue of redundancy. One of the arguments made in support of this proposed reduction is a redundancy of early childhood services in Leelanau County. The services provided by Northwest Michigan Community Action Agency, or NMCAA, have been cited as an example. I would like to address the issue of redundancy as it relates to NMCAA and to our experiences as an early childhood service provider.

The work of NMCAA is targeted to address the causes and conditions of economic insecurity through programming that empowers people and builds communities. With over 40 years of experience, we know that the greatest impacts can be made by working in partnership. NMCAA provides high-quality early childhood services to families throughout northwest Michigan, but we are only able to serve a specific number of families in a narrowly defined income range within our ten-county service area. We work in collaboration with other early childhood partners toward a shared vision of a seamless system of supports and services for all children and families. The information, resources, and social connections made possible through community-based early childhood programming are often critical to the well-being of families parenting young children, many of whom are also navigating the challenge of trying to meet basic needs. The United Way 2021 ALICE Report shows approximately 539 families with children in Leelanau County living below the income threshold required to do just that.

Early childhood service providers know that, despite our best efforts to work collaboratively to maximize services, the gap between our ability to do so and the need in the community is substantial. I know we all wish for a day when services for families with young children are accessible in such abundance that the issue of redundancy becomes a concern.

We are honored to serve the families of Leelanau County, we would like to serve more, but we know that our services are only a slice of the whole pie that is the network of supports and programs needed to provide families with young children the best start possible and to maximize the future potential and quality of life of the next generation.

Sincerely,

Kerry Baughman, Executive Director
Northwest Michigan Community Action Agency

northwest michigan community action agency

www.nmcaa.net

a community action partnership