

**From:** [Sharon Workman](#)  
**To:** [Clerk](#)  
**Subject:** Public Comment to the Leelanau County Board of Commissioners  
**Date:** Sunday, September 19, 2021 5:12:23 PM

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Please officially enter the following letter into the record of the September 20, 2021 and September 21, 2021 Board of Commissioners meeting. Thank you.

**RE:** Action by Commissioners Bunek, Rushton, Lautner, and Robbins to subvert a county-wide millage approval and reduce the early childhood development millage to 0.000

The amendment you approved at the executive session on September 14 to reduce the early childhood development millage to 0.000 demonstrates both a lack of respect for the voters of Leelanau County who approved this millage and a lack of compassion for this county's youngest children and their families. It is also short-sighted. Here's why.

For a cost of \$38 a year to the average tax payer (that's 73 cents a week!) every family with a child from birth to five in this county will have access to home visits, parent education, play groups, health services, and other needed support during the most critical period of their child's development. And, contrary to Commissioner Rushton's and Bunek's assertions, all of this will be offered through a coordinated system of care that makes maximum use of existing resources and avoids duplication of services.

Why is this important? Because such education and support will give every baby in Leelanau County the best chance for a healthy development and a successful future.

The research is indisputable. From birth to 5 is the greatest period of brain growth and language development. Parents are their child's first and most important teachers. Positive relationships with caregivers who talk, sing, and read to babies and preschoolers from birth on is the single most important ingredient to ensure children succeed in school. And, parents will be most successful in this vital role if they have the tools and support they need, know what to expect at every stage of their baby's development, and are not isolated in what is the most difficult job any of us ever undertake.

Those of us who have raised children know how hard it is... when our baby won't stop screaming, we are without sleep and at the breaking point... or our toddler throws himself on the floor in a tantrum during a shopping trip to Meijer's. If we're lucky, we have a caring partner, family member, or friend to reassure us that all this is normal, lend a hand, and help lighten the load. When parents are isolated, problems multiply, resulting in emotional and physical stress that can even lead to abuse and neglect. The cost of maltreatment is immeasurable for the child and parent. And, the resulting social problems created in our community cost thousands more than \$38 a year: mental health problems, drug addiction, school drop outs, teen pregnancy, crime. All are linked to child abuse and neglect.

So, the smart investment is to start as early as possible in giving our community's children the very best chance to be healthy and successful by providing parents with the education and support they need. That's why a 42-member committee recommended a county-wide millage to support ongoing early childhood services, that's why the voters approved it, and that's why experienced professionals at Parenting Communities and the Benzie-Leelanau Health Department were charged with implementing the program. This is a forward-thinking and innovative strategy that deserves a chance to succeed. Please reconsider your action. Leelanau County's youngest children and their

families are depending on your wisdom and caring.

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