

**From:** [Beth Verhey](#)  
**To:** [Michelle Crocker](#); [Chet Janik](#); [Rick Robbins](#); [Will Bunek](#); [Debra Rushton](#); [Ty Wessell](#); [psoutas-little@leelanau.gov](mailto:psoutas-little@leelanau.gov); [Gwenne Allaiger](#); [Melinda Lautner](#)  
**Cc:** [Board of Commissioners](#); [Clerk](#)  
**Subject:** For the record for BOC meeting today 9-21 -- early childhood services  
**Date:** Tuesday, September 21, 2021 3:34:48 PM

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Dear Commissioners,

I am writing to strongly request you vote for the recently revised budget for early childhood services in full, and I request that my letter be entered in the record officially as part of the Board of Commissioner's budget meeting today, Tuesday September 21, 2021.

I have not spoken during public comment, but have been present your meetings of Thursday September 16 and yesterday, Monday September 20. While I feel strongly the budget and millage for the early childhood services should not at all have been questioned, I appreciate the room for discussion created by Commissioner Robbin's comments during the September 16 meeting, and your time devoted to listening to the solid comments and urgent County needs presented to you by so many in yesterday's Special Meeting.

I will thus start my letter with the 'top' and 'bottom line': I find the Health Department's diligent work to prepare a reduced budget laudable, and strongly urge you to accept this and vote for the resulting millage to fulfill this budget in full.

I appreciate your commitment to be judicious with our taxes, yet certain programs and services are more essential than others, and early childhood services are among the most essential. As you have heard from many struggling families among our workforce, Parenting Communities is a lifeline for families who are still surviving through our pandemic and who are seeking to be a positive part of our County's future.

I have recently taken early retirement and am fortunate our beautiful, special Leelanau county is home for that. For me this follows 30 years of professional experience in child protection and social policy, in the international development context. As such I have seen the positive, multiplier effect of many, diverse, local and National governments prioritizing early childhood development programs as essential services, accessible to all families and their varying needs.

I have become increasingly concerned about the needs of Leelanau's struggling workforce households, for whom the pandemic has deepened pre-existing crises. Data, reports and surveys abound on our County's urgent needs of:

- Affordable, attainable, adequate housing,
- Early childhood and mental health programs and services,
- Decades of inadequate and failing water and septic systems which compound unaffordable housing costs and public health costs.

Yes, I present early childhood and mental health in the same line as they are inter-linked and are both extremely over-stretched services in our County. In fact, often when I read 'the blotter', I am struck by how many situations could be prevented by services such as Parenting Communities,

and how many situations need more social workers rather than police officers as responders.

Rather than cut the budget of the early childhood services prematurely, just as the services are starting and are not yet meeting demand, I suggest you commission some form of evaluation or review that is informed by your concerns and questions. Such questions could include your queries on the linkages to other Health Department programs and services, comparing comprehensively to other Counties, and more broadly to other County departments and services that may have scope for budget reductions. Among her remarks at your Thursday September 16 meeting, and others, Michelle Klein noted the expertise they are already starting to receive to ensure there is a solid evaluation of the program. I also suggest you re-commission the bi-partisan led, community represented advisory committee to update the analysis of gaps leading to the current Parenting Communities program so many struggling families are now receiving with a sigh of relief.

Thank you,  
Beth Linnea Verhey  
Leelanau Township

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