

I have been an educator for the past 45 years - as a classroom teacher in grades 1, 2, 3, and 4, as a reading consultant working with staff and grades K-5, and finally as a retired teacher who tutors children in grades K-7. I have a Master's Degree in language arts and reading as well as an additional 30 graduate semester credits in language arts. The importance of early childhood education cannot be overemphasized, particularly in today's competitive world. A majority of voters in Leelanau County clearly understand that, or else the millage would not have passed. This millage is not only a vital investment in our children, but it is also important for the future of our county. The programs supported by the millage help to ensure our children's future academic, social, and psychological growth and well-being. Sadly, however important all of this is, it is not the primary issue facing us after four of the Leelanau County Board of Commissioners voted to defund the millage.

Voting is one of the key foundations of a democracy, where the sanctity of the ballot box is upheld and the country is governed by the will of the voters. Our democracy has functioned for almost 250 years, and it is only in the last year that this process has come into question. One political party has decided that if an election does not produce the outcome they wanted, they will use any means possible to overturn the results. Lying, cheating, poisoning the public's perception of many of our foundational institutions, and even promoting violence has occurred nationally ever since false claims of voter fraud were made about the 2020 presidential election. This is relevant to the situation before us now because our society is becoming desensitized to the idea of disregarding election results. Overturning the results of a legitimate and fair election should horrify all of us, regardless of our political beliefs. The group of Commissioners voting to defund the early childhood millage took a page out of former President Trump's playbook, deciding that they had the right to invalidate the result of an election in Leelanau County. This was an extreme overreach of their positions and responsibilities, and it should alarm every resident of our county. It should never have even occurred to them to defund a voter-approved millage and annihilate it in the process, and it was an authoritarian move that has no place in a democracy. The Board of Commissioners who did this need to immediately rescind their votes and return the voter-approved funding to the early childhood programs.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Kott