

**From:** [Olivia Allen](#)  
**To:** [Clerk](#)  
**Cc:** [Elizabeth Gaines](#); [Shane Linden](#)  
**Subject:** Testimony  
**Date:** Tuesday, September 21, 2021 1:50:44 PM  
**Attachments:** [Leelanau County, MI Early Childhood Millage Testimony.docx.pdf](#)

---

Good afternoon,

I am writing to request that the attached testimony be placed on the record as public comment for this evening's board of commissioner's meeting.

Thank you in advance,

Olivia Allen  
Strategy Director, **Children's Funding Project**  
<https://www.childrensfundingproject.org/>  
434.987.1121



Dear Leelanau County Board of Commissioners,

Children's Funding Project is providing this testimony in support of the Leelanau Early Childhood millage. Children's Funding Project is a nonprofit and nonpartisan organization that helps communities and states expand equitable opportunities for children and youth through strategic public financing. We work with a diverse range of communities both rural and urban, majority red and majority blue, from Escambia County, Florida to Kent County, Michigan, on building dedicated funding infrastructure for early childhood.

Our work across the country shows that local, dedicated public millages for early childhood - like the one passed by Leelanau County voters in 2019 - are extremely effective and popular policy solutions. In the last five years, voters have authorized over 20 new public millages for children and youth. These millages provide a sustainable source of income for the early care and education system, which needs long-term investments that support financial stability and quality improvement. **When programs are funded solely by parent tuition, short-term philanthropic investments, or fluctuating state and federal funding, they are unable to achieve the stability needed to make a difference in children's lives. Additionally, this local funding opens opportunities for state and federal matching funds, which has doubled the investment of millages in some localities in Florida.**

**In addition to the stabilizing funding generated by local early childhood millages, these public funds require the creation of administering infrastructure that has myriad benefits.** Traditionally, the oversight or governing bodies for early childhood millages conduct needs assessments, identify inequities, collect and report data, support quality improvement, and work to increase the supply of high quality early childhood opportunities available. Without this type of dedicated infrastructure, very few communities know how money in their community is being spent on early childhood, the total number of programs and slots available, or the impact of available opportunities. **The dedicated infrastructure that accompanies early childhood millages acts as an accountability measure that ensures that funding is spent in the most efficient and effective way possible.** We are dedicated to supporting the accountability of these funds, and invite the Leelanau Early Childhood Millage to participate in our new cohort of communities across the country to learn best practices from peers at no cost.

Earlier this year, we conducted a national, bipartisan survey that demonstrated that voters consistently prioritize millages similar to the Leelanau Early Childhood Millage. Results show that 70% of voters would be willing to pay \$50 per year for services for both young kids and children of all ages. **Additionally, voters view "improving opportunities for all children to get a strong start in life" as equally important to issues like "reducing crime" and "strengthening the economy," and far more important than "reducing taxes and government spending." These results were consistent with previous surveys.** Voters in rural, urban, and suburban communities in every region of the country agree that our kids deserve the chance to get a strong start in life and are willing to help pay for early childhood programs and services.

Investing in children and youth benefits everyone, something that has been abundantly clear during the past year and a half when child care providers and parents working service jobs have helped keep the economy afloat. Leelanau County voters and those across the country understand this and have made their voices heard. We believe that it would be a disservice to them if the millage were to be reduced to zero, as well as to the families who have benefited from this and the children who deserve the opportunity to thrive.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Gaines

Executive Director, Children's Funding Project

[elizabeth@childrensfundingproject.org](mailto:elizabeth@childrensfundingproject.org) 202-413-2259