

Dear Leelanau County Commissioners,

My name is Jane Becker; my husband, Ron Becker, and I have lived in Glen Arbor as year-round residents for many years. I am a retired middle school teacher. I now work as the Director of Training for Michigan CASA. We are part of a nationwide network of Court Appointed Special Advocates, volunteers who advocate for children when they enter the foster care system. CASA volunteers are appointed by a judge, and those volunteers gather information from all parties, as well as from the child, in the case. They then report back to the court throughout the case regarding the needs and best interests of the child.

Volunteers receive 30-hours of initial training and monthly, on-going training. We must understand child development, childhood trauma, the effects of poverty on children, and the mental and social needs of children. I have served as an advocate for several children in Grand Traverse and Leelanau counties. I have seen first-hand that parents in our county need support -- at all socio-economic levels. They need help in finding good quality childcare, socialization for their preschoolers, and parenting advice and supports.

This is why I implore you to fully support the Early Childhood Services/Parenting Communities with the full funding that the voters of Leelanau County approved. Our county's parents need our support; many of them face isolation and economic difficulties. These factors can lead to stress; our parents need supports to be the best parents they can be. The benefits of early childhood intervention are numerous. Research shows parents and children who are supported in early childhood have:

- Lower substance abuse rates
- Half as many criminal arrests
- Better problem-solving skills
- Lower divorce rates
- Less depression
- Lower teen pregnancy rates
- Lower retention/special education needs
- Higher graduation rates
- More likelihood to attend college
- Higher lifelong earnings

I believe we should live in a world where the most vulnerable receive our care. I want our county to be one where the most vulnerable receive our care. Please support Early Childhood Services with your voice and the tax dollars voters appropriated for these valuable services.

Jane Becker
Glen Arbor