

Alison Middleton

From: Maxine Lauer <mlauer@spheretrending.com>
Sent: Friday, September 17, 2021 12:06 PM
To: Clerk
Subject: Concerned about our early childhood services
Attachments: Response to BOC Decision to Defund early childhood services.pdf; Please note that my husband and I are totally in agreement with the attached letter.docx

Please note that I am a resident of Leland township. I cannot believe that we would overrule something that was voted on and approved by the residents of this county. I hereby request that our letter be sent to all the commissioners and be posted on line.

Maxine and Joe Lauer

Maxine Lauer

4275 N High Bluffs Dr

Leland, MI 49654

Please note that my husband and I are totally in agreement with the attached letter. We are residents of Leland Township and cannot believe that something we all voted for and was approved is overturned. We feel that the people making the decision are not fully aware of the facts and used comparisons such as the Quebec study (which is not even relevant in this matter) and then make such a decision. I am attaching the response from a constituent which says it much better than I and asking that my letter and the response (to be reposted) be sent to all the commissioners and be posted online. This is criminal! We voted this in and now the commissioners are not representing the county by making such a life changing decision that affects the future of many children at risk! How can you all play with the future of children's life and make such a terrible decision that your constituents voted for in the last election? Terrible indeed and we will keep spreading the word prior to the next election for sure.

Maxine and Joe Lauer

4275 H High Bluffs Dr

Leland, MI 49654

Resources to Inform Responses to 9/14/21 Commissioner Recommendation

to Defund Early Childhood Services

Description of millage funded early childhood services:

In early 2019 two county commissioners, Patricia Soutas-Little and Tony Ansonge, formed a 42-member advisory committee to review early childhood services in the county and make recommendations re. any gaps in services. This committee met for three months and then presented its findings and recommendations to the Board of Commissioners. The primary recommendation was for a county-wide millage to support ongoing early childhood services for the families of children from birth to 5 in the county. The commission agreed to hold a millage election in August and the millage was approved by a small margin of voters. After the vote the commissioners agreed to have the Benzie-Leelanau Health Dept. develop and implement the early childhood services. The Health Dept. chose Parenting Communities, at that time an existing early childhood program with a long, successful history in Leelanau County, as the service provider. The Parenting Communities staff, now housed and overseen within the Health Dept., includes community health workers, a social worker, and a part-time supervisor. They can partner with Health Dept. staff when necessary. Staff members provide home visits to parents and their young children, parent groups, play groups in community settings and large group social experiences for these families. Their purpose is to provide support for families, many of whom are new to parenting, away from family and isolated in the community. Support can be in the form of providing (1) information about parenting, child development, mental and physical health; (2) counseling and behavioral support for parents and their children, as needed, and/or serving as referral agents to services/resources within the community; and (3) help parents in finding and partnering with each other as they negotiate their parent roles. The Health Dept. continues to rely on the 42-member advisory board for program oversight and has established a Mental Health Workgroup to provide specific feedback re. mental health services within Parenting Communities. The types of supports provided by Parenting Communities have been shown to lead to positive, long-term outcomes for families who use them.

Strategies for letters/comments:

While letters and contacts with commissioners could address their subversion of the county-wide millage vote and/or specific examples of misinformation that they're claiming as reasons to defund services it is always helpful to use personal stories of families benefiting from support in raising their young children. Examples of support can be a powerful way to convince decision-makers that "it takes a village to raise a child". Additional information that you might consider in your communication is highlighted below.

There are two major concerns that the commissioners' vote raises. The first is whether a commission vote can subvert a decision made by the voters? While the commissioners claim that they are only voting to remove funding, they are preventing the Health Dept. from doing necessary staffing and long-range planning for early childhood services. Commissioners are using the slow start up and lower numbers related to COVID to conclude that "this is becoming a

poor program”. If they don’t fund the program, they’re setting Parenting Communities up for failure. This early childhood millage was determined by the voters; even if they can, do the commissioners have the moral authority to change the election results?

The second concern is the commissioners’ stunning lack of accurate information about what the Health Dept. has developed/expanded with millage funding. The commissioners used the same arguments this week, except for citing what they consider the low numbers of families served, that they used when they opposed the millage two years ago. I have provided a brief description of the arguments opposing millage-funded services by 3 of our commissioners, along with responses in bold, as guidance for your communication with them.

Commissioners’ rationale for defunding the early childhood millage:

Lautner: Doesn’t think this program has been so successful given the numbers of those served provided in August. She stated that there are many programs put in place by the government that will trickle down to meet this need. **The Health Dept. presented an update on the early childhood program (Parenting Communities) in early August. After a year of Covid in which most services were delivered virtually, providers were beginning to see families in person again. Covid protocols delayed standard implementation of in-person services, but Parenting Communities still had several hundred virtual contacts with families during the previous year. Lautner’s speculation about government programs “trickling down” is just that. Exactly what programs is she referencing and how are they going to duplicate Parenting Communities service to parents?**

Rushton: Stated she’s received nothing but complaints about this program when there are so many services available in this county, leading to redundancy of services. Citizens don’t like the added taxes. **Has she talked with any constituents who are receiving services? Has she surveyed her constituents on this issue? What are her examples of redundancy? Who else is providing direct services to parents and their children from birth to 5? The millage related services are intended to fill gaps in existing services, not duplicate or compete with them.**

Bunek: Cites the Quebec Study as proof that early childhood services don’t work and in fact, make children worse. He used the phrase, “this is becoming a poor program”. It takes from the elderly and poor and gives to the better off. The Health Dept. got the contract on a no-bid basis. He once again labels these services as educational and lists all the “duplication” of services including childcare, early childhood education, and pre-K programs. **Starting with Bunek’s reference to the Quebec study, it has nothing to do with Parenting Communities Services. It was a study of childcare outcomes in Quebec; millage funded programming does not provide any childcare services. Bunek consistently places all early childhood services in the one category, seemingly unable to understand the differences. He continues to label all early childhood services as educational, combining Parenting Communities, child care and pre-K services offered by schools. Millage-related services are not connected to the educational system and are considered developmental for children and supportive for parents. Bunek is also unhappy with no income restrictions for receiving early childhood services, although a large percentage of these families qualify for Medicaid. Many other**

public services do not have income guidelines, including public schools and libraries. He was dissatisfied with the Health Dept. getting the contract to provide early childhood services as he wanted an open bid process, bringing in agencies from TC. (perhaps Catholic Social Services?) To change providers at this point is to start over, disrupting established relationships with families and foregoing the advantages to families of receiving multiple services from one organization.