

Leelanau County Board of Commissioners,

I am strongly opposed to the proposal from Chairman Bunek to reduce the early childhood millage rate to .000 for the upcoming taxation period. I voted in support of the Early Childhood Millage in 2019 and remain in support of it today.

This millage was recommended, after significant time and research, by bi-partisan panel of more than 40 people. This group conducted needs assessments, analyzed research in the field, surveyed existing programs, and explored best practice models. The Early Childhood Committee worked tirelessly to inform the community of the proposed millage. These meetings took place regularly throughout the county providing access and opportunity for Leelanau County residents to ask questions and engage in the process. I attended several of these sessions and was impressed each time with the detail of information presented and the opportunity for questions from supporters both for and against. Leelanau County residents voted to support the millage. While the Board may have a legal right to defund, it is a stretch and is ethically wrong to overturn the vote of Leelanau Country citizens.

When our family moved to Leland in the winter of 2014, we did not have many connections to other young families or parent resources. As my daughter was too young for local day care programs we were happy to find the Parenting Communities play groups. These weekly meetups provided so much more than just play (*which is critical for healthy child development*). These experiences provided a foundation that helped us navigate raising a young family in this community. The facilitators of the program were informed, engaging, dedicated and brought years of experience in early childhood development to the group. The first connections my daughter made with other children, and I made with other parents in Leelanau County came through the Parenting Communities playgroups and these experiences quickly became a highlight of the week for both of us.

It is worth noting that based on family income our family would not qualify for support from the Health Department and other available resources. One of the most remarkable things about the various programs offered through Parenting Communities and supported through the Early Childhood millage is the access for all families, regardless of income level, to these programs. The Early Childhood Millage and ongoing support for families is in the best interest of every child and the entire community. The first five years of a child's life is widely understood to be the most critical for their development. Please do not make a decision that would make it more difficult for families to have access to Early Childhood Education and family support during this time.

I served 5 years on the Board of the Leelanau Children's Center. During that time, I witnessed firsthand and learned from experts with numerous years of experience in Early Childhood Education. I evaluated best practice programs from across the nation and engaged in Child Development research. And yet, none of that made me an expert in the field of Early Childhood Education. I am beyond grateful that we have such expertise in this area. We would all be wise to listen to them. Members of this board do not have the expertise to evaluate this program. Let's leave that to those who have dedicated their lives to Early Childhood Education and in doing so support the children and families of Leelanau County.

Over the last 18 months families have faced significant hardships. Now more than ever it is critical to support children and families.

Thank you.

Sarah Mills
Leland, MI