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WEEKS AFTER VOTERS RENEW EARLY CHILDHOOD MILLAGE, THE KENT COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS APPROVES 2024-2025 FUNDING

Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage awards \$10 million to 31 programs for Kent County families

(Grand Rapids, Mich., August 22, 2024)—Just two weeks after Kent County residents voted 59-41 to renew the Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage, the Kent County Board of Commissioners approved more than \$10 million to support young children and their families in Kent County.

Last year, more than 14,000 children and families benefitted from the services of these community-based organizations. Thanks to the support from voters on Tuesday and the Kent County Board of Commissioners today, additional families in all areas of Kent County will be able to receive services that improve the health and school readiness of young children.

Funding totaling \$10,059,999 will be distributed to 18 community-based organizations operating 31 programs from October 2024-September 2025.

“We deeply appreciate the support from the residents of Kent County. The Ready by Five Millage remains a crucial investment, significantly improving the lives of young children and their families in our community,” stated **Jennifer Headley-Nordman, president of First Steps Kent**. “The overwhelming demand for funding highlights the essential nature of this millage and its ongoing positive impact.”

A Resident Proposal Review Board comprised of parents, Kent County Commissioners, and other community members reviewed all proposals. There were 42 proposals submitted totaling more than \$13 million. In June, the Resident Proposal Review Board met to determine where funding would have the most impact. The group’s recommendations first went to the First Steps Kent Board of Commissioners, who administers the millage funding, and were approved by the Kent County Board of Commissioners this morning.

The Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage supports programs in the following categories. The organizations that were recommended and approved for funding for the next year are noted below:

OUTREACH AND NAVIGATION: Outreach and Navigation services educate parents about resources to support their child’s healthy development and early learning. The services make a personal connection with parents and check they are getting support from the programs that best fit their needs. Organizations funded include Kent ISD, Health Net of West Michigan, and Family Futures.

EARLY LEARNING PROGRAMS: High-quality early learning experiences nurture a child’s cognitive, social, and emotional development. Programs in this area ensure all children have access to quality learning opportunities and to build literacy and language

skills. Organizations funded include Comprehensive Therapy Center, Vibrant Futures, Kent ISD, and Grand Rapids Community College.

HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS: Healthy Development programs focus on improving the lives of families in Kent County through healthier pregnancies and births, overall child health and well-being, and ensuring children are developmentally on track. Organizations funded include Kent County Health Department, Arbor Circle, Bethany Christian Services, Family Promise, Healthy Homes Coalition of West Michigan, The PlaygroundGR, YMCA of Greater Grand Rapids, and Hispanic Center of Western Michigan.

PARENT EDUCATION AND SUPPORT: Parent Education and Support programming ensures parents have the knowledge and skills to support their children's health, development, and learning. Services provide in-home and/or community-based support and education. Programs offer parent education through home visiting as well as ancillary support that addresses the preventable causes of infant and child mortality. Organizations funded include Cherry Health, D.A. Blodgett – St. John's, Kent ISD, MomsBloom, Corewell Health, and Vibrant Futures. Also funded under this category are Bethany Christian Services and Hispanic Center of Western Michigan for translation and interpretation support.

"We are excited to continue seeing the positive impact the Ready by Five millage will have in equipping our children with the tools and resources they need to thrive in school," said **Kent County Administrator Al Vanderberg**. "We thank the voters for renewing the millage, everyone who submitted a funding request, and those who selected the organizations. We look forward to the transformative outcomes that will result from our continued and collaborative efforts."

The Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage was renewed this week for a 0.25 mill property tax that will generate about \$8.8 million in 2025. It will be the second term of the six-year millage, beginning in January 2025, and will provide dedicated funding for community-based early childhood programs, ensuring children and their families have access to vital services. All millage dollars go through an independent audit and are reported to the Kent County Board of Commissioners each year to ensure taxpayer funds are spent wisely and transparently.

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The Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage provides dedicated and sustainable funding for programs that improve the health, school readiness, and well-being of children under age five in Kent County. First Steps Kent is the administrator of the Ready by Five millage funds. First Steps Kent is an independent non-profit that works to strengthen and coordinate the system of early childhood services through research and innovation. First Steps Kent is leading a community-wide effort to develop a system of support for children ages 0-5 (and their families) that ensures every young child in Kent County will enter kindergarten ready to succeed in school and in life.