



Supported by the Kent County Ready by Five Millage

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## **Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage to help young children be ready for school success**

### ***Kent County Commission approves First Steps Kent's proposal to administer Ready by Five millage and distribute funds***

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. -- We are excited to announce that Kent County and First Steps Kent are working together to operationalize the Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage which will support young children and their families across the community. Today, the Kent County Board of Commissioners approved the First Steps Kent's proposal to administer the Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage. In November 2018, county voters approved the millage, which will provide more than \$5.5 million annually for enhanced early childhood services. A contract is in the final stages of approval to move this process forward.

"We are excited to work with First Steps and the broader community to increase community based, early childhood services. The Ready by Five funds will allow us to reach children and their families early in life when brain development and social/emotional bonding are critical. We have confidence that First Steps and the system that is being created will ensure that the resources are directed where it can have a significant impact," noted Wayman Britt, County Administrator/Controller.

The millage will support programs that improve the healthy development and school readiness of children ages zero to five. The funding will be distributed to community-based organizations across the county that provide services such as in-home parenting support, developmental screenings, play and learn groups, and outreach to ensure families know what is available and have access to the services that best meet their needs.

A review board comprised of parents, Kent County Commissioners, a First Steps Kent board member, and a community member with early childhood expertise will review proposals from

service providers and make recommendations about which programs and services should be funded. The first round of funding will be awarded this fall.

“We are fortunate in Kent County to have innovative and effective early childhood programs that are getting great results. The Ready by Five Millage will allow many more children and families in our community to benefit from those services,” said Annemarie Valdez, president and CEO of First Steps Kent. “We again want to thank the voters of Kent County, who recognize this is an investment that will pay off for our community.”

Research shows money invested in high quality early childhood programs saves money down the road with reduced costs for child welfare, education, health care, and criminal justice. All programs funded by the Ready by Five Millage will be evaluated to measure their impact. Those results will be shared with the public. Kent County is the first county in Michigan to have local tax dollars dedicated to early childhood.

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*First Steps Kent is an independent nonprofit leading a community-wide effort to build a comprehensive early childhood system in Kent County. A comprehensive system requires that programs, policies, and supports are in place to help all young children and their families thrive.*