



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Kent County Awards First Steps Kent Grant Funding to Help Child Care Centers**

*Funding Will Assist More Than 600 Licensed Childcare Providers Implement New COVID-19 Protocols*

**(Grand Rapids, Mich. – September 16, 2020)** – Kent County recently awarded [First Steps Kent](#) \$450,000 in federal CARES Act dollars to assist licensed child care providers meet the needs of new health and safety requirements. Additionally, First Steps Kent will provide technical assistance support (i.e. applying for past unemployment benefits, tax preparation, etc.) to these providers.

“Too many parents are caught between the need to earn a living and the fear of sending their kids to child care,” said Kent County Board of Commissioners Chair Mandy Bolter. “We can get our parents back to work and our economy back on track by helping child care providers meet the highest standards of public health and safety.”

Since early March, First Steps Kent has convened a [Kent Child Care Crisis Response Team](#) which worked to identify child care providers, match them with children of essential needs workers, and supply them with personal protection equipment (PPE), cleaning supplies and groceries. First Steps Kent recently surveyed providers on their upcoming needs and, based upon the comments, will use this grant funding to distribute easy-to-clean toys and equipment, new curriculum to accommodate virtual learning, and hygiene and sanitation supplies. These items will be circulated to providers based on the licensure [type](#) — family childcare home, group childcare home, or childcare centers — as defined by the State of Michigan.

“Child care providers have been hit hard by this pandemic, and we have had the honor of listening and serving their needs during this time,” said Annemarie Valdez, President & CEO, First Steps Kent. “We know that supporting child care providers means supporting families and our youngest children in Kent County.”

Child care providers who experienced losses due to business interruption as a result of the pandemic may apply for additional grant funding through the [Kent County Small Business Recovery Program](#) and PPE can be obtained through the County’s [program](#).

“We thank our childcare providers for their continued dedication to our children and parents during this extraordinary time,” concluded Bolter. “By providing safe child care centers, parents can return to work which is another important step in getting our economy back on track.”

Childcare providers should visit First Steps Kent website at [www.firststepskent.org/sharedservices](http://www.firststepskent.org/sharedservices) to learn more about this program and other available resources.

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## **About Kent County**

The County of Kent government serves a diverse population of more than 650,000 residents, making it the fourth largest county in Michigan. The County provides a wide range of essential services in the following areas: law enforcement, correctional facility, three court systems, elections, social services, public health, park system and vital records. Additionally, it has operating agreements for the maintenance of County drains, solid waste and road, mental health services, and with the Gerald R. Ford International Airport and John Ball Zoo. To learn more about Kent County services, visit [www.accesskent.com](http://www.accesskent.com).

## **About First Steps Kent**

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 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.