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THE READY BY FIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD MILLAGE WILL HELP CONNECT THOUSANDS OF KENT COUNTY FAMILIES TO CRITICAL SERVICES *Four local organizations recommended for support in first round of millage funding*

(Grand Rapids, Mich., September 12, 2019)—The first round of funding from the Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage will help thousands of families in Kent County connect to programs that improve the health and school readiness of young children. The initial funding is dedicated to navigation and outreach services that will help families know what is available in the community and how to access the resources that best meet their needs.

A Resident Proposal Review Board – which consists of nine community members, including parents, an early childhood expert and Kent County officials – reviewed proposals from local organizations that applied for funding. The Review Board made recommendations to First Steps Kent on July 17. These recommendations were approved by the Kent County Board of Commissioners Finance and Physical Resources Committee last week and approved by the Kent County Board of Commissioners today.

“The Board of Commissioners appreciates the work of First Steps Kent and the Resident Proposal Review Board in making funding recommendations for community-based programs that will ensure our children are ready for school, said Kent County Administrator Wayman Britt. “Our Board remains committed to the Ready by Five millage to ensure our tax dollars are not only used responsibly but that the funding will have the greatest impact on our children and their families.”

The recommendations call for a total of \$2.4 million to be distributed through 2021 to the following organizations:

- Family Futures – \$763,324,
- Family Promise of Grand Rapids – \$50,000,
- Health Net of West Michigan – \$930,000 and
- Kent Intermediate School District – \$656,676.

The organizations will connect expectant parents and parents of young children with information to early childhood and support services in the community. Navigation and outreach services will be available to families across Kent County, with a strategic focus on those with the greatest needs.

"We are proud of the passionate, thoughtful work that the Resident Proposal Review Board has put into the selection process," said Annemarie Valdez, President & CEO of First Steps Kent. "Research tells us the earlier we connect to families, the greater the benefits for their children. With this funding, the four organizations will reach thousands of additional families in Kent County and will support parents as they work to give their children the best possible start in life."

Kent County voters approved the Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage on November 6, 2018. It will generate approximately \$5.7 million a year for six years. The next round of funding will become available late 2019 to programs that provide ongoing support to strengthen families and nurture the healthy development and early learning of young children.

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About First Steps Kent: First Steps Kent is an independent nonprofit organization that works with parents, service providers, funders, advocates, and other stakeholders to build a comprehensive early childhood system in Kent County. Our community vision is that every young child in Kent County will enter kindergarten healthy and ready to succeed in school and life. First Steps Kent is working with our community partners to make that vision a reality. Learn more at www.firststepskent.org.