

ANALYSIS OF THE 2017 MUSKEGON COUNTY YOUTH, FAMILY & COMMUNITY MILLAGE

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On Tuesday, November 7, 2017 Muskegon County residents will vote on the proposed new millage to fund enhancement of existing youth programs and for the development of proven youth prevention and treatment programs. If approved (a “Yes” vote), the new millage will provide dedicated funding to support youth programs in Muskegon County. If rejected (a “No” vote), funding supporting existing youth programs will need to be allocated from county general funds and could be considerably reduced, leading to significant reductions and/or elimination of services. Additionally, substantial reductions in funding to other county departments and/or programs could also occur.

The following analysis has been developed by Michigan State University Extension to assist voters in making an informed decision. The information below is based on MSU Extension’s research and analysis of the proposed millage and is for educational purposes only. MSU Extension does not endorse nor show bias against any position.

BALLOT LANGUAGE

The following is the proposed ballot language for the November 7, 2017 general election:

For the purpose of funding Muskegon County’s enhancement of existing youth programs and for the development of proven youth prevention and treatment programs; family based programs; school based services; increasing the number of foster care and therapeutic foster care homes; respite care; crisis housing; transitional and community aftercare; psychosocial activities; residential treatment; employment services; and assessment and stabilization treatment programming, and/or other youth services pursuant to or authorized by Public Act 179 of 1967, shall the constitutional limitation on the total amount of taxes which may be assessed in one (1) year upon all property within the County of Muskegon, Michigan, be increased and the County of Muskegon authorized to levy a new tax of up to 1.5 mills (\$1.50 per \$1,000 of taxable value) for a period of ten (10) years, from 2017 to 2026 inclusive? The cost per \$100,000 home is \$75 per year. If approved and levied in full, this millage will raise an estimated \$6.2 million in the first calendar year of the levy based on taxable value.

Millage rates (taxes)

The proposed 10 year millage (2017-2026) is asking for a new millage of 1.5 mill*. If this new millage passes, an estimated \$6.2 million would be raised in the first calendar year. Property owners will see an increase in their existing tax rates: for a property with a taxable value of \$50,000, this new millage will increase annual taxes by \$75.

**1.5 mill is \$1.50 paid per \$1,000.00 of the total taxable value of a property.*

FACTS

Out of Muskegon County's population of approximately 173,000 people, 23% (39,790) are under the age of 18. The children of Muskegon County show a demonstrated high level of need for increased services and support. Although there is a wide continuum of care in place, there are gaps in access and in needed resources to support the county's youth to become resilient, successful adults. Muskegon County's children are facing multiple challenges, many of which are influenced by poverty, generational trauma, lack of access to needed services, and systemic barriers.

The following facts have been identified by Muskegon County's child serving systems and community partners:

- 28% of Muskegon youth live in poverty; 3 out of 5 children qualify for free and reduced lunch.
- The total Medicaid population is approximately 24,577, or about 14% of the population.
- The "ALICE" population (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) makes up 40% of Muskegon County.
- 37 out of 100 Muskegon County youth will not graduate traditional high school in time.
- An estimated 12,000 Muskegon County youth have a diagnosable DSM (mental health) condition and only 796 (6.6%) received treatment through the public mental health system in 2015 which is currently only able to provide Medicaid services.
- According to the 2013 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 74 (2.9%) students in Muskegon County made suicide attempts in the past year causing injury or illness requiring medical treatment.
- High school students in Muskegon County are more likely than state and national comparison groups to say that feelings of sadness or hopelessness interfered with normal activity during the past year: 34.2% Muskegon County youth compared with 27% in Michigan and 29.9% in the US report this to be true.
- The percent of students who said they seriously considered suicide during the past year: 20.2% in Muskegon, 16% in the state of Michigan, and 17% in the US reported suicide ideation.
- The Juvenile Justice system including Family Court and Juvenile Transition Center estimate 75% of youth in the system have significant mental health needs, and cite a lack of resources to offer therapeutic services such as case management, therapy, after-care, community-based housing, prevention, and family-based services.
- Out of county placements often occur because Muskegon County does not have enough placements to meet the needs of youth and families.
- There are no Child Abuse/Neglect facilities available in Muskegon County. There is a need for prevention resources and therapeutic foster homes for youth that have complex needs. Counseling services for youth and families, intensive in-home services for youth and families, non-traditional services to support youth and families and the provision of these services at non-traditional times are also identified gaps in this system.

- A greater percentage of Muskegon students have emotional impairment (7.6%) than the state average (5.6%).
- Schools report that many students experience anxiety, depression and other mental health disorders that are not properly or consistently treated. There is a lack of readily available psychiatrists and therapists, and untreated mental health conditions can lead to disruptions to the learning environment. School systems alone are not equipped to deal with these needs and often students get caught up in the discipline system.
- According to the Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) Muskegon survey of approximately 22,000 residents aged 18+, childhood abuse, neglect, and family dysfunction is higher in this county than in the state of Michigan or the U.S. as a whole. Childhood trauma is a leading cause of disease, social problems, and early death due to its impact on brain development, immune system function, and negative health behaviors such as substance abuse, smoking and overeating. It has become clear that to address youth needs in the community, parent and family needs must be addressed as well in order to stop the generational cycles of trauma and abuse.

EXISTING COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Current community programming and resources include:

Health/mental health services:

- HealthWest, the public mental health system in the county, provides a wide array of behavioral health and substance use services to children/youth ages 0-26 and their families including infant mental health, community-based services, transition age services, Wraparound facilitation, counseling, case management, Autism services, and school-based services. Service delivery is limited to individuals with Medicaid and a diagnosis of Serious Emotional Disturbance. Increased resources could expand service delivery to youth with mild to moderate behavioral health concerns.
- The county recently received a Systems of Care grant to enhance systems to be more coordinated and collaborative, using youth guided and family driven principles to guide care and pilot mental health services in area schools.
- A wide array of quality services is available through private agencies and providers.
- The Lakeshore Regional Entity manages substance use prevention dollars and funds programming throughout the community.
- Public Health Muskegon County has prevention programming in several areas of health.
- Mercy Health System and their community benefit program offer numerous high quality health and mental health services.

- Current providers have administrative capacity to enhance and expand service delivery with added resources.
- Muskegon is part of the SIM (State Innovation Model) initiative working to redesign healthcare in our state to be more prevention oriented and integrated.

Social and community services:

- The child welfare system has trauma-informed practice; case-specific focus on protective factors; a strong desire for collaboration, dedicated staff who are committed to meeting the needs of youth and families and a willingness to be creative in problem solving. This system uses the MiTeam practice model to assure services are child centered and family focused.
- The Juvenile Transition Center and Family Court is working to add more treatment capacity at the facility. An expert consultant will be working to redesign this system toward treatment-oriented programming and provable results.
- Current Family Court programming includes Fresh Start Summer program for youth on intensive probation, Success Teams Assisting Youth (STAY) program for reduction of suspensions and expulsions, mentoring program, Transition to Independence Process Model Training and collaboration with Pathways to Potential sites, Truancy Court and a Juvenile Mental Health Court.
- Muskegon County has a wide variety of community-based services including non-profit agencies, collaborative committees, early childhood programs, mentoring programs and school-based programs for youth and families.

GAPS/NEEDS

The following gaps/needs in the continuum of care for youth have been identified by Muskegon County's community leaders and partners:

- Treatment-oriented Juvenile Justice system
- Therapeutic housing options
- Increased treatment for mental health issues
- Increased treatment for substance use disorders
- Family mentoring and support
- Parent education and engagement
- Prevention services

YOUTH PROGRAMS AFFECTED BY THE PROPOSED NEW MILLAGE

Youth programs that would be funded by the proposed new millage include mental health and substance abuse treatment, parent education, family-based programs, school-based services, respite care, foster care and therapeutic foster care homes, transitional and community aftercare, crisis housing, psychosocial activities, residential treatment, employment services and assessment and stabilization treatment programming.

Specifically, the proposed new millage would provide funding for the following:

Intensive probation

The millage would enhance intensive probation services by increasing probationary supervision and counseling for adjudicated youth petitioned to the court for delinquency. Youth in this program would be at risk for out-of-home placement: the goals are to keep youth in the community and reduce recidivism.

Community service/aftercare

The millage would enhance development of an individualized plan for each youth and their family discharged from placement, engaging youth in community-based, pro-social activities until it is determined benefits have been achieved and risk of recidivism has been reduced.

Truancy

Truancy Court includes an intensive program to address needs of youth petitioned for excessive absenteeism. This program would be collaborative between schools and Family Court, allowing for detection of criminogenic behavior and early intervention and treatment, as well as required parent education and skill building.

Day treatment

This program would provide highly structured and intensive day treatment programming, ensuring youth served receive social and academic tools including community based opportunities. Classrooms would include teachers as well as behavioral specialists and vocational training would also be offered.

Evening program

This program would use cognitive behavioral interventions for youth, including structured activities, tutoring and dinner during evening hours.

Residential treatment

At times the court must order a youth into a residential treatment facility. The millage would provide more local residential treatment options.

Community services

These services would expand current community services to meet the needs of more youth and families with complex needs. These services allow youth to address their behavior while still residing in the community, including substance abuse assessments and treatment, anger management, domestic violence intervention, respite care, transportation assistance, mental health services and private practitioners for individual and family therapy.

School-based services

This program would sustain and expand school-based mental health services aimed at preventing out-of-home and out-of-community placements, as well as suspensions and expulsions to ensure academic success of these students.

Prevention Services

Age-appropriate programs that promote healthy physical, mental, and social development give youth opportunities to discover and develop their abilities and build confidence in safe, welcoming environments. In communities affected by violence, like Muskegon County, targeted prevention programs and mental health supports have a more focused impact.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Long-term outcomes expected from the funding of operation and enhancement of existing youth programs and for the development of proven youth prevention and treatment programs include: improved public safety, reduction in the number of youth detained, long-term tax dollar savings, reduction in the disproportionate confinement of minorities, reduction in youth repeat offenses, recidivism and out-of-county and out-of-state placements, an increase in the numbers of youth who grow into productive and successful adults, and an increase in the quality of services provided to adjudicated youth.

FUNDING

If this proposed new millage is approved, the millage collected would provide dedicated funding to youth and family-based services for 10 years. This dedicated funding would offset other deficits, providing a balanced budget and helping to maintain existing funding for other county departments and programs.

If this proposed new millage is not approved, a variety of approaches may be taken to balance the county budget, but there would almost certainly be a need to include significant budget cuts. Options could range from cutting entire departments and/or programs to a more balanced approach that could considerably reduce funding across multiple departments and/or programs. Regardless of the approach taken, current youth programming will be at risk for elimination or will not be enhanced. The Muskegon County Board of Commissioners has the authority to make these fiscal decisions.

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