

Press Release – 2017 Children Services Levy

The Lake County Commissioners agreed today to place a 0.7 (seven tenths) of one mill renewal and an additional 0.4 (four tenths) of one mill Children Services levy on the November 7th ballot. Currently the levy generates approximately \$3.5 million a year, which is about \$450,000 less than when it was passed in 2008. The reduction is the result of the elimination of other supporting revenue sources by the state of Ohio. This reduction in levy revenue, along with a significant increase in demands for the services provided by this agency has necessitated the need for an additional levy. Lake County, like communities throughout Ohio and the nation, is experiencing an opiate epidemic and escalating violence against our families and children.

As a result of these social crises there has been a 38% increase in the number of children placed into the custody of Job and Family Services due to abuse and neglect since 2010. Many of these children were placed into Job and Family Services custody as a result of parental drug addiction. The increased number of children placed into Job and Family Services' custody has resulted in a 26% increase in the cost of caring for these children. These increased costs are occurring at a time when the State of Ohio has not increased funding for these vital services since 2010. As a matter of fact, Ohio is 50th out of 50 states in providing funding for Children Services per capita.

According to the Lake County Auditor's Office, these levies would result in a property owner paying an additional \$14.00 per \$100,000 property value per year. Lake County voters have faithfully approved the Children Services levy every five years since its inception in 1968. In 2013 the voters approved the levy with 66% supporting the issue. If passed this levy is projected to provide enough revenue so that voters will not have to pass another levy for ten years.

Given current fiscal constraints Children Services has already reduced its staff by 8% and makes judicious decisions on every dollar spent. Our funding is used to provide protective services, to investigate reports of abused or neglected children, and to care for children placed into the custody of Children Services because of abuse or neglect. Child care options include residential treatment centers, foster and adoptive homes, and kinship placements with grandparents who care for grandchildren in their homes. There are over 1,000 grandparents raising grandchildren in Lake County and our services support many of those grandparents. If this levy does not pass it will result in cuts to vital services and programs for abused and neglected children.

Matt Battiato, the Lake County Job and Family Services Director, said the funds assist one of the county's most vulnerable populations. "This is a crisis. Working with and protecting abused and neglected children is always a challenge but the impact of the opiate epidemic on children has been horrific," Battiato said. "The epidemic does not discriminate. Every income level, age group and race and city in our county has been impacted by this crisis. Whether people blame the parents for being addicts or are sympathetic to the disease, the children are the innocent victims."

These services have been recognized as essential by our law enforcement community. Lake County Sheriff Dan Dunlap supports the Children Services levy and the vital role it plays in protecting children from abuse and neglect. "Law enforcement relies on Children Services to take kids out of abusive situations and step in and care for these children. It's who we call in the middle of the night when kids are not being taken care of by parents," Dunlap said. "It is a reasonable expectation for citizens to support programs of this nature and it is money well spent."