



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
SEPTEMBER 19, 2023

Media Contact:
Sarah Spoonholtz
269-932-4040

sspoonholtz@smrchamber.com

TRI-COUNTY HEAD START SEEKING CHILDCARE INPUT
Community and Businesses in Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren Counties Encouraged
to Participate in Survey

Paw Paw, Michigan – All across Southwest Michigan, there is a continued growing need for safe and affordable childcare options that families are able to access. In an effort to understand what the current need is, Tri-County Head Start, with support from enFocus and the Southwest Michigan Regional Chamber, has put together a survey for residents and businesses to participate. All data collected will guide overall efforts on creating and implementing effective solutions for the entire community.

"Before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the early childhood system showed signs of strain. However, in its wake, it has been pushed to the brink, leaving families with limited alternatives for childcare and employers without a workforce," remarked Chanda Hillman, the Executive Director of Tri-County Head Start. "We firmly believe in the strength of our community and recognize that both our community members and employers require viable solutions to solve this childcare crisis."

"Too often in Michigan, working parents are forced to sacrifice rewarding work because their childcare needs are not adequately met," said Arthur Havlicek, President & CEO of the Southwest Michigan Regional Chamber. "To put this plight in perspective, childcare issues result in an estimated annual \$2.88 billion loss for Michigan's economy, as well as \$576 million in tax base lost annually."

"Lack of access to childcare is regularly brought up as a barrier to workforce participation and talent attraction throughout Southwest Michigan as well," Havlicek added. "In order to better understand the impact on our region, we are imploring parents and employers alike to complete this brief survey. Your responses will empower us with the data necessary to make informed decisions and ultimately move the needle on this important issue."

During a Cass County study in early 2022, estimated shortages in available slots for children under the age of 5 neared 1,500. That same study indicated nearly 60% of respondents had declined employment or withdrew from the workforce due to childcare issues. 18% of employers citing lack of childcare options being the reason they are unable to attract and retain talent. Base estimates for Berrien and Van Buren counties, respectively, put those numbers even higher.

Hillman adds, "The longer we wait to gather the data and understand the true need, the worse the crisis becomes locally, and the strain on our families and employers increases, which is unacceptable."



Community members can find the survey at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/FamilySurvey-ECE2023>.

Employers can find the survey at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/BCVBemployersurveys>. Both surveys will close on October 6, 2023.

About Tri-County Head Start

Tri-County Head Start has served more than 40,000 children and families in Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren counties since 1972. They serve both the children and their families by providing a preschool program for children to begin Kindergarten school-ready. They also connect families with needed resources, educational, and leadership opportunities. Head Start provides hope and helps dreams come true. For more information, please visit www.tricountyhs.org.

About Southwest Michigan Regional Chamber

The Southwest Michigan Regional Chamber is a member-driven organization working to achieve economic prosperity throughout the region, by leveraging every available resource within our network for the advancement of our members and the betterment of all who live and work in our community.

-end-