

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 24, 2026

West Michigan Partnership for Children (WMPC) will appeal the February 25, 2026 decision on Performance-Based Funding to the Michigan Court of Appeals.

Grand Rapids, MI — West Michigan Partnership for Children (WMPC) announced today that it will appeal a recent decision by the Michigan Court of Claims regarding the administration of the foster care system in Kent County.

The decision stems from a February 25, 2026 ruling by the Court of Claims concerning WMPC's challenge to the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services' (MDHHS) approach to complying with state statute governing the Kent County foster care system. The Court concluded that MDHHS's quarterly prospective payment model with reconciliation, along with performance expectations embedded in provider contracts, satisfies the statutory requirements.

WMPC respectfully disagrees with the Court's interpretation and believes appellate review is necessary to clarify the meaning of the law and preserve the Legislature's original intent. Additionally, WMPC believes that the current child welfare system in Michigan needs significant system change to provide better outcomes for children and families across Michigan.

"We believe appellate review is important to ensure that the statutory framework enacted by the Legislature is interpreted as intended," said **Sonia Noorman, CEO of West Michigan Partnership for Children**. "Unlike the traditional foster care system used across Michigan counties, where funding is largely tied to the number of children in care, the Kent County model was designed to reward better outcomes by helping children safely leave foster care and move into permanent homes more quickly,"

Kent County is one of six counties in Michigan participating in the 6.3 Project, which focuses on helping children in foster care find permanent homes more quickly. "Permanency" means a child safely returning home, being adopted, living with a legal guardian, or being placed with a relative. In Kent County, children finding a permanent home within 12 months **increased from 9% in 2023 to 20% in 2024**.

Since its creation in 2017, WMPC has overseen a community-based, performance-driven model of foster care designed to improve safety, permanency, and well-being for children. The model was authorized in Michigan law to allow Kent County to operate under a prospective payment structure that ties funding to measurable outcomes. Children served through the WMPC model spent **about 79 fewer days in foster care**, reached **permanent homes faster**, and experienced **85% fewer cases of maltreatment while in care** compared with similar counties in Michigan.

"This appeal is not about preserving an organization," said **David Shields, Director of Strategic Initiatives and Advocacy for WMPC**. "It is about protecting the Legislature's vision for a community-based system that aligns funding with accountability and performance. Over the past eight years, Kent County has shown that this approach can strengthen outcomes for children and families."

While the appellate process proceeds, WMPC acknowledges that the Court of Claims ruling effectively ends its role in administering the Kent County foster care system for the time being.

"Our immediate priority is supporting the dedicated professionals who have worked tirelessly on behalf of children and families," **Noorman said**. "We are committed to handling this transition with transparency, compassion, and respect."

A small team will remain in place to pursue the legal appeal and to continue advancing policy and legislative reforms intended to strengthen foster care and child welfare systems across Michigan.

WMPC leaders emphasized that the progress achieved in Kent County demonstrates the potential of performance-based systems to improve outcomes. For example, outcomes among youth before and after the WMPC Model was implemented include;

- 240 days faster for reunification with parents or primary caretakers.
- 14% more youth achieved permanency within six months.
- 24% more youth achieved permanency within 12 months
- 18% more older youth achieved permanency within six months
- 27% more older youth achieved permanency within 12 months

“The experience in Kent County shows that when systems are built around collaboration, accountability, and measurable performance, better outcomes for children are possible,” **Shields added**. “We remain committed to advancing those principles across Michigan.”

WMPC will continue to provide updates to partners, community members, and policymakers as the appellate process moves forward. For more information visit <https://wmpc.care/>

Media Contact:

David Shields
Director of Strategic Initiatives and Advocacy
West Michigan Partnership for Children
256-443-4626
dshields@wmpc.care