

The Ann Arbor/Ypsilanti Regional Chamber Statement of Support for the May 3rd 2016 Washtenaw Intermediate School District Special Education Millage Proposal

March 24, 2016

The Ann Arbor/Ypsilanti Regional Chamber supports the May 3rd Washtenaw Intermediate School District (WISD) Special Education Millage Proposal because of its benefits for our local business community and the broader community as a whole. The WISD seeks an additional 1.5 mills to fund special education efforts for children throughout Washtenaw County. The Chamber supports this effort for several reasons:

1. Approximately one in seven children in Washtenaw County receives some form of special education services, and the number could increase. Our local school districts spend roughly \$24M out of their own general funds to pay for these mandatory services. This is an important issue for our entire community and passing this millage will free up funds back to our local school districts.
2. The funding sought by WISD will bring it to the maximum allowed by state law, so this is not a millage that will grow beyond possible increases in property values, already subject to the Headlee Amendment which limits the rate of growth.
3. The WISD has been a good steward of these special education funds, and it is an agency that can be trusted with additional resources.
4. As a business community, it is a strong benefit to be able to tell existing and potential employers and employees that our community cares for and supports education for **all** children. We will keep and grow talent because of the benefits to quality of life this funding provides.
5. WISD has made successful efforts to engage many individuals with special education needs directly in the business community, as the employment rate for young adults with disabilities served by WISD is 32% compared to the national average of 17%. These formal and informal connections result not just in positive economic activity (income and taxes paid) on behalf of the individual, but they save all of us money by decreasing the amount we collectively pay in related human services for these individuals. Putting people with special needs to work is good for them individually and good for all of us as a community.

The WISD is an effective agency doing needed and useful work on behalf of individuals with special needs. Their millage request is a significant ask, but it will provide even more significant benefits. The A2Y Chamber is committed to the success of our members, the Washtenaw County business community, and the community as a whole. For these reasons, we urge our members to support the WISD proposal on May 3rd.