

Continue Equal Funding of Seven Berrien County Senior Centers

Berrien County is blessed with 7 senior centers located throughout the county, so everyone lives near at least one senior center. County voters provided this blessing by overwhelmingly approving the property tax millage supporting the centers. The millage is split equally between the 7 centers, and, in return, all centers are obligated to serve any Berrien County resident 60+ years old. You would think that folks go to the closest senior center, but many may actually travel to a center with the programs and services they need and the center they like most. The Buchanan Area Senior Center provides a great array of programs and services attracting people from throughout the county, as 27% of our attendees come from Niles and another 18.5% from the rest of the county.

Recently, the St. Joseph/Lincoln Senior Center (SJLSC) asked the Berrien County Commission to change millage funding from the current equal 7-way split to one based upon property values and total population of the community where the center is located (note: the proposal gives total population as the senior population, which is inaccurate). This approach gives more funding to wealthier urban communities and less money to lower income rural communities. In fact, the SJLSC proposal recommends cuts to millage funding for 4 rural senior centers totaling \$288,359 and redistributing these funds to 3 mostly urban senior centers, with the majority (\$162,873) going to SJLSC. Do you think that is fair? The position of the BASC Board of Directors is that millage funding should continue as an

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even 7-way split to provide every senior center an equal opportunity to serve the community. All older adults should have convenient access to a senior center regardless of their income or location in the county.

While the Board of the BASC empathizes with SJLSC's quest for additional funding, this should not be addressed by robbing Peter to pay Paul. In order to best serve older adults, the BASC supplements County funding by raising funds through various methods, including fundraising events, an annual appeal, general donations, sponsorships and grant funding. We are grateful for our community's generosity, despite our community's economic status. Buchanan has a median household income of \$56,163 as compared to both the Berrien County median income of \$65,425 (16.5% higher than Buchanan) and the St. Joseph median income of \$84,057 (50% higher than Buchanan), per data from the U.S. Census Bureau's *2024 American Community Survey*. We are proud of our community for their generosity and support of our work, and we are grateful to all senior centers in Berrien County for their great work supporting older adults.