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Facing budget cuts, Ottawa health officials & Planned Parenthood explore options

Proposed Ottawa County Health Department budget cuts opens the door for Planned Parenthood in Ottawa County



Photo by: FOX 17



By: Matt Witkos , Karie Herringa

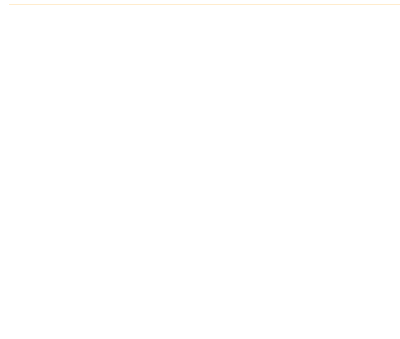
Posted at 3:34 PM, Sep 15, 2023 and last updated 3:34 PM, Sep 15, 2023

OTTAWA COUNTY, Mich. — Planned Parenthood of Michigan and Ottawa County health officials are exploring options to fund family planning services after proposed cuts to the departments could put some programs and services in jeopardy.

The State of Michigan has introduced Ottawa County public health officials to Planned Parenthood of Michigan, according to emails shared with FOX 17. The two-email exchange shows plans to discuss potential options for Title X funding if the health department cannot fulfill requirements.

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Title X is a federal grant program that requires local agencies to provide family planning and preventative health services.

It comes as the Ottawa County administrator and county commissioners consider a proposed budget that would lower health department funding for services like family planning, health education and immunizations.

The introduction email between the State of Michigan, Ottawa County public health officials and Planned Parenthood of Michigan is dated August 23, the day Hambley was supposed to turn in her downsized budget proposal, which she said would force the department to shutter within weeks of FY24.

Planned Parenthood of Michigan replied on August 31.

"PPMI would be happy to discuss options for ensuring access to services for patients in Ottawa County," wrote Planned Parenthood Vice President of Healthcare Transformation and Innovation Martha Nokken.

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FOX 17 reached out to MDHHS for comment on this exchange. They release a statement, reading:

"The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services awaits information about the final approved Ottawa County Department of Public Health budget. Decisions about local health department budgets are

made at the local level. The department is dedicated to ensuring all Michigan residents have access to services provided through local health department partners.”

The communication between the Ottawa County Health Department officials and Planned Parenthood of Michigan could lead to more contention with county commissioners associated with Ottawa Impact.

Moss, and a majority of the other county commissioners, signed a contract with Ottawa Impact during their candidacy in 2022. According to a copy of that contract on the PAC’s website, candidates will, “support ending the county’s promotion and use of Planned Parenthood-aligned resources.”

Right to Life of Michigan has endorsed each commissioner who signed the Ottawa Impact contract.

Currently, the closest Planned Parenthood provider to Ottawa County is in Kent County.

Sources told FOX 17 that the county receives just over \$200,000 in Title X funding.



As FOX 17 has reported, the current FY24 budget draft includes [significant cuts to public health](#) compared with the budget pitched by the department. It includes lowered funding for family planning, health education and immunizations.

Health Officer Adeline Hambley has said previously, that while this budget may meet state funding requirements, it may not provide adequate service levels.

The email exchange happened prior to [Hambley's public warning](#) of what could happen to Title X funding.

A September 4 Public Health press release it reads in part, "...it is unlikely that the department will be able to meet the service requirements needed to retain Title X funding for Family Planning services. These services may then be transitioned to the nearest Title X provider, which is Planned Parenthood."

On August 22, Ottawa County's Health Department shared on social media that County Administrator John Gibbs had requested Hambley work with Fiscal Services on a revised budget. Gibbs wrote, "...work out the details of a budget using \$2.5 million general fund contribution and also discontinuing all COVID-related grants."

Hambley was asked to send this downsized budget proposal to Gibbs by close of business on August 23, two days later.

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The request followed a conversation during the Finance Administration Committee meeting on August 21. Commission Chairperson and Ottawa Impact founder Joe Moss suggested the general fund contribution should sit closer to pre-pandemic levels.

"If you look back to 2009 through 2019, that kind of area, you see public health general fund allocation much closer to \$2.5 to \$3 million," Moss said. "You all see a fair number of grants that also add to the public health budget. So, I think what would be a wise use of taxpayer funds is to look at bringing the general fund allocation for public health back to its historical standards over the last 10 or so years."

Public health officials maintain that in the last 20 years, the general fund allocation was never as low as \$2.5 million.

In the current FY24 budget draft, public health is getting a \$4.3 million general fund contribution. It's also utilizing \$1.7 million from the department's rainy-day fund.

In Hambley's initial budget draft, she asked for over \$1 million for family planning, down from FY23. The current FY24 budget draft allocated just under \$800,000 to the program.

Last week, hundreds of people gathered in Ottawa County to show their [support for the health department](#).

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More than [100 healthcare providers have signed a letter](#) voicing their concerns over the impact cuts to public health would have on the county.

[Healthcare Letter to Ottawa...](#) by [WXMI](#)

"I'm concerned that you'd be jeopardizing your tax base by jeopardizing the health care of our community," Dr. Kurt Lindberg told Ottawa Commissioners.

Dr. Michael Borenitsch said, "I would like you to severely think about your decision to defund the health department."


FOX 17 has reached out to county commissioners and Administrator Gibbs for comment but has not heard back.

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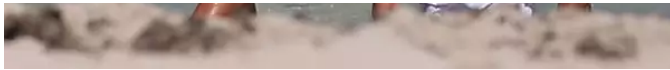
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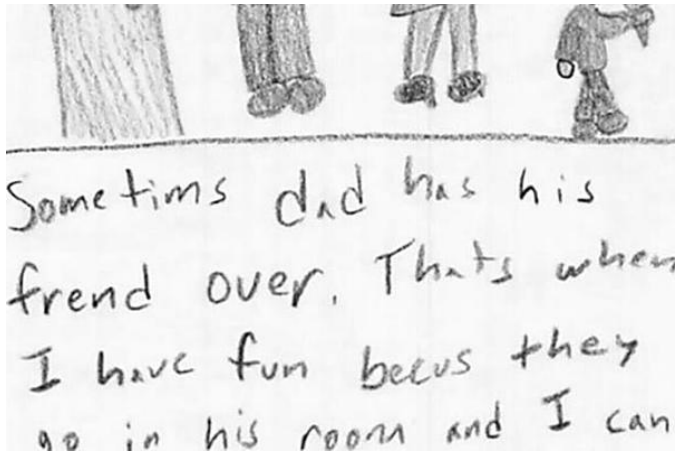
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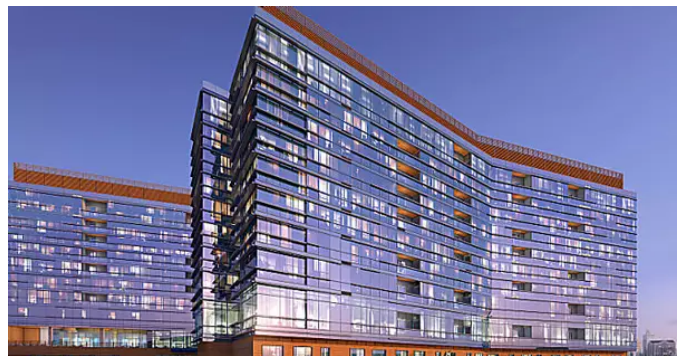
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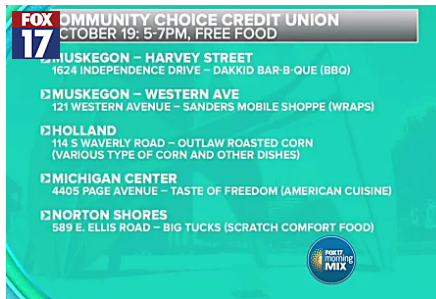
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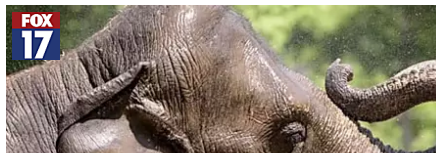
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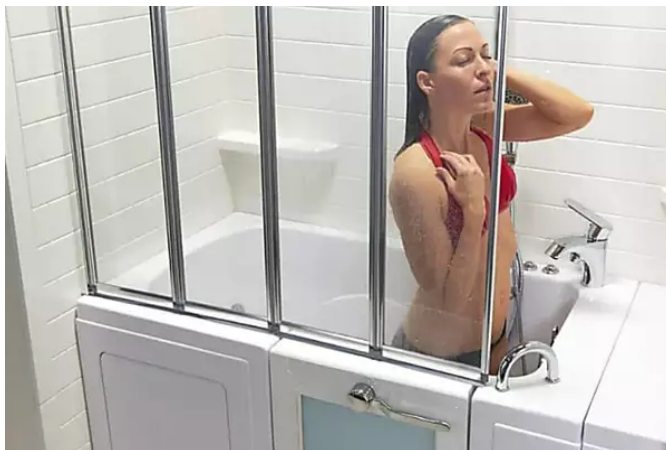
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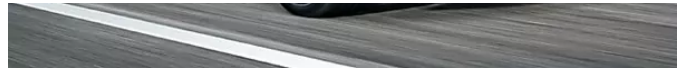
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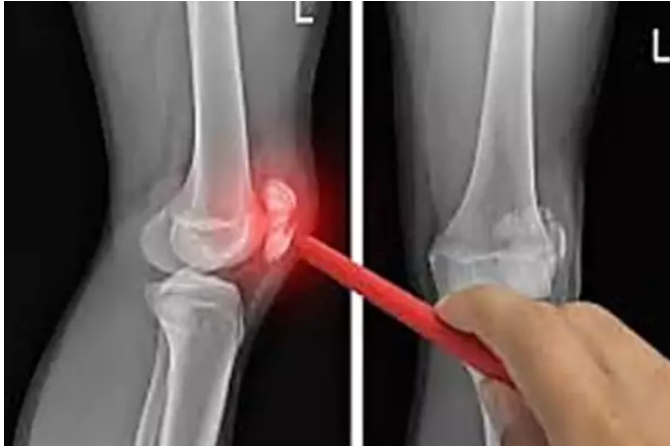
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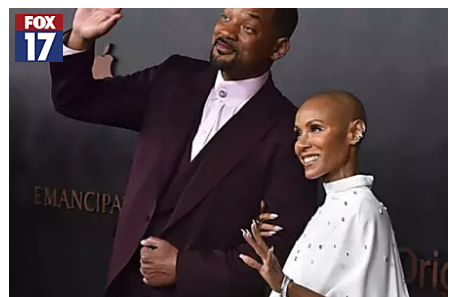
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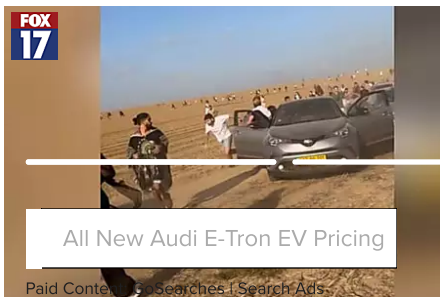
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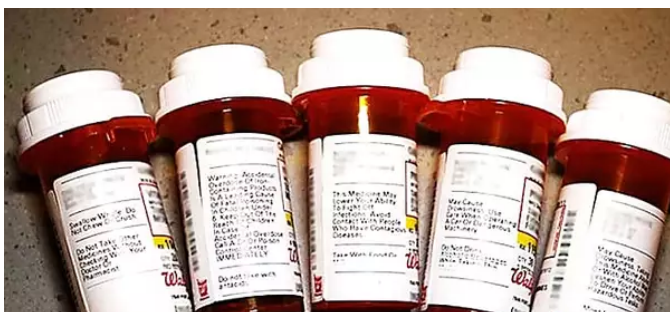
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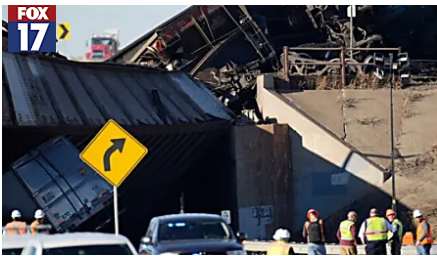
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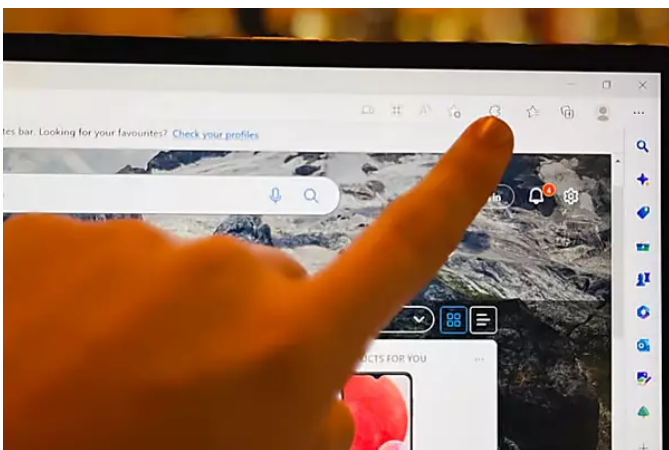
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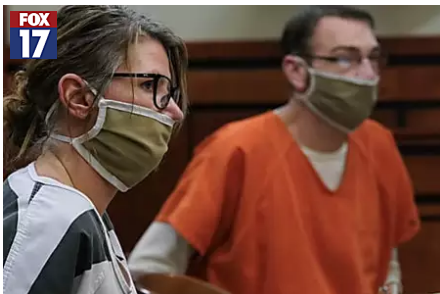
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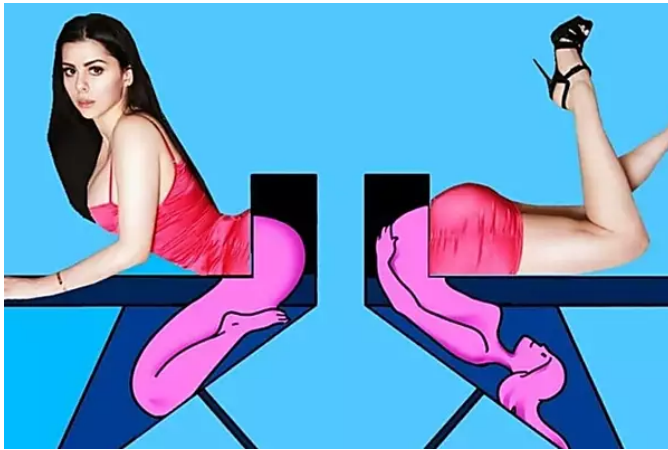
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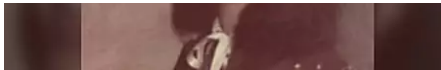
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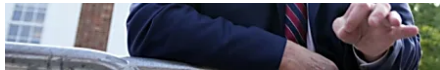
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