

Grand Rapids legislative candidates to talk childcare accessibility at forum

Published: Oct. 27, 2022, 12:30 p.m.



Candidates in four state legislative races will discuss child care issues at a 6 p.m. Grand Rapids forum on Thursday, Oct. 27 from 6 to 8 p.m. at the First Christian Reformed Church, 651 Martin Luther King Jr. Pictured is a file photo of ELNC preschoolers (MLive Fire Photo)

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GRAND RAPIDS, MI – Candidates in four state legislative races for the Grand Rapids area will share their stances on child care accessibility during a parent-led forum tonight.

The Thursday, Oct. 27 event will feature candidates running for the state Senate's new 29th District and the House 81st, 82nd and 84th districts in the November general election.

The forum is scheduled for 6 to 8 p.m. at the First Christian Reformed Church, 651 Martin Luther King Jr. St. Learn more on Facebook [here.](#)

The forum was organized by five local and statewide parent groups that are centered around early childhood issues: Great Start Collaborative of Kent County,

MomsBloom, First Steps Kent, Michigan's Children and Think Babies Michigan.

The main topic of discussion will be the struggles that Kent County families face with child care access, according to a joint news release from organizers.

“At MomsBloom, we see firsthand every day the many barriers parents in our community face and are working so hard to overcome,” MomsBloom Executive Director Carrie Kolehouse said in a statement.

“We’re so glad that parents will have the chance to share about their challenges and concerns, and ask questions of the candidates who will soon be representing them in the legislature at this event.”

These are the candidates who were invited to the forum:

- State Rep. Tommy Brann, R-Wyoming, and state Sen. Winnie Brinks, D-Grand Rapids in the [29th state Senate race](#)
- Democrat Kristian Grant and Republican Ryan Malinoski in the [82nd state House race](#)
- State Rep. Rachel Hood, D-Grand Rapids, and former Republican state Rep. Lynn Afendoulis in the [81st state House race](#)
- State Rep. Carol Glanville, D-Walker, and Republican Mike Milanowski in the [84th state House race](#).

As of this morning, nearly all of the candidates had confirmed attending tonight's event, according to a news release. However, organizers did not say

specifically which candidates had not confirmed attendance in release or responded to call and emails.

Enterprise reporter and producer Dustin Dwyer, of Michigan Radio's West Michigan Bureau, will moderate the forum, according to the release.

Daniel VanderMolen, a project manager for First Steps Kent, said maintaining steady employment in the face of child care woes weigh heavy on the minds of Kent County families ahead of the general election.

"It's clear that the availability of child care is going to be a deciding factor for when, or if, people return to work," he said. "The health of Michigan's economy depends on a workforce that can access safe, affordable, high-quality child care."

Matt Gillard, president and CEO of the nonprofit advocacy group Michigan's Children, said the forum will help educate Grand Rapids voters on where their candidates stand before they head to the polls.

“We’re proud to partner with Kent County in this effort in civic and candidate engagement,” Gillard said in a statement. “When voters speak up and candidates listen, it leads to better policy-making in the best interest of kids and families. It’s important to recognize and elect people who will fight for children and families in Lansing.”

