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November 23, 2016

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to express my full support for Heart of West Michigan United Way's Food from the Heart initiative.

In its first year, Food from the Heart mobilized hundreds of people to take a stand against local hunger in what remains the largest single-day volunteer event in Feeding America West Michigan's 35-year history. These volunteers packed 75,000 nutritious meals which we were able to distribute to local families through our network of food pantries.

Hunger remains a serious public health issue in our community. According to Feeding America's Map the Meal Gap study, 1 in 8 people is food insecure in Kent County. The need is even higher among children, with 16.1% considered food insecure, a condition that has serious implications for their immediate wellbeing and their long-term physical, cognitive, and social health. Food from the Heart 2016 addressed food insecurity directly by providing healthy, easy-to-prepare meals to thousands of local families. Perhaps just as important, the event captured public attention, making it more likely that donors and volunteers will support hunger relief in the future.

By coordinating a large-scale, public hunger-relief initiative in downtown Grand Rapids, Heart of West Michigan United Way is rallying local businesses and individuals to support this cause like never before. The impact they had in 2016 was enormous, and, if funded, I believe their proposal will have an even bigger impact in the coming years. I fully endorse their grant proposal.

Sincerely,

Kenneth R. Estelle
Chief Executive Officer

