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Granholt Announces 10 Promise Zone Designations in Communities Across Michigan

Program will help transform communities, provide students with expanded access to higher education

Governor Jennifer M. Granholt today named the 10 Promise Zones, which are being established to expand opportunities for students to attend college and help transform communities in the process. Granholt proposed the Promise Zone concept in her 2007 State of the State address as a component of her comprehensive plan to grow and diversify Michigan's economy and create jobs. The governor signed the enabling legislation into law on January 13, 2009.

"We must ensure that every Michigan citizen has access to an affordable, first-class education beyond high school," Granholt said. "The best-paying jobs of the 21st century will require a high level of education and training. Each of these communities is interested in giving students access to education after high school that will allow them to compete for those jobs."

Promise Zone designations have been awarded to Baldwin Community Schools, Battle Creek Public Schools, Benton Harbor Area Schools, the City of Detroit, the School District of the City of Hazel Park, Jackson Public Schools, the Lansing School District, the Muskegon Area Intermediate School District, the School District of the City of Pontiac, and the Saginaw School District. Promise Zones are located in communities that meet or exceed the state's average poverty level for families with children under age 18.

"The promise of a college education for all has the power to transform communities across our state, replacing poverty and despair with opportunity and hope," said Lt. Governor John D. Cherry, Jr., who chaired the Commission on Higher Education and Economic Growth. "In addition to higher educational attainment levels, Promise Zones can spur investment, economic development and home ownership."

Under the enabling legislation qualifying applicants were awarded Promise Zone designations by the Michigan Department of Treasury on a first come, first serve basis. To apply for a designation, an eligible city, township, county, or school district had to approve, by resolution, the creation of a Promise Zone following a public hearing on the matter. The community also had to meet or exceed the state average poverty level for families with children under age 18 to be considered for a Promise Zone. In all, 14 communities submitted applications to the Department of Treasury.

"This initiative is one of the most creative ways to give children in these areas of higher than normal poverty a new lease on life and will change the dynamic from "if" they are going to college to "where" they are going to college, and that psychological impact cannot be matched," said State Representative Tim Melton, a key sponsor of the Promise Zone legislation.

Under the legislation, the governing body of each Promise Zone must create, by resolution, a Promise Zone Authority consisting of no less than 11 members. The authority must outline the intended educational promise, which at a minimum, must include funding for an associate's degree, and the methods through which resources will be raised to fund the promise. Promise Zones may capture one-half of the growth in the state education tax (SET) to support the promise. However, before the Department of Treasury approves the SET capture, a Promise Zone Authority must show it has the financial means to fund the first two years of the promise.

"Promise Zones help Michigan achieve our two most important goals - diversifying our economy and doubling the number of college graduates in our state," Governor Granholt added. "Now, more than ever, communities need this powerful new tool to take charge of their economic futures."

Governor Granholt has led several efforts to make college and technical training more accessible to Michigan citizens, including the Michigan Promise scholarship, which provides high school graduates an opportunity to earn up to \$4,000 toward a college degree or technical certification.