

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
February 22, 2021

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## Southwest Michigan First Statement to the Community

**Kalamazoo, Michigan** – This morning our newly appointed CEO, Lee Chatfield, submitted his resignation to the Southwest Michigan First Board of Directors. At our 10:00 a.m. meeting today, the board accepted Lee's resignation. We wish the very best for Lee and his family.

In recent days, the announcement of our selection to fill the vacant CEO position has caused a great deal of disappointment by our team members, community partners, investors, donors and board members of Southwest Michigan First. Many have questioned our agency's commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion as well as our human capital and CEO search processes.

We welcome the conversations, challenging questions and opportunities to listen, learn and grow. What is abundantly clear is that our search process fell well below the standard expected by our board, our community partners, investors, donors and importantly, our Southwest Michigan First team.

As we renew and begin again our search process for our next CEO, we are committed to and will assure a process that is open, transparent and inclusive of those who depend upon us to improve economic development and employment opportunities for all we serve. We recognize that increased prosperity has not often been experienced by our communities of color, Latinx communities and our LGBTQ+ community. We remain committed to increasing access to capital, entrepreneurial opportunities, leadership development programs and representation at board tables.

In 2017, the Southwest Michigan First Board of Directors voted to support the amendment to expand the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act. We supported that legislation then and we support it today. Words, policies, and actions matter. We believe that communities, individuals and organizations get better when we engage in tough important conversations about discrimination and racism. Southwest Michigan First is committed to the conversations and actions necessary so that all in our community prosper and are free from the debilitating impact of discrimination of any kind.

The first step in our agency's journey is to establish and appropriately resource an executive level position for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at Southwest Michigan First. Additionally, we will create a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Board Committee to make certain that all of our human capital policies, procedures and practices mirror the expectations made clear by our community partners, investors, donors, board members and team members. With humility, we apologize to all who we have disappointed.