

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**April 3, 2020**

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## **144 Small Businesses Across Southwest Michigan Receive Michigan Small Business Relief Grants**

**Kalamazoo, Michigan** – Southwest Michigan First, the regional economic development catalyst based in Kalamazoo, Michigan, today announced 144 small business grant recipients are receiving allocations as part of the state’s Michigan Small Business Relief Program. Grants may be used by recipients for working capital to support payroll expenses, rent, mortgage payments, utility expenses or other similar expenses that occur in the ordinary course of business.

This funding is made possible by the Michigan Economic Development Corporation releasing \$10 million in small business grants from the Michigan Strategic Fund (MSF) to regional economic development agencies for businesses facing drastic reductions in cash flow and the continued support of their workforce due to the COVID-19 outbreak. The seven-county Southwest Michigan region received \$800,000 to be administered among businesses located throughout Berrien, Branch, Calhoun, Cass, Kalamazoo, St. Joseph and Van Buren counties. Funding allocations were based on the concentration of eligible small businesses within each county. The average grant award was \$5,555.

“The Michigan Small Business Relief Program is one of the ways we are leveraging every resource available to provide relief in the face of negative impacts COVID-19 is having on businesses across the state,” said Josh Hundt, Chief Business Development Officer and Executive Vice President at the Michigan Economic Development Corporation. “We are proud to work with our partners at Southwest Michigan First to bring these critical resources to small businesses in Southwest Michigan.”

To be considered, a business was “eligible” if:

- The company is in an industry outlined in Executive Order 2020-9, or any subsequent Executive Order of similar intent (“EO”), or demonstrates it is otherwise affected by COVID-19 outbreak, that meets one or more of the following: provides support to impacted employees, is located in a downtown district or high impact corridor or has 50 employees or less, or is a company that provides services to companies outlined in the EO and requires additional employees to support companies or employees impacted by EO;
- The company has 50 employees or less;

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- The company needs working capital to support payroll expenses, rent, mortgage payments, utility expenses, or other similar expenses that occur in the ordinary course of business; and
- The company is able to demonstrate an income loss as a result of the EO, or COVID-19.

“We understand small businesses across our state are facing unprecedented challenges as we take every step possible to mitigate the spread of COVID-19,” said Governor Gretchen Whitmer. “Through decisive actions like [these] taken by the MSF Board to authorize relief for small businesses throughout Michigan, we are leveraging every resource available to support our businesses, communities and entrepreneurs around the state impacted by this outbreak.”

To administer the funds, Southwest Michigan First and representatives from Cornerstone Alliance, Battle Creek Unlimited, Marshall Area Economic Development Alliance, Albion Economic Development Corporation, Market Van Buren and Branch County Economic Growth Alliance collected completed applications.

“The Southwest Michigan First team, along with our local economic development partners, worked around the clock since March 27 when the application process opened, as the need to provide relief to our region’s small businesses grows stronger every day,” said Ron Kitchens, CEO and senior partner at Southwest Michigan First. “We thank everyone who participated in this process, the Michigan Strategic Fund and, in particular, Governor Whitmer for making these grant awards possible.”

“We congratulate the recipients receiving allocations in this round of funding. At Southwest Michigan First, we believe that the greatest force for change is a job, and we thank today’s recipients for keeping as many people employed as possible during this unprecedented time. Qualified applications totaling 1,060 were submitted in what was a very competitive process for limited funding. We truly wish we could have supported all requests, but requests outnumbered our available pool of money 12:1; this means we would have needed \$10.6 million rather than \$800,000 to supply all with grant monies,” continued Kitchens.

Additional relief programs are still available for small businesses in need, including the CARES Act Paycheck Protection Program, U.S. Small Business Administration Economic Injury Disaster loans and advances, Michigan Small Business Relief Loan Program, and Kalamazoo Small Business Loan Fund. Small businesses in need of support are encouraged to get their financial documents in order and work with their local economic development agencies and chambers for referrals.

### About Southwest Michigan First

Founded in 1999 on the principle that the greatest force for change is a job, Southwest Michigan First is an organization of privately funded economic development advisors who act as the catalyst for economic growth in Southwest Michigan. For more information about Southwest Michigan First, please visit us at [www.southwestmichiganfirst.com](http://www.southwestmichiganfirst.com), or call 269.553.9588.



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