

# FACTS vs MEDIA



*Media's Claims Versus the Facts*

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**Claim:** The Board of Commissioners gave itself a 60% raise.

**Facts:** This is false. The Board of Commissioners cannot give itself a raise. Only a separate, independent entity called the "Officers Compensation Commission" can do that. In 2024, the Officers Compensation Commission voted to give raises to other elected officials in 2025 and 2026, but the vote to increase pay for the Board of Commissioners failed.

As a result, the Board of Commissioners is not getting a raise in 2025 or 2026. (Other elected officials will still receive raises in 2025 and 2026.)

**Claim:** The Board of Commissioners planned to pay the County Health Officer \$8 million or \$4 million.

**Facts:** This is false. The Health Officer can demand anything she wants: it does not mean she can have it. The Board of Commissioners only voted to pay the Health Officer \$0. The Board of Commissioners settled the Health Officer's lawsuit, and no money was paid to her. The only issue remaining is the Health Officer's claim for attorney fees, which will be decided by a court later.

**Claim:** The Board of Commissioners invited a Satanist to give the invocation at a meeting.

**Facts:** The Board of Commissioners did not invite the individual from the Satanic Temple of West Michigan to give an invocation. Rather, the Board of Commissioners upheld the First Amendment and followed its own policy, which was created with help from organizations like Alliance Defending Freedom, to uphold the Constitution. The policy allows any county resident, regardless of religious affiliation or lack thereof, to request to be on the invocation schedule.

The Board of Commissioners, after much reflection and discussion with community pastors and faith leaders, continued the invocation tradition, which allows people in Ottawa County to pray before each meeting.

Pastors in Ottawa County have specifically requested the Board of Commissioners continue this policy, so they can continue to pray before meetings. Commissioners are continuing to observe the situation carefully.

The prayer schedule filled up through the end of the year because more pastors decided to get involved!

**Claim:** The County's AAA bond rating is at risk.

**Facts:** The County's bond rating was evaluated in early 2024, and the County maintains its AAA bond rating. The County is in excellent financial health, with over \$200 million in assets. The annual budget is over \$260 million, much of which is spent on things like the Sheriff's Department, Public Safety, Community Mental Health, etc. Ottawa County had a clean audit for FY2023, with no budgetary overages. The Board of Commissioners adopted a budget for FY2024 with the smallest increase in five years, at 3.59%.

**Claim:** The Board of Commissioners drastically cut the Health Department's budget and discontinued programs like Ottawa Foods.

**Facts:** This is false. In 2023, the Board of Commissioners approved the second highest budget for the Health Department, at \$14.3M. The Board of Commissioners did reject some Covid grants because the emergency was over, and the grants were not needed.

The Health Department was not accustomed to Board oversight and input during the budget process—which is the statutory responsibility of the Board. The Health Department brought assumptive and false conclusions to the media during the process, creating a media frenzy and public panic.

The Health Department's funding was adequate to fund whatever programs are a priority for the Health Department.

**Claim:** The Board fired a competent administrator and attorney and replaced them with inexperienced people.

**Facts:** The previous county attorney (Van Essen) had submitted a resignation letter to the incoming Board advising that he intended to retire once a replacement could be found. The Board acted responsibly by hiring a new law firm to work as the County attorneys.

The new Board of Commissioners needed people leading Ottawa County it could trust, not the people who supported government overreach during the Covid-19 pandemic and advocated for the DEI Department.

Both people the Board fired had made it clear they would not work cooperatively with the new conservative Board of Commissioners.

The Board hired John Gibbs as the administrator. Unfortunately, Gibbs was not a good fit and made some poor decisions. The Board took responsibility by terminating his employment in early 2024.

**Claim:** The Board is not protecting children and families.

**Facts:** Here are two examples of how the Board is protecting children and families:

1. The Board passed the Resolution to Protect Childhood Innocence on June 27, 2023. This happened after learning that staff members from Ottawa County were working at the Grand Haven Pride Festival, where children were giving money to drag queens wearing sexualized clothing. The resolution says:

"...no county staff or resources shall be allocated to activities, programs, events, content, or institutions which support, normalize, or encourage the sexualization of children and youth."

2. The Board rejected a grant when it discovered harmful strings attached. The Health Department wanted to promote a website called Man Therapy. Most of the items on the website were fine. However, one section linked to the Trevor Project which encourages children to reach out to unlicensed counselors to discuss gender fluidity, confusion, and sexual identity. The Trevor Project promises to keep its "counseling" conversations secret from parents.

Instead of approving this grant, the conservative Board members voted to expand the Department of Veterans Affairs and hired a director for the first time. The new department is already positively impacting veterans and their families in the county.

**Claim:** The Board is spending more money than the previous Board, especially on attorney fees and severance.

**Facts:** The Board of Commissioners adopted a 2024 budget with one of the smallest increases in recent history.

- Current Board: 3.59% increase for 2024
- Previous Board: 10.5% increase for 2023
- Previous Board: 11.94% increase for 2022

The previous Board paid one attorney over \$400,000 per year.

The new Board of Commissioners hired a team of Constitutional attorneys who prioritize freedom and improved the County's processes and procedures.

The new law firm also is defending the county when Democrats sue the Republican Board. For example, the previous Chair of the Michigan Democratic Party has sued the Board with baseless claims (and he lost twice in court). Progressive liberals should stop their frivolous lawsuits.

The previous Board created severance packages for the former administrator and the DEI ("Diversity, Equity, Inclusion") Director.

The DEI Department alone was budgeted at \$286,000 per year. It was on track to cost almost \$1,000,000 from 2023-2025. By closing this department, the new Board of Commissioners saved taxpayers millions of dollars over the next decade and stopped pushing radical Critical Race Theory ideology (aligned with the Biden and Whitmer administrations) in the county.

The Board terminated the employment of former Administrator Gibbs for cause with no severance.

## ONE FINAL NOTE ABOUT THE MEDIA'S CLAIMS

Sarah Leach is one member of the media spreading lies, false claims, and defamation by authoring hundreds of hit pieces against the conservatives on the Board. Leach was recently fired from her job at the Holland Sentinel.

**Leach's former boss had this to say about her:**

**"...Our product is TRUTH and FACTS, which entail the need for TRUST internally... and fostering that trust externally among our audiences.**

**Sarah has her version of the "truth" and then there's the narrative she is choosing to peddle to justify her actions."**

Sarah Leach's former boss does not trust her to tell the TRUTH. Instead, she understands Leach was "peddling" a narrative.



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