



MICHIGAN SENATE

Appropriations Requests for Legislatively Directed Spending Items

Date Submitted: 05/05/2026

1. Sponsoring legislator's full name:

Senator Thomas Albert

2. Cosponsoring legislators' names (if applicable):

N/A

3. Intended legislatively directed spending item recipient:

Binder Park Zoo

4. Physical address of legislatively directed spending item recipient and the intended location of the project or activity:

7400 Division Drive, Battle Creek MI, 49014

5. The recipient's employer identification number:

51-0163223

6. Requested amount of the legislatively directed spending item:

\$2,000,000.00

7. What is the purpose and how does the legislatively directed spending item provide a public benefit that is an appropriate use of taxpayer money?

Purpose: Binder Park Zoo intends to build a giraffe barn to modernize critical animal care infrastructure and enhance the zoo's role as a regional driver of economic activity, education, and conservation leadership. Binder Park Zoo is accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), the highest level of accreditation and the gold standard within the zoo and aquarium industry. Accreditation happens every five years and is a rigorous process, consisting of a complete demonstration of compliance and an inspection by peer professionals. Binder Park Zoo completed this process in 2025, with a directive to complete a new giraffe barn to meet AZA standards. The existing barn is insufficient for what the giraffes require. The solution is to build a new barn, and the site has been cleared with the goal to have the facility fully constructed and operational in 2027. Appropriate use of taxpayer dollars 1.

Strengthening Michigan's Economy and Tourism Industry: Binder Park Zoo is a significant tourism asset for Southwest Michigan, generating approximately \$33 million annually in economic impact. State investment in this project will enhance the zoo's ability to attract visitors, increase length of stay, and drive spending at local businesses such as hotels, restaurants, and retail establishments. This results in a direct return to the state through increased economic activity and tax revenue. 2. Supporting Workforce Development and Youth Engagement: Binder Park Zoo serves thousands of Michigan children annually through camps, field trips, and informal STEAM learning experiences. The new giraffe barn will expand educational programming tied to animal science, veterinary care, and conservation -- helping to build early interest in high-demand careers such as biology, agriculture, and environmental science. These experiences align with Michigan's long-term workforce development priorities. 3. Delivering a High-Value Public Asset Without Ongoing Tax Burden: Binder Park Zoo is a private, nonprofit institution that does not receive ongoing operational tax funding. A one-time capital investment from the state leverages significant private fundraising and donor support while avoiding long-term financial obligations for taxpayers. This model maximizes public benefit while maintaining fiscal responsibility. The zoo's giraffe exhibit is one of the most iconic zoo experiences in the state of Michigan, drawing around 250,000 visitors a year to the zoo. Binder Park Zoo strengthens, educates and inspires the community with affordable access for families, students, and low-income residents. Binder Park Zoo is one of the very few accredited zoos in the nation not supported by a millage or tax revenues. With this legislative-directed spending award, Binder Park will join zoos in other parts of Michigan that recently have received grant funding from the state to support infrastructure for cultural, educational and scientific initiatives that are important to the public. 4. Advancing Animal Welfare and Ethical Standards: As an accredited member of the AZA, Binder Park Zoo is required to meet evolving, science-based standards for animal care. The current facility no longer meets best practices for giraffes. 5. Contributing to Global Conservation Efforts: Binder Park Zoo participates in cooperative breeding and conservation programs that protect endangered species. The expanded giraffe facility will increase capacity for herd management and breeding, directly contributing to species sustainability.

8. Has the legislatively directed spending item previously received or been awarded any of the following types of funding in the past 5 years? If so, how much? Check all that apply:

State

Amount

\$800,000.00

9. Estimated time frame for completion of the legislatively directed spending item project:

Upon receipt of initial funding, Binder Park Zoo anticipates this project will be completed in 12 months.

10. Is the recipient a nonprofit corporation?

Yes

Additional Information for Nonprofit Corporations (if applicable)

The answer to questions 1 to 3 must be "Yes" for the nonprofit corporation to qualify for a legislatively directed spending item.

1. Has the nonprofit corporation continuously operated in this state for the preceding 36 months?

Yes

2. Has the nonprofit corporation had a physical office in this state for not less than the preceding 12 consecutive months?

Yes

3. Does the organization have a board of directors?

Yes

4. List all of the officers and active members on the board of directors:

Diane Thompson, President & CEO Amy Riegel, CFO Board of Directors: Thom Unger, Board Chair – President & CEO of HomeCare Transitions, Inc. Jim McKernan, First Vice Chair – Former Senior Vice President and COO of Bronson Battle Creek Sara Dunn, Second Vice Chair – Founder and Project Lead for 11Web Inc., Todd Johnson – Former co-owner of Hunter Prell Company Dr. Jessica Keen – Director, Global Animal Care and Compliance at Zoetis Aaron Kuhn – Revenue Services Director for the City of Battle Creek Rob Ridgeway – Superintendent of Harper Creek Schools Kurt Sherwood – Former Principal Lawyer at Miller Canfield, P.C

Certification By Sponsoring Legislator

"I certify that my immediate family members, legislative staff members, and I have no direct or indirect pecuniary interest in the requested legislatively directed spending item."

"I certify that the intended recipient of this legislatively directed spending item is not a for-profit entity."

"I certify that the information in this form is true to the best of my knowledge."

Senator Thomas Albert