

# Literacy for Life



Literacy Legacy Fund



of Michigan

## 2024 ANNUAL REPORT

Supporting a literate Michigan citizenry of all ages

*Dear Donors & Friends,*

What an amazing year we have had in 2024! Through our partnership with The Dollywood Foundation for the Dolly Parton's Imagination Library program, and our continued collaborations with Northern Michigan University Center for Rural Health, Copper Shores Community Health Foundation, Wayne State University, and other partners, our impact has expanded throughout Michigan. When people come together to support foundational skills that shape lives – a positive impact is made. We continue to affect individuals of all ages locally and statewide, improving literacy through our work focused on our mission.\*

Over the last year, we have added several new initiatives while maintaining long-standing partnerships. New projects in 2024 include our expanded GivingTuesday project, the "Words Matter" initiative with NMU Center for Rural Health, the "Michigan Dogs and Cats Advancing Literacy" grant with the Michigan Pet Alliance, and a collaboration with Little Brothers - Friends of the Elderly Upper Michigan Chapter, who assisted with the "Bertha's Buddies Special Outreach" program. We also hosted a special "Bubbles & Bites" thank-you reception for donors as a friendly stop on the way to the annual Outback Art Fair.

We have added new members to the board and expanded our outreach across both Upper and Lower Michigan, advancing our mission to support the improvement of a literate Michigan citizenry for all ages through the distribution of charitable funds to enhance literacy efforts.

**If you are interested in supporting our efforts in honor or memory of someone or would like to ensure continued programming, please return the enclosed donation envelope or visit [www.literacylegacyfund.org](http://www.literacylegacyfund.org) to donate.**

We extend our profound gratitude to all of you who support our efforts.

Sincerely,

*LLF Michigan Board of Directors*

*\*Our Mission: To support the improvement of a literate Michigan citizenry for all ages through the distribution of charitable funds to enhance literacy efforts.*

The Literacy Legacy Fund of Michigan is a section 501(c)3 nonprofit organization.  
EIN 26-3673521

# Outstanding Support

## 2024 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Nancy (Wiseman) Seminoff, Ed.D. (Chair)  
Lyndsay Carey, M.A. (Secretary - Jan. - Nov. 2024)  
Colleen Whitehead, M.M.A. (Secretary - Dec. 2024)  
Gloria J. LaPointe, B.S., CPA (Treasurer)  
Carolyn Jane Blough, M.A. (Member-at-Large)  
Melinda Vokal, A.A. (Member-at-Large)

## 2024 ADVISORY GROUP

Dave Bammert, M.A., Roxanne Daust, B.S., Angela Hentkowski, J.D., LLM,  
Laura Lamp, B.S.N., Heather Picotte, B.S., Kristin Tessman, J.D., B.S.,  
Colleen Whitehead, M.M.A. (to Nov.)

## FINANCE COMMITTEE

Gloria J. LaPointe, B.S., CPA, Nancy (Wiseman) Seminoff, Ed.D.,  
Melinda Vokal, A.A.

## VOLUNTEERS & ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANCE

Brett Hanson (Dolly Parton's Imagination Library Data Clerk),  
Courtney Claus, Nikki Loehr, Margaret Schwalm and Anne Stanger  
(Clerical Assistants), Sandra Grenke and Arianna Picotte (Volunteers)

## THANK YOU TO THE FOLLOWING ORGANIZATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS FOR SUPPORT

Brian Maki, Computer Technician; Tony Beres, La Dolce Video & Design; Elise Bur,  
Northern Michigan University Center for Rural Health; Mark Shevy, Ph.D., NMU  
Department of Communication & Media Studies; Dayna Browning, Student  
Leadership Advisory Council of the Keweenaw; Kevin Store, Copper Shores  
Community Health Foundation; Victoria Leonhardt, GivingTuesday;  
Grow & Lead: Community and Youth Development;  
Little Brothers - Friends of the Elderly Upper Michigan Chapter;  
Lauren Wirt, The Dollywood Foundation; Marquette-Alger RESA

## 2024 BOARD APPOINTMENTS

LLF Michigan welcomed  
two new board members in  
2024. Pictured left to right,  
Melinda Vokal, A.A.,  
Director and Colleen  
Whitehead, Board  
Secretary.



# Inspiring the Imagination

## DOLLY PARTON'S IMAGINATION LIBRARY

The Literacy Legacy Fund of Michigan is thrilled to continue its partnership with The Dollywood Foundation to offer the Dolly Parton's Imagination Library children's book gifting program. Once enrolled a child receives one new book per month from birth to age five with no cost, obligation, or income requirement for the child's family. All preschool-age children (birth to age 5) in the service area are eligible to receive one age-appropriate book in the mail monthly, addressed to the child while participating in the program. A parent or guardian must register online or submit an official registration form to enroll the child in the program. The Dollywood Foundation is responsible for selecting, processing, mailing, and managing the distribution of over 3.1 million books a month throughout the United States and four other countries.

The Literacy Legacy Fund of Michigan is the Program Partner (aka Affiliate) for several Dolly Parton's Imagination Library programs in Marquette and Alger Counties. It is both the Program Partner, Local Champion, and Sponsor for Marquette 49855. In the Marquette 49855 area, LLF Michigan is responsible for paying \$26 per child annually for the cost of the books and their mailing, maintaining the database, and marketing the program. Area fundraising initiatives, including donor mailings, annual posters, and an informational reel (new this year), help raise funds locally for this program.

LLF Michigan also provides guidance and support to other programs in the U.P. under its oversight. In addition to Marquette 49855, current programs with LLF Michigan as the Program Partner include:

- AuTrain-Onota Public Schools
- Burt Township Schools
- Ishpeming Public Schools No. 1
- Munising Public Schools
- Powell Township Schools



Scan QR code to  
learn more and view  
the reel.

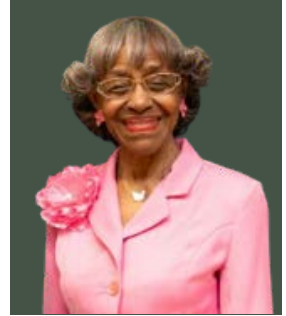


Pictured above, the new DPIL  
49855 informational reel.

# Spotlight Award

## WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF EDUCATION SCHOLARSHIP IN HONOR OF DR. JACQUELINE TILLES

LLF Michigan provides a scholarship in honor of Dr. Jacqueline Tilles who served as an educator for 45 years, retiring in 2015 from Wayne State University where she was an Associate Professor of Reading, Language, and Literature. Described as a “Teacher’s Teacher,” Dr. Tilles helped her students to understand literature and how to engage students to appreciate a wide range of works, especially literature representing various ethnic groups.



Dr. Jacqueline Tilles.

Dr. Tilles’s love of reading started before she was old enough to go to school. In order to fulfill her desire of learning to read, she had to change schools at age five.

Persistence paid off; she never let go of her Mama’s promise that, in school, they will teach you to read. That promise was so powerful that it provided a foundation for her life. Today she continues to inspire others through her story and continued contributions to this scholarship. Scan the QR code to learn more about Dr. Tilles.



The 2024 scholarship recipient was Andrew Paul Wellerritter, a graduate student majoring in secondary education with a concentration in Social Studies. Since 2016, this scholarship has provided 15 students with financial assistance. Through the fall 2024/spring 2025 academic year, a combined total of \$23,550 in scholarships has been awarded by donors and LLF Michigan to date.



In 2023, Joye Clark, Director of Development, College of Education, and Dr. Denise Taliaferro Baszile, Dean, College of Education, wrote to LLF Michigan, “Your generosity is a testament to the positive change that can be achieved through philanthropy. We are truly grateful to be a part of your giving and the legacy you are creating.”

***\$23,550 in scholarships have been awarded to Wayne State University Students by donors and LLF Michigan to date.***



# Legacy Award

## LOWELL AREA HISTORICAL MUSEUM IMMERSION PROGRAM

LLF Michigan has provided financial support for the fifth consecutive year to the Lowell Area Historical Museum, a Legacy Grant for its “Museum Immersion” Program. The program includes all third-grade classes in the Lowell Area School District. Objectives met by the program: 1) Support, expand and supplement social studies curriculum through direct exposure to



historical artifacts, exhibits, techniques and interaction with local historians; 2) Connect learning in the classroom to the local community; 3) Model methods of historical research and writing through student-driven activities during their time in the museum with the guidance of historians. This program has been very successful and has consistently made adjustments to in-person learning with the supplementation of videos and activity ideas.

# Supporting New Teachers

## MRA CONFERENCE FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FOR NEW TEACHERS

Since 2008, LLF Michigan has assisted a combination of 52 educators, including individuals and school teams, in attending the Michigan Reading Association (MRA) Annual Conferences. LLF Michigan provided financial assistance to new Michigan teachers as part of a special application process. Selection was based on a 300-word essay submitted by conference attendees explaining how information gathered from the conference would impact their work as educators.

In 2024, \$500 was awarded to one new teacher to attend the MRA Conference. Additional funds were awarded to another teacher to cover book costs in the classroom after their school provided funding to cover conference expenses. As conference participation has changed over time, LLF Michigan has transitioned to supporting a variety of special projects.

# Michigan Dogs & Cats Advancing Literacy Grant

## NEW LITERACY-BASED GRANT FOR MICHIGAN ANIMAL SHELTERS

LLF Michigan embarked on a new partnership with the Michigan Pet Alliance (MPA) to introduce the Michigan Dogs and Cats Advancing Literacy Grant, a \$2,000 grant that inspires shelters to create and implement a new program that involves at least one aspect of literacy while improving the lives of shelter animals. The 2024 award went to Friends of Detroit Animal Care and Control for their program called, "Paws and Pages: A Community Storytelling Project" based on a poem written by a staff member titled, "Why am I here in this loud, scary place?" The project allows the community to participate in the book's illustration.



Pictured, left to right, Sarah Devaney, MPA CEO, Heather Griffith, representing LLF Michigan, Cameron Cummings, Dana Eldred, and Nena McCaskil, Friends of Detroit Animal Care and Control representatives.



The LLF Michigan communications team, Get Fresh Communications, created a reel that played throughout the luncheon on day two of the conference. The reel introduced and supported the new grant and promoted LLF Michigan's incentives. Heather Griffith, representing LLF Michigan, attended the MPA's "Better Together - One Voice" Conference and Expo luncheon held in Grand Rapids to introduce the grant and to present the award on behalf of LLF Michigan. This was the first grant awarded from the MPA/LLF Michigan partnership, which we hope to cultivate and grow over the next few years. Sarah Devaney, MPA CEO, has been working directly with LLF Michigan. Colleen Whitehead, now LLF Michigan Board secretary, also serves on the MPA Conference Planning Committee. Scan QR code to view reel.

# Read to Your Shelter Pet

## UPPER PENINSULA ANIMAL WELFARE SHELTER (UPAWS) SPECIAL PROJECT

### READ TO YOUR SHELTER PET PROGRAM

As part of developing “Kid’s Clubs” programming, LLF Michigan granted a Special Project Award to the Upper Peninsula Animal Welfare Shelter (UPAWS) to assist them in initiating the Reading Buddies “Read to Your Shelter Pet Program” in 2018. LLF Michigan supported this project through an initial \$2,500 grant to support the purchase of a bookcase, cushions, and a kickoff ice cream social reception. Recently, the program was resumed after delays due to the pandemic.

This program pairs children with pets and books. Reading to the pets fosters socialization for the pet while increasing the child’s reading skills in a non-critical setting. UPAWS’s objectives included developing youth-involved programs at UPAWS while improving the quality of life and behavior of adoptable animals. Pictured below, children from a local homeschool program participate in the program at the shelter. Visit [upaws.org/kids-resources](http://upaws.org/kids-resources) to learn more about this program. Scan QR code to view page.



Upper Peninsula Animal Welfare Shelter  
Great Friends Found Here. Visit UPAWS





# Northern Partnership

## NORTHERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY CENTER FOR RURAL HEALTH

### RURAL HEALTH DAY ESSAY CONTEST

In celebration of National Rural Health Day, recognized on November 21st, the NMU Center for Rural Health, the Michigan Center for Rural Health (Michigan's State Office of Rural Health), and LLF Michigan partnered to extend an opportunity to all high school seniors who are college/university bound in fall 2025 and intend to pursue a healthcare career to participate in an essay contest. Each participant wrote an essay highlighting the importance of health literacy. Winners include:

#### **Eastern Region Winners**

1st Place: Elizabeth Laitinen, Barbeau, MI

2nd Place: Alyssa Wojnaroski, Sault Ste. Marie, MI

3rd Place: Madison Stefanski, St. Ignace, MI

#### **Central Region Winners**

1st Place: Samantha Korpi, Gladstone, MI

2nd Place: Vy Nguyen, Escanaba, MI

3rd Place: Julia Moyle, Marquette, MI

#### **Western Region Winners**

1st Place: Keona Sutinen, Hubbell, MI

2nd Place: Emma Dube, Norway, MI

3rd Place: Maleah Maki, Ironwood, MI

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***LLF Michigan  
awarded \$500  
to each 1st place  
recipient.***

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Learn more about the NMU Center for Rural Health at:  
[www.nmu.edu/ruralhealth](http://www.nmu.edu/ruralhealth).





NORTHERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY  
CENTER FOR RURAL HEALTH

WORDS MATTER  
HEALTH COMMUNICATIONS PROJECT

In a semester-long project spearheaded by NMU Professor Mark Shevy, Ph.D., Communication and Media Studies Department Head, and Professor of Mass Communication and Media Production, NMU students spent a semester researching reliable vaccine information as well as the importance of educating the public regarding vaccines as part of a “Words Matter” literacy project in a Health Communications class. The project was inspired through a discussion between the Literacy Legacy Fund of Michigan and the NMU Center for Rural Health. This project received funding from the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan Foundation to support activities focused on flu vaccine education.

After deepening their learning about vaccinations, the class discussed the ethics of communicating vaccine information to the public. Students determined that receiving vaccines should be a personal decision made between an individual and their doctor as each person's health and circumstances are different. The class also discussed the importance of encouraging the public to research credible vaccine information sources to support decisions based on verifiable facts.

As part of the course curriculum, the class then developed marketing messages and advertising that would encourage people to research credible vaccine information. College students were selected as the primary target audience, with the general public as the secondary target. A survey focused on student beliefs regarding vaccines was also conducted. The class reviewed previous vaccination campaigns and considered which messages would be relatable to students and the general public.

Based on their research, the class developed a series of messages to share on social media, such as Instagram and TikTok. They utilized streaming services and social media platforms to share information. Additional messaging for various types of media, focus group testing, and a presentation to the NMU Center for Rural Health were also discussed for an upcoming class. Dr. Shevy and the students appreciated the inspiration for the project from the Literacy Legacy Fund of Michigan and hope to continue discussions in future classes.

# Expanded Partnerships

## ORAL HEALTH LITERACY INITIATIVE

### NMU CENTER FOR RURAL HEALTH, COPPER SHORES COMMUNITY HEALTH FOUNDATION, STUDENT LEADERSHIP ADVISORY COUNCIL OF THE KEWEENAW

March is Reading Month was celebrated with the help of the Northern Michigan University Center for Rural Health by engaging NMU students currently enrolled in the pre-dental and pre-medical academic tracks at Northern Michigan University. Together, they joined forces to read the book, *Curious George Goes to the Dentist* and engage with second-grade youth to increase awareness and education about proper oral hygiene and encourage reading at home. The youth received a copy of the book and oral health kits. Books included a QR code linked to a video of an NMU alumni member reading the book for those who would like additional help reading at home.

For a second year, the annual project was sponsored in part by the Literacy Legacy Fund of Michigan (LLF Michigan). The ongoing partnership between NMU Center for Rural Health and LLF Michigan continues to develop and benefit youth in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. As a result of this year's support, the project expanded from visiting three elementary schools and educating 350 students in 2023 to visiting nine elementary schools and educating 500 students in 2024.



This year's project targeted second-grade students at Aspen Ridge Elementary in West Ishpeming, Birch View Elementary in Ishpeming, Lakeview Elementary in Negaunee, K.I. Sawyer Elementary and Gilbert Elementary in Gwinn, Powell Township School in Big Bay, Mather Elementary School in Munising, and Graveraet Elementary and Superior Hills Elementary in Marquette.

The ongoing partnership between LLF Michigan, NMU Center for Rural Health, and Copper Shores Community Health Foundation resulted in replicating and expanding this project to the Copper Country area in 2024. Copper Shores Community Health Foundation supported project expansion by engaging with the Student Leadership Advisory Council of the Keweenaw (SLACK). SLACK is a youth organization hosted by the Copper Country ISD. The group brings youth leaders together to improve the lives of youth in Houghton, Keweenaw, and Baraga Counties. Approximately 45 student youth leaders received training and education from NMU Center for Rural Health and then engaged with the approximately 500 youth by reading to them and educating them about oral hygiene.

# Special Celebrations

## MARCH IS READING MONTH IN MICHIGAN

In recognition of more than 40 years since the development of the “March Is Reading Month In Michigan Celebration,” a special social media campaign was developed to educate the public about the history of the celebration.

The month-long recognition became prominent from 1984 onward when Gwen O'Donnell (now Graham) and Nancy Seminoff, MRA President, celebrated with Michigan's Governor Blanchard, who signed an Executive Declaration. Lt. Governor Griffiths hosted a balloon launch at the state capital with Lansing school children. Today, it continues as National Reading Day across America and has evolved over 40 years at the national level. The initial project was spearheaded in the early 1980's by Gwen O'Donnell (now Graham) through a Michigan Reading Association Committee.

March Is Reading Month In Michigan continues to benefit countless students in Michigan as teachers, local school districts, and intermediate school districts host and promote one-day, week-long, and month-long events as part of this celebration.

## BUBBLES & BITES



Governor James Blanchard signs the Executive Declaration in observance of March 1984 as Reading Month in Michigan. Pictured left to right: Elaine Weber, Michigan Department of Education Reading Specialist; Nancy Seminoff, LLF President; Governor James Blanchard; and Gwen O'Donnell (now Graham), MRA March Is Reading Month Chair. Inset: Executive Declaration signed by Gov. Blanchard.



Pictured above, left to right: Elaine Weber, Michigan Department of Education Reading Specialist; Nancy Seminoff, then, MRA President (now, LLF Michigan founder and president); Governor James Blanchard; and Gwen O'Donnell (now Graham), MRA March Is Reading Month In Michigan Chair.

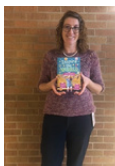
A special “Bubbles & Bites” LLF Michigan donor appreciation reception was held in July. The event hosted by the LLF Michigan President gave participants a chance to visit, celebrate LLF Michigan efforts and partnerships, and cool off before attending the Outback Art Fair near the reception.

# Giving Tuesday

## RURAL LIBRARY BOOK DISTRIBUTION

Literacy Legacy Fund of Michigan donated new books to various small rural libraries throughout Upper and Lower Michigan as part of an extended GivingTuesday celebration. The 2024 book selected was *Inspire the World: A Kid's Journey to Making a Difference* by author Sammie Vance, an eight-year-old girl who wanted to make a difference. Sammie involved her family and friends, school, and community in a special recycling project that led to the creation of "Buddy Benches" to help kids who felt lonely. The book and projects have inspired people around the world to demonstrate acts of generosity. This is LLF Michigan's third year hosting this project. Laura Lamp, Advisory Group member, assisted with the identification and distribution of books to sites in Lower Michigan this year.

Twenty-five books were distributed to rural libraries by various LLF Michigan leadership in Marquette, Alger, Kent, and Presque Isle counties. Several of the libraries hosted special GivingTuesday projects and a reel was created on the project. Libraries who received a book included: AuTrain-Onota Public Schools Library, Bayliss Public Library, Burt Township Library, Forsyth Township Public Library\*, Ishpeming Carnegie Public Library\*, Kent District Libraries: Alto\*, Caledonia Township, and Englehardt (Lowell)\*; Mackinac Island Public Library, Mancelona Township Library, Mayville District Public Library, Millington-Arbela District Library, Munising School Public Library, Negaunee Public Library\*, Ojibwa Community Library\*, Powell Township School Library\*, Presque Isle District Libraries\*: Grand Lake, Millersburg, Onaway, Posen, and Rogers City; Republic Michigamme School Public Library, Richmond Township Library\*, Superior Central School Library, and Wells Township School Library. A special GivingTuesday case study is planned for 2025. Scan QR code to view event reel.



**GIVING  
TUESDAY**

\*Libraries that hosted activities.

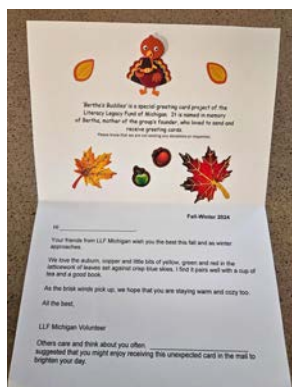


# Creating Connection

## BERTHA'S BUDDIES CORRESPONDENCE PROGRAM

Literacy Legacy Fund of Michigan sponsored Bertha's Buddies, a special correspondence project that brings joy into the lives of adults, usually, but not limited to, senior citizens who may not receive an abundance of personal mail during the year. This project was initiated in memory of Bertha Wiseman, mother of the LLF Michigan founder, and was launched by the Board in February 2021. Bertha loved to send cards to those who were often alone to extend to them a ray of sunshine.

In 2024, LLF Michigan partnered with Little Brothers - Friends of the Elderly Upper Michigan Chapter to send cards. About 70 cards were sent to Upper and Lower Michigan individuals through each of the spring and fall mailings in 2024. The special mailings featured uplifting cards with stickers and a positive message. Each card reflects the individual recommending the recipient to receive a card. LLF Michigan invites and encourages the community to nominate those who may benefit from such correspondence by reaching out to [llfsocialmichigan@gmail.com](mailto:llfsocialmichigan@gmail.com) or our website at [literacylegacyfund.org](http://literacylegacyfund.org).



Little Brothers - Friends of the Elderly Upper Michigan Chapter Program Coordinator - Marquette Danielle Berg (pictured above, right) fills out fall greeting cards with special messages.

# THANK YOU TO THE FOLLOWING 2024 FINANCIAL DONORS

Anonymous (S)	David R. McGinnis (S)
Jim & Karen Anderson (S)	Gail & Doug Miller (S)
Phyllis A. Aurich Estate (LC)	Megan Murphy (G)
Barbara Bennett (S)	Betty Childs Hilbert O'Brien (S)
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Lorraine Johnson (S)	Kristin Tessman (G)
Kathleen & Dr. James Keplinger (S)	Dr. Jacqueline Tilles (D)
James & Kim LaJoie (S)	Melinda Vokal (D)
Laura Lamp (S)	Colleen Whitehead (S)
Gloria J. LaPointe (G)	Susan Whitney (G)
Kathy Lovrich (S)	Amanda Zorza (S)
Mary Mathews (S)	

*(Legend: Silver up to \$100; Gold up to \$250; Diamond up to \$500;  
Platinum up to \$1,000; Legacy Circle above \$1,000)*

## IN HONOR OF

Jameson Baker O'Donnell.....from Gwendolyn A. O'Donnell Graham  
Dr. Jacqueline Tillis..... from Mary Mathews

## IN MEMORY OF

David Boyd.....from Dr. Nancy E. Wiseman Seminoff  
Marie Constant.....from Patricia Smothermon  
James E. Graham ..... from Gwendolyn A. O'Donnell Graham  
Ann Kaufman Jordan.....from Dr. Nancy E. Wiseman Seminoff  
Joyce McGinnis .....from David R. McGinnis  
Matt Whitney..... from Susan Whitney

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The Mining Journal  
Upper Peninsula Health Plan  
Zonta Club of the Marquette Area

## ANNUAL BUSINESS SPONSORS

Get Fresh Communications  
Globe Printing  
La Dolce Video & Design

We're honored to have this annual business support, and  
we are grateful for all our donors!

## LEGACY GIFT



LLF Michigan would like to thank the Phyllis Ann (DeJonge) Aurich Estate for continued support for the LLF Michigan mission. Phyllis' contributions have built a strong foundation for literacy efforts both now and in the future. Her memorial fund will keep our initiatives thriving, while keeping her memory close in our hearts and thoughts for years to come.

## CONTACT US



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