Hundreds to gather in downtown Grand Rapids for coalition’s walk and talk justice, equity

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GRAND RAPIDS, MI – Hundreds of people are expected to gather in Grand Rapids this week to discuss issues centered around equity and justice at an event that is being hosted by a coalition of local churches and community organizations.

Together West Michigan, a coalition of 20 faith-based and community groups in Grand Rapids, has organized a public event for Thursday, June 30, that will feature several speakers and have 17 elected officials in attendance, including U.S. Rep. Peter Meijer.

The event, which runs from 6-8:30 p.m., will include an organized walk near several local churches at 6:15 p.m., followed by a main speaking event at 7 p.m. at Westminster Presbyterian Church, 47 Jefferson Ave., the group announced in a news release.
Over 500 people have already registered and signed up for Thursday’s event, said Megan Cottrell, the coalition’s spokesperson.

Coalition leaders are using the event as an opportunity to address some of the key issues that people in Grand Rapids are dealing with today, including mental health, immigrant and refugee well-being, neighborhood safety, childcare, housing and transportation.

The coalition is seeking to “create substantive change” in Grand Rapids by building a strong community network that seeks input from diverse people of different races, incomes, ages and neighborhoods, according to the group’s Tuesday, June 28 news release.

The group recently hosted a three-month “listening campaign” this spring where members of the coalition talked to over 1,300 people across the greater Grand Rapids area to figure out which issues were most important for the group to focus on.

At Thursday’s event, coalition leaders will share some of the powerful stories they heard during the listening tour, according to the release.

Over a dozen public officials will be at the 7:30 p.m. speaking event to pledge their support for the coalition’s work, including:

- Grand Rapids City Commissioners Joe Jones, Milinda Ysasi, Kurt Reppart and Senita Lenear.
• Kent County Commissioners David Bulkowski, Carol Hennessy, Robert Womack and Stephen Wooden.
• State Reps Carol Glanville, D-Grand Rapids, Tommy Brann, R-Wyoming and Rachel Hood, D-Grand Rapids.

Many of the people attending the event will be wearing Together West Michigan shirts and carrying signs for the organizations they represent, the release said.

The walk starts at 6:15 p.m. and will have two segments. The first segment will begin at St. Mark’s Episcopal Church at 134 Division Ave., then go to Fountain Street Church at 24 Fountain St., Park Church at 10 E Park Place, then finish at Westminster Presbyterian Church.

The second segment will start at St. Andrew’s Cathedral, 215 Sheldon Blvd., and finish at Westminster Presbyterian Church.