GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. — Elected leaders in the area pledged their support to a new coalition that wants to create “substantive change.”

“You can count on me as a partner,” said U.S. Rep. Peter Meijer.

Meijer was one of 13 officials who agreed to work with Together West Michigan on issues faced by families in the area, including housing, mental health access, immigrant and refugee services, childcare, transportation, and public safety.

Together West Michigan is a nonpartisan partnership of 20 local, faith-based and community groups.

The coalition listened to more than 1,000 people over a three-month period this past spring to identify the top concerns, which were laid out at an event on Thursday.

At the event, community members held a march, then listened to the ways in which the issues are affecting families.
One mother said her family could only afford to send their older children to daycare this summer because of their tax return.

“We are grateful that it worked out this time, but it worked out because of a miracle and a miracle is not a strategy,” said Alaina Dobkowski. “Families should not have to rely on a miracle for this to work. I know that my family is not alone in these challenges. Many families are struggling.”

Organizers say the area has a long history of philanthropy and charity, but falls short when it comes to justice and equity.

“Often times people and organizations have the tendency to try and plan for individuals and circumstances,” said Rev. Willie A. Gholston II, Together West Michigan co-chair. “We believe that at the core of our existence is to listen to what is going on in our community so we make sure that we’re meeting their needs.”

Gholston said the next steps include forming research groups, who will create proposals related to the issues.

The groups will then present the proposals to the elected leaders within the first three months of 2023 with the hopes of legislative action.