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**AUTISM ALLIANCE OF MICHIGAN PRESENTS THE GRAND RAPIDS CHILDREN'S MUSEUM
WITH AUTISM SEAL OF APPROVAL**

Grand Rapids, MI—On Monday, January 30th at 5:00 p.m. Autism Alliance of Michigan (AAoM) is proud to present the Autism Alliance Seal of Approval to the Grand Rapids Children's Museum (GRCM) (11 Sheldon Ave. NE) for their work toward creating a safe and welcoming venue for autism families. This private event will take place at the GRCM.

Other historic, cultural and recreational venues across Michigan have also joined forces with AAoM to better welcome and accommodate families affected by autism. AAoM prepares these community partners with proper materials and training to ensure that they are able to design a safe and autism-friendly environment, all while diversifying their businesses. GRCM joins the Detroit Zoo as the second venue in the state to secure this Seal. Colleen Allen, President and CEO "We are so pleased to partner with GRCM and commend the staff and leadership of GRCM for recognizing the importance of inclusion efforts for families living with autism. Unfortunately, too many families become isolated from these types of community venues, given concerns of wandering, behavioral challenges, and the perception others 'just won't understand my child'. Our mission is to make the community a more inclusive, safer place for this population".

The Autism Alliance Seal of Approval was designed to identify community venues across the state that have taken steps to create inclusive environments for families affected by autism. In order to qualify for the seal, the GRCM demonstrated:

1. Host mandatory all-staff safety training so that families can be assured that staff know how to interact and protect individuals with autism and related special needs.
2. Preparation of a social narrative and/or sensory map to help families prepare for their visit. AAoM assists through advisement and/or creation of materials.
3. Undergo a free Safety and Sensory Audit Walk-Through with a member of AAoM's MiNavigator and Safety Program Staff.

GRCM's Executive Director Maggie Lancaster beamed with pride when speaking about this honor. "This award goes out to all staff, community volunteers, partnering organizations, and board members who have worked these past 10 plus years to create

an environment where the belief holds strong that play is for everyone and everyone should play. A huge thank you to the Autism Alliance of Michigan for recognizing this decade long journey."

The Detroit Zoological Society received their Autism Seal of Approval in May of 2016. GRCM is the first venue to receive the Seal on the west side of Michigan and they are paving the way for other community venues in the state.

About Autism Alliance of Michigan

The mission of Autism Alliance of Michigan is to lead collaborative efforts across the state that will improve the quality of life for individuals with autism through education, comprehensive services, community awareness, inclusion efforts, and coordinated advocacy. For more information, visit www.aaomi.org

About Grand Rapids Children's Museum

The Grand Rapids Children's Museum creates minds through play by providing open-ended, creative, interactive play experiences which have been shown to help the cognitive, social, emotional and physical development of children. Children ages 0-10 learn while having fun each time they visit. The Museum is open to the public Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays from 9:30 a.m.-5 p.m., Thursdays 9:30 a.m.-8 p.m. (Thursday Family Night 5-8 p.m.) and Sundays noon-5 p.m. Regular admission is \$8.50 per person, EBT card discount is \$1.75 all day, every day, Family Night is \$1.75 and Pals Members and children under 1 are free! For more information, please visit www.grcm.org.