

**FIRST 5 SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY
CHILDREN AND FAMILIES COMMISSION**

**COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES (Approved 5/27/2015)
March 25, 2015**

Commissioners Present

Bruce Gibson	SLO County Board of Supervisors
Penny Borenstein, M.D.	SLO County Public Health Department
James Brescia	SLO County Office of Education
Mary Kern	Community at Large
Lee Collins	Department of Social Services
Janet Murphy	Community at Large
Michael McNerney, M.D.	American Academy of Pediatrics (FAAP)
Melinda Sokolowski	Child Care Planning Council
Tracy Schiro	Children's Services Network

Commissioners Absent/Excused -- none

Staff Present

First 5 Staff: Wendy Wendt, Jason Wells
Commission Evaluator: Tom Keifer
Commission Counsel: Ray Biering

Call to Order

Chairperson Gibson called the meeting to order at 4:03 PM.

ITEM 1 - Chairperson Comments & Update

none

ITEM 2 - Public Comment

Mary Bianchi made public comment as a representative of Friends of Martha's Place. January 2015 marks the 7th anniversary of the opening of Martha's Place, which provides diagnostic screening and referral services for children at risk due to abuse, neglect, or prenatal drug/alcohol exposure. Friends of Martha's Place urges First 5 as part of its strategic planning process to "consider Martha's Place and its exclusive role as the only mental health resource in SLO County specializing in infants and children up to 5" to support increased specialized

pediatric medical assessment services and help cover services that are not fully reimburseable in the CenCal system.

Lisa Fraser made public comment as Executive Director of Center for Family Strengthening with a reminder that April is Child Abuse Prevention Month, first instituted in 1983 by President Reagan. The month spotlights the community importance of strengthening families. L. Fraser announced two upcoming events: April 3: Wear Blue for Kids – Symbol of child abuse prevention; April 24: Child Abuse Prevention Academy on Child Abuse Prevention (to be held at Cuesta College)

Briana Pierce made public comment as Family Services Coordinator at the LINK. She introduced the LINK's new First 5-funded Health Navigator, Adrienne Lomp.

ITEM 3 - Consent Agenda

- 1) Approve February 25, 2015 minutes
- 2) Approve Child Care Planning Council Nomination of Melinda Sokolowski to continue as Designated Representative for another 4-year term (2015-19)

Public Comment: None

Commissioner Brescia made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Schiro and passed unanimously.

ITEM 4 – Approve FY 15-16 Commission Meeting Calendar

Executive Director Wendy Wendt introduced a draft Commission Meeting calendar for FY15-16. She proposed adding one additional meeting date to allow sufficient time to complete strategic planning over the coming year. The two date options were August 26 or November 18. Brief discussion ensued. Commissioners favored August 26.

Public Comment: none

Commissioner Collins made a motion to approve the FY 15-16 Commission Meeting Calendar, to include the following dates: 7/8, 8/26, 9/23, 10/28, 12/2, 1/27, 3/23, 5/25, 6/22). The motion was seconded by Commissioner McNerney and passed unanimously.

ITEM 5 – Public Hearing: Receive and Approve First 5 Annual Report 2013-14

Public Comment: none

Commissioner Borenstein made a motion to approve the First 5 CA FY 13-14 Annual Report. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Collins and passed unanimously.

Commissioner Murphy commented that it is interesting to read on other county efforts.

ITEM 6 – Staff Report

Staff updated the Commission on various projects and information regarding First 5 SLO County.

Public Comment: None

Commissioners suggested an Event Calendar to capture all of the work/events that First 5 is involved in and/or advertises.

ITEM 7 – Director’s Report

Wendy Wendt, Executive Director provided a preliminary draft of the FY Administrative Budget, updated Commissioners on training activities during her first 5 months on the job, and proposed conducting a salary study.

Initial preview of the Administrative Budget draft was for informational purposes only. Ms. Wendt will present an updated draft for Commission approval at the May 2015 Commission meeting.

Executive Director training activities include one-on-one consultation with prior ED Susan Hughes. Ms. Wendt pointed out how valuable this training support has been and will continue to be during the full first-year cycle of her employment. She has also determined that the Commission’s initial estimate of 40 hours total for Ms. Hughes services is not sufficient to ensure a fully smooth transition, and has augmented this arrangement by up to 40 additional hours, to conclude following the FY14-15 audit process.

Ms. Wendt proposed conducting a salary study during the upcoming Fiscal Year for all staff positions, noting that current salary schedules may be out of date. Current Program Officer and Executive Director step schedules were developed in 2008, and Communications Officer salary schedule was developed in 2012. Ms. Wendt suggested several resources that could be accessed in launching a study – 1) available comparative figures from other First 5s and similar SLO County positions; 2) guidance from Tami Douglas-Schatz, SLO County Human Resources Director; 3) possibility of hiring an outside consultant to conduct a study versus conducting “in-house.”

Discussion:

Re: Salary Study. Commissioner Schiro pointed out that a sixth step was added in 2011 or 2012 to the salary schedule, effectively updating staff salaries to current market rates. Commissioner Collins emphasized that Commissioners should be involved in a salary study

exercise. Commissioner Gibson proposed delegating initial work to the fiscal subcommittee (assigned at the February 2015 Commission meeting – Schiro, Gibson, Borenstein). Counsel Biering inquired if Commissioners feel an outside study is necessary. Commissioners Borenstein and Brescia suggested that their staff may be able to provide professional guidance on the project, and that paying for an outside study would likely not be necessary.

Public Comment: none

ITEM 8 – Ad Hoc Nominating Committee Report

The Ad Hoc Nominating Committee (Commissioners Gibson, Borenstein, Brescia) presented and requested approval for At-Large and Medical Representative Nominees, terms to commence July 21, 2015.

At-Large:

Janet Murphy, Community Volunteer, Cal Poly Instructor in Child Development (retired)
 Bob Watt, Principal, Cambria Grammar School; Chair, Center for Family Strengthening

Medical:

James Forester, DDS, Dental Director, Tolosa Children’s Dental Center, President-Elect, Central Coast Dental Society

Chair Gibson introduced and summarized the nominating process. A total of six At-Large candidates and four Medical Representative candidates submitted applications:

At-Large Candidates	Medical Rep Candidates
Tonya Iversen Camille Johnson Mary Kern* Janet Murphy* Jac Pedersen Bob Watt	James Forester Michael McNerney* Jac Pedersen James Tedford

**Current Commissioner*

The Ad Hoc Nominating Committee reviewed applications and conducted 15-minute phone interviews with each candidate. After deliberation, the Committee came to a consensus decision to recommend two new faces on the Commission. Commissioner Gibson described the Committee’s commitment to approach the process with the most open mind possible. They recognized that certain turnover is potentially beneficial, and brings greater participation to the First 5 program. They also took into account distribution of geography, and representation across specialty areas.

DISCUSSION:

Commissioner McNerney opened discussion by commenting that change is a good thing and that he fully supports the committee's recommendation. Commissioner Kern added that it is always good to bring new people on board. She is interested to continue being involved with First 5 in whatever capacity she is needed. Commissioners discussed the important and difficult balance of consistency with occasional "turnover." Six out of nine seats are designated in the current bylaws, and the remaining three come up for renewal at the same time. Commissioner Gibson suggested considering ways to build greater participation in the future, perhaps by adding Alternates.

Commissioner Schiro expressed disappointment in losing Dr. McNerney as the Medical Representative Commissioner. She pointed out that a pediatrician has a broader perspective than a dentist. Commissioner Collins described feeling conflicted by the Committee's recommendation. He was not part of the committee, and does not want to second-guess its selections. But he feels like we're "firing" two of First 5's members, who volunteer their time to do this work. We should celebrate what they do, not let them go.

Commissioner Murphy reflected that the voices of both outgoing Commissioners (Kern and McNerney) will be missed. Commissioner Gibson commented that the structure of the Commissioner selection process is inherently and deeply uncomfortable.

Public Comment: NONE

Commissioner McNerney made a motion to approve the First 5 CA FY 13-14 Annual Report. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Kern. The Motion passed 8:1 (Collins dissenting vote).

Follow-Up Discussion

Commissioner Brescia reiterated previous comments that changes need to be made to the process and structure. Commissioner Murphy pointed out that she has been through three of these application processes and each has been awkward. She preferred this Ad Hoc Committee interview approach to the public meeting interviews in the past. Commissioner Borenstein pointed out that staff did not take part in the decision of the Committee. Commissioner Kern commented that everyone knew going in to the process that change might happen. She also suggested that initiating Term Limits for At-Large Representatives might be considered in the future. Commissioner Murphy suggested setting up staggered terms for At-Large Commissioners.

First 5 Counsel Ray Biering pointed out that it is not the process but the result that is uncomfortable and difficult. If First 5 Commissioners opt to change the process and have staggered terms, the ordinance will need to change. He will look into options.

ITEM 9 – Strategic Planning Presentations and Discussion: Early Development and Early Toxic Stress

Review/Reflections on Health and School Readiness

Ms. Wendt introduced the discussion with a brief outline of themes introduced in the previous two strategic planning sessions in January (Health) and February (School Readiness). Commissioners requested that as the process progresses, these themes get consolidated and “boiled down” to a set of clear direction-setting guidelines. One all-encompassing theme that is fundamental to supporting children is the need for strong families, communities, systems. Commissioners challenged themselves to look both within and beyond the current universe of partners as they consider future directions.

Presentation on Early Brain Development

Program Officer Jason Wells shared a presentation on early brain development and a video, “How Brains Are Built,” produced by the Alberta Family Wellness Initiative. Evaluator Tom Keifer presented a summary of three* studies on early brain development and the word gap. (*Hart and Risley (1995). Kuhl (2010): “Brain Mechanisms in Early Language Acquisition”. Betencourt et al (2011): “Adolescents with and without gestational cocaine exposure: longitudinal analysis of inhibitory control, memory and receptive language”)

DISCUSSION:

Commissioner Murphy appreciated the image of a house in the video, and added an image of “scaffolding” representing family and community so that children grow “up and out.” As trust and maturation continue, scaffolding can come down or be reconfigured to fit development. She also pointed out in reference to the Word Count study that socioeconomic conditions are not necessarily a fair predictor of parent behavior with respect to the “word gap.” Middle class families and children overuse television and screen time, and low-income families in many contexts and cultures are “all about talking-reading-singing.”

Commissioner Borenstein noted the cyclical nature of the current emphasis on the earliest years and brain development. In the first part of her career this was the focus, then there was increasing attention paid to the preschool age-stage, and now the pendulum is swinging back.

Commissioner Kern is encouraged that the science of brain imaging can now support what people who work and live with young children have known anecdotally forever. It is exciting to put this together, and it is important for parents and teachers to know/understand the critical role they play at this first stage in children’s lives.

Commissioner Borenstein pointed out a fundamental challenge to reach and support families in the first year of their child’s life when they are often overwhelmed and “go underground” into survival mode.

DSS Data Presentation

Commissioner Collins presented a matrix of DSS caseload data along a variety of indicators (e.g. entry into foster care; evidence of abuse/neglect, introduced key strategic planning

considerations related to early childhood and family poverty in San Luis Obispo County. Below are highlights:

- There is no more clear predictor of brain development than poverty. Cycle of poverty is not just about economics, it's also about brain development from the get go. Poverty creates an immediate disadvantage for children. If poverty went away, many of the other childhood challenges would disappear.
- 16% of children in SLO County live in poverty. Current caseload of 776 children aged 0-5 in CalWorks program.
- Childhood homelessness is invisible in our community. We see and can identify homeless single men, but almost never will we know a homeless family with children if we see them on the street. The current CalWorks caseload includes 189 homeless families.
- DSS' job is to help families reunite and get kids home. Community partners' priority is to work toward this goal. Everyone including the judge wants this.
- Median stay for SLO County children in foster care is 18-20 months. Majority of cases are in North County (including coastal communities). Most involve neglect.

DISCUSSION:

Commissioner McNerney asked if there is a county map documenting where abuse/neglect referrals come from. Commissioner Schiro responded that this type of analysis would not necessarily yield accurate conclusions on prevalence of the abuse/neglect itself, given that in some neighborhoods/communities people are more likely to refer than in others.

Commissioner Collins explained that neglect is closely correlated with poverty, while physical/sexual abuse is *not* correlated with poverty. Reduce poverty and you reduce neglect.

SUMMARY COMMENTS:

Commissioner Kern: How we can play a role in addressing poverty?

Commissioner Murphy: Many people are on the same page with a focus on young years, social-emotional attachment. This focus provides a catalyst for us to rethink what we're doing, who to partner with, to hone in and be purposeful.

Commissioner Schiro: Families who are in poverty don't love their children less. How do we help them do the things they need to do to support their children?

Commissioner Brescia: We need to look at sustainability across programs. "It is not a done deal that the resources will be able to come from First 5."

Commissioner Gibson: Our resources are meager relative to the need. We need to bring other resources to bear. I'm awed by the work that Department of Social Services carries out every day.

Dr. Borenstein: There is not going to be money that falls from the sky to fix poverty. There is great value in the work that we're doing in quality/affordable childcare. Every family needs a respite from parenting responsibilities to work and take care of themselves. Meanwhile, Family childcare providers are a step away from poverty themselves.

Commissioner Collins: First 5 does not have the resources to lift families out of poverty. But we do have a voice. State has additional revenues this year. We can be advocates for use of these revenues to invest in tools that address the poverty problem (e.g. Earned Income Tax Credit? Job training for parents?) Anything we can advocate for that helps directly or indirectly to alleviate poverty.

Commissioner McNerney: First 5 needs to pay attention to North County -- Send more of what we do to the north. (e.g. More parent educators)

Commissioner Sokolowski: Our duty at First 5 and elsewhere is to ensure that we are balancing services for parents AND children. We should be supporting first-time parents and pregnant women. We should start earlier and sustain support longer.

Public Comment:

Mary Bianchi – There are a lot of reasons why kids do not succeed, not just poverty. Please invest First 5 funds where there is fertile ground already and good work being done, not just lift out of poverty, but help families be more successful.

Brianna Pierce – Underscored the need to focus more attention on North County.

ITEM 10 – Commissioner Comments and Announcements

Commissioner Murphy requested a weekly calendar of First 5 activities be sent to all Commissioners, both to give them a sense of everything we are involved with and to offer opportunities for them to attend/observe/participate in events.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:40 PM.

*All materials referred to in these minutes, as well as an audio recording of the meeting, are available at the First 5 SLO County office. Call (805) 781-4058 for information. **The next Commission meeting will be May 27, 2015 from 4:00-6:30 at the San Luis Obispo County Office of Education Board Room, 3350 Education Drive, San Luis Obispo, CA.***