

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

**COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES**  
May 28, 2025 (APPROVED June 25, 2025)

**Current Commissioners Present**

Dawn Ortiz-Legg (Chair)  
James Brescia (Vice Chair)

SLO County Board of Supervisors  
SLO County Office of Education

Penny Borenstein  
Patty Clarkson  
Nancy Kuster  
Leslie Mehigan  
Alison Ventura

SLO County Public Health Department  
Early Care and Education Planning Council  
Department of Social Services  
Community at Large  
Community at Large (attending virtually)

**Current Commissioners Absent**

Erica Ruvalcaba-Heredia  
VACANT

Community at Large  
Medical Representative (AAP, Ch 2)

**Staff Present**

First 5 staff: Wendy Wendt, Jason Wells, Maggie Payne  
Commission Counsel: Daniel Cheung

**Call to Order**

Chair Ortiz-Legg called the meeting to order at 3:05 PM.

**ITEM 1 – Public Comment – Items not on the agenda**

None

**ITEM 2 - Commissioner Announcements**

Commissioner Brescia announced he must leave early for an employee appreciation event. He added an update on enrollments in the Ticket to Teach Apprenticeship Program – 50 total participants moving toward early childhood education (ECE) licensure; 25 of these have completed the program. Apprentices and graduates are employed at programs countywide.

Commissioner Clarkson announced the launch of the new “Curiosity to Career” element of Ticket 2 Teach, designed to engage people who have expressed an initial interest in ECE. Recruitment is currently open, with five participants signed up to date. Program activities will start in August. This project is funded in part by First 5 San Luis Obispo County.

Legal Counsel Daniel Cheung announced that Commissioner Ventura is attending the meeting virtually and is able to participate in and vote on Commission actions (per AB2449 and AB2302).

**ITEM 3 (ACTION ITEM) - Consent Agenda**

- a. Approve March 26, 2025 Minutes
- b. Q3 – FY 2024-25 Financials
- c. Office Lease Amendment with Walter Brothers

*Public Comment: None*

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

**ITEM 4 – Nomination of Dr. Michelle Auran for First 5 Commissioner – Medical Rep.**

Associate Director Jason Wells introduced the item. He reminded Commissioners of the process and timeline to select a nominee for the Medical Representative Commissioner who will complete the term vacated by Dr. James Tedford.

At the March Commission meeting, Commissioners Kuster and Mehigan were approved to form an ad hoc committee with staff to interview candidates. Applications were due on May 2; interviews took place on May 15<sup>th</sup>. At the conclusion of this process, the Committee chose to recommend Dr. Michelle Auran for a formal nomination by the full Commission at today's meeting.

Dr. Auran is a pediatrician who currently splits her professional time between Bravo Pediatrics and Tri-Counties Regional Center. She is board-certified in General Pediatrics, a fellow of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), a member of the Central Coast Medical Association, and a member of Chapter 2 of the AAP.

Today's Commission action constitutes a formal nomination that will then pass to the County Board of Supervisors for final approval at its June 17, 2025 meeting. Upon approval by the Board of Supervisors, Dr. Auran will assume the seat vacated by Dr. Tedford, with a term end of July 21, 2026. If Dr. Auran chooses, she will have the opportunity to opt in for at least one additional three-year term, contingent on nomination by the Commission and approval by the Board of Supervisors.

Commissioner Kuster added comment that she appreciates Dr. Auran's authenticity, and her experience working with diverse populations in the county through her two roles at Bravo Pediatrics and Tri-Counties Regional Center. Commissioner Mehigan concurred and added that her own children have been patients at Bravo Pediatrics for many years and that she has respect for her professionalism, care and awareness of the array of supports the county has to offer children and families.

Executive Director Wendy Wendt underscored Dr. Auran's initiative in launching the county's first local – Reach Out and Read partnership out of Bravo Pediatrics – a national program that that involves pediatricians' promotion of early literary including book distribution at well-child visits.

Dr. Auran was in attendance at the meeting and expressed gratitude for having the opportunity to practice pediatric medicine in this community.

Commissioner Ortiz-Legg welcomed Dr. Auran and commented that it will be good to have her expertise on the Commission.

*Public Comment:*

Commissioner Ortiz-Legg made a motion to nominate Dr. Auran to fill the Medical Representative seat on the Commission and to forward this nomination to the County Board of Supervisors for final approval. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Kuster and passed unanimously.

## **ITEM 5 – Staff Reports**

Special Projects Coordinator Maggie Payne provided the following updates on First 5 activities:

- First 5 hosted a Funded Partner Meeting last month at Oak Park Community Room.
- The final SLO Thrive Home Visiting Lunch and Learn took place this month.
- Parents Helping Parents has an opening for a Family Resource Center Specialist
- MICOP recently held an Open House at its Paso Robles location.
- First 5 staff attended a webinar hosted by First 5 Santa Barbara County. Dr. Manuel Pastor, demographer and professor at the USC Dornsife Equity Research Institute, was the keynote speaker.
- Center for Family Strengthening Parent Leadership Institute graduation is May 29.
- Corazon Latino hosted a parenting class for Spanish-speaking families during May.
- First 5 SLO County provided sponsorship support to allow for local participation in the state Latina Day of Action in Sacramento. Commissioner Ruvalcaba-Heredia attended the event.
- Other First 5-sponsored events include
  - a Perinatal Wellness Circle at the SLO Botanical Garden hosted by the Central Coast Childbirth Network (First 5 also provided outreach materials for the recent CCCBN Expo)
  - Month of the Child/Child Abuse Prevention Month events throughout the county, notably Children's Day in the Plaza in SLO and Dia del Niño in San Miguel)
  - SLO Blues Baseball (note: free game tickets received through this sponsorship will be distributed by Commissioner Kuster and her staff to local foster care resource families)
- First 5 staff took part in the annual First 5 Association Advocacy Day in April. They met with staff from Senators Laird and Limon offices, and staffers of Assemblymember Addis and Hart.
- First 5 Association released a response to the Governor's May Budget Revise.

- The First 5 Kit Program is back up and running. First 5 SLO County received an initial distribution of over 300 kits, all of which have been distributed to local hospitals, clinics and other child-serving sites. A new order has been placed, but supplies have not yet been received.

Cal Poly intern Arlein Logrono presented a pre-prepared Powerpoint on her First 5 project to research the value of play and the conduct an inventory of county parks and play spaces.

Ms. Wendt informed Commissioners that an additional one-year round of IMPACT Legacy funds are available for FY25-26. First 5 San Luis Obispo County is again serving as Fiscal Lead Agency for the Region 7 (San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties). First 5 San Luis Obispo County anticipates contracting again with the Ventura County of Education, which will manage operational and fiscal coordination with the two other County Offices of Education.

*Public Comment: None.*

## **ITEM 6 – Child Care Systems-Building Updates**

### **UPLIFT CHILD CARE COALITION UPDATE**

Ms. Payne presented this item.

- The Contract has been signed between First 5 SLO County and the Economic Development Collaborative (Uplift Coalition lead fiscal agency for Catalyst Grants)
- Child Care Coalition Steering Group member organizations\* have signed MOUs, and are active in building contacts with other counties (\*SLO Chamber, Community Foundation SLO County, City of SLO, Early Care and Education Planning Council, CAPSLO Child Care Resource Connection, Cal Poly)
- Consultant Holly Goldberg is working with staff to develop a best practices documentation framework
- First month of fiscal and program reporting has been submitted to EDC
- Summary of first 6 weeks of program activities

### **FUTURE of FAMILY-FRIENDLY WORKPLACES PROGRAM**

Mr. Wells introduced this agenda item. The Family-Friendly Workplaces Program (FFWP) was launched in 2021 with joint funding from First 5 SLO County and the County of San Luis Obispo, and was housed at the SLO Chamber of Commerce where it has resided over the ensuing four years.

Christina Lefevre Latner, SLO Chamber's Workforce Development Manager and founding coordinator of the FFWP, presented a summary of program goals and accomplishments. These have included creation and maintenance of an assessment and awards opportunity for local employers to explore current and potential additions to their suite of family friendly practices. To date the program has enabled over 300 organizations to go through the FFW assessment, with over 250 receiving awards for improving or adding to their FFW employee offerings. Ms. Latner has worked to expand participation countywide, and to broaden the

types of businesses that participate. In FY24-25 for example, a special award category was established to focus on businesses in the Hospitality sector. Ms. Latner concluded with a summary of goals for future impact, including continued expansion geographically and by sector, championing/supporting employer-sponsored child care innovation, and activating a sustainability plan that includes a new institutional home\* and funding.

Mr. Wells continued the presentation. He reminded Commissioners that the current \$75,000 annual contract with the SLO Chamber of Commerce sunsets on June 30, 2025, with no concrete indication of an option to extend for an additional period. First 5 staff seeks direction from the Commission regarding whether they are interested in considering continuing investment in FFW programming.

The San Luis Obispo Chamber has confirmed that it is not in a position to continue operating the program, though it is hopeful that this successful initiative continues and has explored options with other Chambers, notably the Atascadero Chamber. Mr. Wells noted that Atascadero Chamber CEO Josh Cross is present on Zoom, and that SLO Chamber CEO James Dantona submitted written comment regarding his organization's perspective on the program's value and hope that it finds a future home and continued funding from a variety of sources.

Commission Chair Ortiz-Legg invited Mr. Cross to provide comments on the Atascadero Chamber's potential interest in managing the program. Mr. Cross confirmed that he has board support to explore the possibility.

Commission discussion ensued.

Commissioner Kuster asked for clarification on the level of funding. Ms. Wendt explained that for three years First 5 and the County of San Luis Obispo each contributed \$75,000 annually to the SLO Chamber for launch and implementation of the program. The fourth (current) year, First 5 sustained its \$75,000 investment; the County dropped its investment to \$25,000, and the Chamber absorbed the balance through in-kind staffing. Future funding through the County is not an option at this time, and as described above, the First 5 contract sunsets June 30, 2025.

Commissioner Ortiz-Legg proposed that First 5 continue with its historical annual \$75,000 foundational support, with an expectation that additional necessary funds would be raised from other investors by an organization to be selected through a competitive procurement process.

Commissioner Kuster recommended a short-term time frame for any potential new organizational home, to allow First 5 and its funded partner to determine impact. She also recommended that applicants provide a scope of work that reflects both a fundraising plan and options for scaled-down services if additional funding is not fully secured.

Legal Counsel Daniel Cheung reminded that the Commission last year had voted to limit this program to only one additional year and gave notice to the San Luis Obispo Chamber of Commerce that they would need to find other funding in the future. Now -- given the success of the program, its future potential, and interest from at least one party to date to potentially continue building it -- staff is asking for Commission for direction on 1) whether it wants to

consider continued investment for at least a fifth year and 2) identify the optimal investment home through a competitive application process.

Commissioners directed staff to explore options in the above two areas and bring them back to the Commission at the June 25 meeting for further deliberation.

*Public Comment: None.*

## **ITEM 7 – Annual Strategic Plan Review (Part A)**

### **PROGRESS REPORTS IN FIRST 5 PRIORITY AREAS**

Mr. Wells provided a summary overview of First 5 funded-program partners and activities/impacts over the past year to date in each of the Strategic Plan priority areas.

### **FUNDING SHIFTS (FEDERAL/STATE/LOCAL) IMPACTING SERVICES FOR CHILDREN 0-5 AND FAMILIES**

Ms. Wendt began her presentation with a comment on the importance of taking stock of major funding decisions at the federal, state and local levels and the potential effects on early childhood. This is important in the context of First 5's Strategic Plan because the funding and policy landscape has dramatically changed in the year since the Strategic Plan was enacted, and more changes are anticipated. First 5 and other organizations have partnered to build the local fabric of support for young children and families, and many of these services are currently at risk of reduction or elimination. Highlighted examples include MediCal covered services, family resource center staffing and the broader SAFE System of Care, Martha's Place, WIC, North County Family Planning Clinic, Head Start, Parent Connection, and other public and nonprofit programs. Ms. Wendt explained that she is bringing this issue up in the context of the First 5 Commission because of its role as the county's primary champion for early childhood. Staff is introducing these challenges and asking Commissioners to provide guidance and leadership on what First 5's role can and should be during this season of change. She also asked for Commissioner input into what else is being impacted that she did not include in her presentation.

Commission Discussion ensued.

Commissioner Ortiz-Legg reminded fellow Commissioners and staff that not all funding decisions are final, and that it is difficult to know what First 5's role might be before changes are fully enacted. Ms. Wendt suggested that being prepared and informed at this stage is important so that it is possible to strategize in a timely and effective manner when and if services shift.

Commissioner Ventura commented that a significant and devastating aspect of current policy changes at the federal level is the dismantling of higher education research, some of which has been investigating and making the evidence-based case for health and human services that support young children's health and wellbeing.

Commissioner Borenstein added to this comment, pointing out the recent announcement that federal Health and Human Services has announced that COVID vaccines are no longer recommended for pregnant women or healthy children. She also pointed out that some pending changes to CA Proposition 56 may have negative consequences for funding within the County oral health and tobacco control program.

*Public Comment:*

Jane Pomeroy: CAPSLO Child Youth and Family Services Partnership Manager; shared serious concerns about the cuts to funding at all levels of government that also affect non-profit's ability to partner in providing safety services for children and families. Examples at CAPSLO include the family preservation program and family advocacy services at Martha's Place. "When you cut one thread, the whole net starts to fail."

Gwen Garcia, Parent Connection Coordinator at the Center for Family Strengthening, commented on this important resource for families that has been in operation since 2009. She passed out an infographic showing the program's services, reach and impact. Since its launch, Parent Connection has supported over 12,000 parents with personalized support. It operates on a lean staff model of 1.5 FTE. It is now looking at a budget shortfall of \$163k and will likely have to close as of July 1, 2025.

Veronica Macias, founder of mentoring program Madrinas para Latinas, spoke about her passion for early childhood. She also wanted Commissioners to be aware of her mentoring program which is mostly geared to the Hispanic community and matches professionals with middle and high school students. She is looking to expand to mentoring for young parents.

Lisa Fraser, Executive Director at Center for Family Strengthening (CFS) (lead agency for Parent Connection) reinforced Gwen Garcia's comments and infographic detail. She thanked Ms. Wendt for what was shared about the reality that we are entering into with respect to funding and policy changes. Her agency is having to make difficult decisions and is working hard to advocate for the important programs CFS and partner agencies may have to shutter, notably Parent Connection and also family advocacy services related to the SAFE System of Care. Among other things, she is worried that highly experienced professionals who have been working for these programs sometimes close to two decades may have their roles eliminated.

Discussion returned to the Commission.

Commissioner Kuster reinforced concern for the potential restructuring/reduction of community-based family advocate supports that are part of the County's SAFE System of Care. To some extent this potential change is connected to school districts' budgetary considerations that may bring family advocacy roles into school staffing patterns, which in term will likely refocus priorities away from whole-child/whole-family family advocacy to more focus on student educational outcomes in school. Some of these potential changes specific to SAFE and school-based family advocates have a somewhat more remote timeline, pending to start FY26-27, and are related to state rollout of the Behavioral Health Services Act and the Children and Youth Behavioral Health Initiative.

Commissioner Ortiz-Legg provided context regarding county-level budget decisions and timeline. The County operates hundreds of programs and staffs thousands of employees. The County needs to realign the budget to better match revenues with expenditures. And it also is due for a deep analysis of the programs it offers and how to maximize effectiveness and efficiency. She called out Martha's Place as an example of a program that has support for continued operation in the short term but that also needs to be examined for improvements to efficiencies and cost effectiveness. County Supervisors are also aware of the risks that local nonprofits face in the potential elimination of some County grants and contracted program investments with community-based organizations. She reminded all present that budget hearings are taking place June 9-11 and are a good opportunity for members of the public to express their perspectives.

#### **ITEM 8 – Annual Strategic Plan Review – Long Range Financial Plan First Read (Part B)**

Ms. Wendt presented this item. She reminded Commissioners that the Long Range Financial Plan presents a picture of anticipated revenues and expenditures out to the conclusion of the current strategic plan plus one additional strategic planning period. She urged Commissioners to study the Plan, to ask clarifying questions if needed in the next month, and to fully review and be prepared to take action to approve the Plan at the June 25, 2025 meeting.

Ms. Wendt also pointed out that there is a placeholder amount of \$1.3 million for contracted program expenditures in the coming year. Staff currently estimates that approximately \$1.14 million of this total is already encumbered through multiyear contracts. This leaves a total unencumbered balance of \$155,000. \$75,000 of this may be allocated to Family-Friendly Workplace, leaving \$75,000 for potential investment in project areas identified in the Strategic Plan (e.g. reinforcement of early childhood supports within SAFE, early intervention assessment and/or services for mild-moderate diagnoses). Additionally, today's Commission dialogue regarding changing funding landscapes affecting early childhood may warrant consideration of potential new needs for First 5 funding support. Ms. Wendt emphasized that the Commission can opt to increase the total \$1.3 million next year to accommodate these changing needs. The increase is not sustainable in the long term, but could be absorbed over one or two years.

Commissioner Ortiz-Legg suggested that First 5 could invite local organizations to submit statements regarding pending/potential/known future gaps in service and funding, and where gaps need to be filled.

*Public Comment: None.*



**ITEM 9 – FY2025-26 Draft Administrative Budget First Read**

Ms. Wendt reminded Commissioners that the Administrative Budget is directly built from the the Long Range Financial Plan. Most line items are more or less level funded for FY25-26, with the exception of personnel. Staff currently at the highest step level (Wendt, Wells, Livengood) are all due for a 3% increase, per current Commission policy. Ms. Payne will move from Step 2 to Step 3.

*Public Comment: None.*

**ITEM 10: Future Agenda Items**

None noted

*Public Comment: None*

**ITEM 11: Adjournment**

5:36 PM