FIRST 5 SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY
CHILDREN AND FAMILIES COMMISSION

COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES
June 25, 2025 (APPROVED September 24, 2025)

Current Commissioners Present

Alison Ventura, Ph.D. (Acting Chair)	Community at Large
Michelle Auran, M.D.	Medical Representative
Penny Borenstein, M.D.	SLO County Public Health Department
Nancy Kuster	Department of Social Services
Leslie Mehigan	Community at Large
Erica Ruvalcaba-Heredia, Ed.D	Community at Large

Commissioners Absent/Excused

James Brescia, Ed.D (Vice Chair)	SLO County Office of Education
Patty Clarkson, Ed.D	Early Care and Education Planning Council
Dawn Ortiz-Legg (Chair)	SLO County Board of Supervisors

Staff Present

Commission staff: Wendy Wendt, Jason Wells, Misty Livengood, Maggie Payne
Commission Counsel: Daniel Cheung, Natalie Frye-Laacke

Call to Order

Commissioner Ventura called the meeting to order at 3:01 PM.

Commissioner Ventura announced an agenda change – Item 4 will be moved to later in the meeting, following Item 7.

Commissioners and staff welcomed new Commissioner Dr. Michelle Auran and bid farewell to longtime First 5 friend and colleague Marilu Gomez. Ms. Gomez first worked with First 5 as the Paso Robles School Readiness Coordinator, and caps off her partnership as the county's popular Talk.Read.Sing. weekly bilingual storytime on Facebook Live.

ITEM 1 –Public Comment – Items not on the agenda

Michelle Fries, new Director of Grants and Programs at the Community Foundation San Luis Obispo County, introduced herself. She comes to the role after two decades at the Silicon Valley Foundation, with a focus on early childhood initiatives. She is a Cal Poly graduate and glad to be back in the community.

ITEM 2 - Consent Agenda

a) Approve May 28, 2025 minutes
b) Accept Commissioner Appointment Nominations – DSS (Nancy Kuster, Health Agency (Penny Borenstein), SLOCOE (Joe Koski)
c) Authorize Executive Director to sign IMPACT Legacy Documents – First 5 CA Grant Award Notice (GAN), related agreement with Ventura County Office of Education

Executive Director Wendy Wendt requested to pull Item 2c for a separate vote, as the original posted agenda did not include full and accurate information on the recommended action. The correct recommendation (as noted above in the minutes) is to "Authorize Executive Director to sign IMPACT Legacy Documents – First 5 CA Grant Award Notice (GAN), related agreement with Ventura County Office of Education."

Public Comment (Items 2a/b): None

Commissioner Mehigan made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda Items a/b. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Kuster and passed unanimously.

Commissioner Borenstein made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda Item c. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Ruvalcaba-Heredia and passed unanimously.

ITEM 3 – PUBLIC HEARING re: Status of Staff Vacancies, Recruitment Retention Efforts

Legal Counsel Daniel Cheung presented on this item, which is in compliance with CA AB2561. The State Legislature enacted this legislation to ensure that public boards are informed about staff vacancies/recruitment/retention. First 5 SLO County does not have any vacancies or recruitment efforts in effect at this time.

Public Comment: None

ITEM 4 – Family Friendly Workplaces Investment
(Move to After Item 7)

ITEM 5 – Early Childhood Systems Stabilization Fund

Ms. Wendt presented on this item, which is a continuation of a Commission discussion launched at the May meeting. At the May meeting, staff presented on federal, state and local shifts in funding and policy that have or will have impacts on local community supports for young children and their families. Staff seeks Commission direction on First 5's potential roles to participate in addressing these systemic impacts – as Funder, Convener, and/or Advocate.

Staff is requesting Commission action at this meeting specific to First 5's Funder role, to coincide with the annual budget approval process (see Items 6 and 7). The recommendation is as follows:

Creation of a First 5 Early Childhood Systems Stabilization Fund, totaling $600,000 over three fiscal years ($300,000 in FY25-26, $200,000 in FY26-27, $100,000 in FY27-28).

Ms. Wendt clarified that this Fund would not be used to create new programs or legacy projects, but instead is designed to prioritize those areas that need bridge funding or stabilization funding in most critical early childhood & family programs and systems in the immediate future. She also emphasized that First 5 is only one player in this problem-solving space. It will be important to take the necessary time to study the issue and determine our most effective and appropriate level of participation.

Recommended next steps would be:
- Include the Stabilization Fund annual total amounts in the FY 25-26 long range financial plan and budget.
- Conduct a landscape analysis with participation by staff and a Commission ad hoc committee over the summer to identify service needs, gaps, and opportunities.
- With ad hoc committee, develop mechanism/s and metrices to determine where/how these funds should be utilized
- Staff/ad hoc committee presents a Fund Investment Plan (analysis results and funding mechanism recommendation) to Commission at September meeting
- Commission directs staff to activate Fund Investment Plan

Discussion ensued.

Commissioner Questions:

- Will these funds be made available only to current funded partners or a wider potential pool? Answer – staff recommends maximum flexibility.
- How would this money be used if not allocated to the Fund? Answer: This would come out of General Fund and be accessible for this newly described purpose. Similar action was taken at the beginning of the Pandemic to set up an “Emergency Response Fund.” In neither case did then budget decision take away from other current program investments. However, longer-term budget planning will need to adjust to this new Fund.
- Is there a possibility to adjust the recommended annual Fund amounts based on community need? For example, Martha’s Place is able to stay open for one more year with County funds but will then lose funding in FY26-27. Answer: The Fund rollout is flexible; it will be possible to roll over unspent funds at the end of FY25-26.
- Comment: Commission decision regarding this funding might best be made after the ad hoc committee meetings to decide how to allocate. Legal Counsel Daniel Cheung responded that today’s Commission action would be only to allocate the “bucket” for the Fund, not to make specific decisions on use.
- Can the Commission action today be to allocate $600,000 over three fiscal years and then more concrete annual amounts be worked out through ad hoc committee deliberation and Commission action at future meetings? Answer: County Treasurer’s office needs a concrete budget approved for each fiscal year. FY25-26 budget will be approved by the Commission later in today’s meeting, and a concrete amount will be required for the Stabilization Fund.

- Is the new Stabilization funding coming out of the core $1.3 million program allocation listed in the draft budget for next year? Answer: No. This would add an additional $300,000 for FY25-26 on top of the $1.3 million. Legal Counsel Cheung recommended that the motion for this item focus on activating the Early Childhood Systems Stabilization Fund totaling $600,000 over three years, and then to include annualized details in the next two agenda items (Item 6 – Long Range Financial Plan and Item 7 – Administrative Budget).

Commissioner Borenstein expressed strong support for the staff recommendation: “If not now then when?” Challenges are being felt across the human services landscape. It is our job as First 5 to focus on shoring up supports for the 0-5 population and their families.

Public Comment:

Becca Carsel, speaking from the perspective of the First 5 Health Access Training Project, urged First 5 to also lift up its advocacy voice in the coming months and years.

Commissioner Mehigan made a motion to approve the staff recommendation to create a First 5 Early Childhood System Stabilization Fund. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Borenstein and passed unanimously.

Commissioners Borenstein, Kuster and Mehigan volunteered to form an ad hoc committee with staff to conduct a landscape analysis and determine optimal funding decision mechanisms.

ITEM 6 – Strategic Plan Update: Approve Long-Range Financial Plan

Mehigan/Borenstein

Executive Director Wendy Wendt introduced this item. First reading of the long-range financial plan took place at the May Commission meeting. The draft presented for approval today has two modifications:

- Addition of the new First 5 Early Childhood Systems Stabilization Fund (see Item 5)
- The interest rate estimate is in line with Treasury yield (3%), instead of the more conservative estimate presented at the May meeting (2%).

Commissioners asked for clarification on MediCal Administrative Activities (MAA) revenue as related to CalAIM – could the revenue increase in future years? Answer: Not within the current program. CalAIM activities are tracked differently. Some county First 5s are exploring becoming administrative hubs for CalAIM services.

Public Comment: none

Commissioner Mehigan moved to approve the Long-Range Financial Plan Update. Motion seconded by Commissioner Borenstein. Motion passed unanimously.

ITEM 7 – Approve FY 2025-26 Administrative Budget

Ms. Wendt introduced the final draft of the FY 2025-26 Administrative Budget. A first reading was conducted at the May 2025 Commission meeting. Two changes since the May 2025 First Reading:

- Lower Membership expense total than in the May draft. First 5 Association dues are 300% higher in FY25-26 than FY24-25. The May budget draft reflected this increase. However, since then the Association has confirmed that a portion of this increase can be assigned as a contribution to the Association's policy work. This portion can be coded as "Program" expense, allowing for a lower amount to be assigned as "Administrative." This adjustment allows for the following two updates to the draft Administrative Budget.

- Higher Professional Services total than in the May draft. This is in anticipation of a change in legal counsel, with the potential for a higher hourly rate than current Legal Counsel (see Staff Reports for detail on Legal Counsel change).

- Higher Registration total than in the May draft. This is to help ensure that staff will be able to attend the annual First 5 Association Summit. The registration fee has increased significantly, and as such staff were not able to attend in FY24-25.

Discussion ensued.

Commissioner Kuster asked if the increase in Registration allows *all* staff to attend the Summit next year? Answer: Yes.

Commissioner Borenstein commented that other public sector associations are also raising their rates.

Commissioner Kuster asked if the 3% salary increase will continue next year as well. Answer: As of now there is no increase in salaries budgeted for future years. The agency is due in FY25-26 for an updated salary study and related Commission action on First 5 salary schedule.

Public comment: None.

Commissioner Kuster moved to approve the FY 2025-26 Administrative Budget; Commissioner Borenstein seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

ITEM 4 (*rescheduled to after Item 7 per Commission Chair request*) –Approve Staff Recommendation: SLO Chamber Family Friendly Workplaces Program Contract Development Under New Leadership: Atascadero Chamber of Commerce

Associate Director Jason Wells presented on this item. At the May Commission meeting, staff provided an overview of First 5's investment in the Family-Friendly Workplaces Program, which over the past four years has been housed at the San Luis Obispo Chamber of Commerce. The current contract sunsets on June 30, 2025. The SLO Chamber is not in a position to continue operating the program even if the First 5 Commission opts to continue investing in this work. At the May meeting, Commission directed staff to explore options for another organization to carry the program forward with potential annual funding support from First 5 maintained at the current $75,000 level. A request for Letters of Interest was released. Three organizations responded. Staff is recommending the Atascadero Chamber of Commerce as the optimal organization to administer the program moving forward, and requests Commission approval to enter into contract negotiations. A final contract draft will be brought to the Commission for approval at the September 24 meeting.

This staff recommendation is based on the following:

- The Atascadero Chamber (AC) is a like-organization to the SLO Chamber and has a solid network of relationships with local employers.
- The AC intends to bring the existing Family-Friendly Workplaces Program Manager, Christina Latner, onto its team which will ensure a seamless transition.
- The AC will focus on building out more north county participation, which has been a goal of the program.
- The AC expects to integrate the program with its other efforts, and will tap other AC staff and partners to engage with the program (e.g. AC-based Workforce Development Manager, AC-affiliated Latino Business).
- The AC anticipates growing community-based financial support for the program through its Foundation arm.

Discussion ensued.

Commissioner Kuster asked if a Scope of Work has been developed yet, and asked for clarification on what the Commission is voting on today. Answer: A scope of work will be developed as part of contract negotiations during the summer. Today's vote is Commission approval of continued annual funding at the $75,000 annual level for the coming year, and direction to staff to complete contract negotiations with the Atascadero Chamber. A full contract will be presented to the Commission for approval at the September 24 meeting.

Commission Kuster commented that she appreciates the Atascadero Chamber's ability to fundraise for additional program support through its Foundation arm.

Public Comment:

Christina Latner, SLO Chamber Family-Friendly Workplaces Program Manager, expressed excitement at the possibility of continuing to shape the program under the umbrella of the Atascadero Chamber. She emphasized her perspective that the AC is the appropriate new home for the program.

Josh Cross, CEO of the Atascadero Chamber, submitted written public comment (read by Mr. Wells), expressing commitment and excitement about this opportunity to partner with First 5 in building the next chapter of the county's Family-Friendly Workplaces Program.

Commissioner Ruvalcaba Heredia made a motion to approve First 5's continued investment in FFW, with direction to staff to develop a contract with new funded partner Atascadero Chamber of Commerce. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Mehigan and passed unanimously.

ITEM 8 – Staff Reports

Outreach and Communications Coordinator Misty Livengood provided the following updates:

- Summer Meals Information (on First 5 Community Happenings page): SunBucks and food bank for school age children.
- First 5 will again have an ad in the Mid State Fair program and related promotions this year. The ad includes basic information about First 5 and a QR code with a link to the Community Happenings page of the First 5 SLO County website.
- First 5 is a sponsor of this year's City of Atascadero Movies in the Park series.
- First will be participating as a vendor in the upcoming SELPA Parent Institute.
- Updates on Central Coast Breastfeeding Coalition activities, including monthly meeting and the fall breastmilk drive.
- Pregnancy and Parenting Support of SLO County has mobilized a diaper drive in partnership with Meathead Movers
- Early Learning in the News:
    - Child Care Study: a partnership between the City of Paso Robles and CAPSLO Child Care Resource Connection
    - Opening of the Multi-Sensory room at the Marie Bauer Early Education Center
    - Ticket2Teach/Curiosity2Career from SLOCOE (KSBY is working on a story)
- Central Coast Home Visiting Week campaign: First 5 SLO County is collaborating with First 5 Ventura & First 5 Santa Barbara.
- First 5-funded MICOP parent engagement program (Aprendiendo con Mama i Papa) has launched.
- Mr. Wells attended the Parent Leadership Institute Graduation hosted by Parent Connection (Center for Family Strengthening).
- The Parent Connection referral line will remain up online, though funding cuts have necessitated an end to staffed programming.
- Congratulations to First 5 intern Arlein Logrono, who has graduated from Cal Poly's Public Health program.
- Congratulations to Commissioner Ventura in her new role as Director of the Cal Poly Center for Health Research.
- New First 5 t-shirts are available. Commissioners are encouraged to stop by the office to pick one up.

Ms. Wendt had the following updates:

- IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES. First 5 here in San Luis Obispo County and across the state are engaged with young children and families affected by changing immigration policy
    - First 5 remains an active partner on the UndocuSupport Advisory Committee based at the Community Foundation SLO County
    - The UndocuSupport website includes a curated Immigrant Services Guide page that is also posted on the County of San Luis Obispo website.
    - First 5 Health Access Training Project Director Becca Carsel is facilitating the SLO County Immigrant Support Coalition
    - Commissioner Ruvalcaba-Heredia commented: Some of the organizations used to have events and gatherings that are now being cancelled or postponed due to community members' fear of participating. The Coalition is collaborating to figure

out how to provide resources effectively and safely to the community. Many families are struggling to pay their rent and are living paycheck to paycheck already and they are scared to go to work or to go out for food.

- MEDI-CAL

First 5 staff attend quarterly meetings of CenCal-hosted CalAIM steering committee

The CA Dept of Health Care Services is now requiring local MediCal managed health plans to reach out to local agencies to develop MOUs articulating relationships, roles and responsibilities. First 5s are included in this directive. First 5 SLO County is now developing an MOU with CenCal. This draft will be presented at a future First 5 Commission meeting for approval.

CenCal CEO Marina Owen has invited First 5 Executive Director Wendy Wendt to join the board of the CenCal Foundation, which is in the process of being reactivated.

- LEGAL COUNSEL

Legal firm Adamski Moroski Madden Cumberland & Greene LLP (AMMCG) will be ending their nearly 15 years of legal counsel services for First 5 San Luis Obispo County due to an organizational shift away from public sector client representation. Daniel Cheung, currently assigned as First 5 Legal Counsel, is leaving AMMCG June 30, 2025 and joining the County Counsel team with County of SLO.

The process for selecting a new First 5 legal counsel firm is as follows. A Legal Counsel RFP/Q will be released July 1, 2025 with a deadline of July 31st. A Commissioner/staff ad hoc committee will form to review submissions, interview firms and select a candidate. A final interview with the selected candidate will take place in a closed session during the full meeting of the Commission at its September 24, 2025 meeting. If approved, the firm will enter into a services agreement to commence October 1, 2025.

During the intervening months (July-September 2025) or until a suitable candidate is found, First 5 SLO County will continue to receive legal counsel services through AMMCG and assigned attorney Natalie Frye-Laacke. Ms. Frye-Laacke is familiar with First 5, having served as legal counsel for several years prior to Mr. Cheung.

Discussion Ensued.

Question– Are there legal firms that are already engaged in the public sector, or are there some that will now fill the void due to this firm ending these types of contracts? Ms. Frye-Laacke responded that there is a mix of both; there are local firms and also others that have branches in other parts of the state and also maybe some that will now be choosing to start new public sector contracts.

Question – What is the time commitment for the ad hoc committee? Mr. Cheung responded review of applications (10-15 minutes per application) plus a 3-4 hour interview session.

Commissioner Auran offered to join the ad hoc committee. Ms. Wendt said that she would seek an additional member from absent Commissioners (either Commissioner Ortiz-Legg or Clarkson).

Public comment: None.

ITEM 9 – Commissioner Announcements

Commissioners formally welcomed Commissioner Auran. All Commissioners present shared brief mutual introductions. Commissioner Auran splits her professional time as a pediatrician between Bravo Pediatrics and Tri-Counties Regional Center. She has a special interest in early literacy, and was instrumental in launching a local Reach Out and Read program at Bravo Pediatrics, through which pediatricians give families developmentally appropriate books at every well-child visit from 6-months to 5-years.

Commissioner Ventura reminded her colleagues that this is the final meeting of the fiscal year, which is followed by a summer hiatus. The next meeting will be September 24, 2025. Please keep in touch with staff during this time.

ITEM 10 -- Future Agenda Items

Commissioner request to include an agenda item taking a deeper look at Medi-Cal, CenCal, CalAIM and the relationship with early childhood health and First 5.

Public Comment:

ITEM 11 – Meeting adjourned at 5:01 p.m.