

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

COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES

December 6, 2023 (Approved January 24, 2024)

Current Commissioners Present

James Brescia, EdD (Chair)
Penny Borenstein, MD (Vice Chair)

SLO County Office of Education
SLO County Public Health Department

Linda Belch
Dawn Ortiz-Legg
Patty Clarkson, EdD
James Tedford, MD
Alison Ventura, PhD
Bob Watt

SLO County Dept. of Social Services
SLO County Board of Supervisors
Early Care & Ed Planning Council
Medical Representative (FAAP)
Community at Large
Community at Large

Commissioners Absent/Excused

Erica Ruvalcaba-Heredia, EdD

Community at Large

Staff Present

First 5 Staff: Wendy Wendt, Jason Wells, Misty Livengood
Commission Counsel: Daniel Cheung

Call to Order

Chair Brescia called the meeting to order at 3:02 p.m.

ITEM 1 – Commissioner Announcements and Updates

None

ITEM 2 - Public Comment – Items not on the agenda

Margaret Shepherd-Moore spoke as a member of the FASD Leadership Team. She is also on staff at Transitions Mental Health Association. She requested a future agenda item to present and discuss Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. She emphasized that this silent epidemic affects one in 20 children. She shared her family's personal story of adopting a small boy who showed signs at a young age. He eventually received a diagnosis through a Martha's Place referral, now has an IEP through his school. She is hoping for more supports for other families with FASD members.

ITEM 3 (ACTION ITEM) - Consent Agenda

- a. Approve October 25, 2023 minutes

Public Comment: None

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

ITEM 4: Staff Reports

Misty Livengood, Communications and Outreach Officer, provided an update on the following activities:

- First 5 25th anniversary creative assets are now available through the Association. A communications framework includes messaging for various platforms and audiences. A “We are First 5” campaign will elevate impact stories and include a social media calendar that has thematic connections to First 5’s daily work.
- First 5 Association Annual Meeting and Advocacy Day is coming up Feb 5-7 in Sacramento. First 5 California Summit will be in Oakland on March 25-27. Commissioners interested in attending either event are encouraged to contact Executive Director Wendy Wendt.
- The December print media First 5 in Focus spotlight is on the New Parent Kits program.
- CAPSLO’s new Paso Robles-based Family Resource Center recently held an open house.
- Ms. Livengood highlighted a variety of holiday-related family happenings throughout the county.

Wendy Wendt, Executive Director, reported on the following:

- Confirmation that January 24th is the optimal next meeting date (note: Commissioner Brescia will be out of town though he may be able to attend via zoom, and SLOCOE Board room will not be available). More information to come on alternative location.
- Ms. Wendt will be stepping down from two board positions at the end of 2023 – San Luis Obispo Chamber of Commerce and the First 5 Association Board. She is also leaving her role on the UndocuSupport Executive Committee, though she will remain on the UndocuSupport Leadership Council in 2024.
- CenCal and SLO Health Counts Steering Committee roles will continue in 2024.
- Work continues to integrate child and family needs – notably child care – into economic development planning for the region. Examples include incorporation of child care into a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) coordinated through REACH.
- The Help Me Grow Steering Committee has initiated a work group to look at early intervention workforce issues related to referrals. This information will be shared with the County Healthcare Workforce Collaborative.
- Cuesta College has mobilized a new Family Strengthening Certificate Program.

- In January 2024, First 5 SLO County will be launch the processes to hire a new part-time Special Projects Coordinator (previously held by Kris Roudebush), and to nominate a new at-large Commissioner (Commissioner Bob Watt's final term ends July 2024).

Public Comment: None.

ITEM 5: Strategic Planning Discussion: Resource Allocation Part 2

In anticipation of Commission discussion and deliberation on issues related to contracts, Legal Counsel Daniel Cheung summarized conflict of interest parameters specific to First 5 Commissioners as articulated in SB1090. When individual Commissioners know their organization/department is directly affiliated with a specific contract/program under consideration, that Commissioner states a need to recuse and refrain from participation in any discussion and/or vote.

Ms. Wendt provided a brief introduction to the item. She summarized Commission direction provided to staff at the October 25, 2023 meeting to provide more detailed information regarding the rationale associated with staff recommendations for resource allocations to align with the 2024 Strategic Plan framework – contract renewals, non-renewals, and new investment directions. In preparation for today's meeting, staff has prepared and distributed in advance a document that provides detailed information on funded program purpose, activities, leveraged funds, and rationale for either continuing/discontinuing First 5 funding as well as initial recommendations on potential new investment opportunities.

Laura Keene, First 5 evaluation team consultant, facilitated the balance of the discussion on this item. She began by defining the goal of the discussion: to reach consensus on staff recommendations for 1) funding allocation packages as related to priority areas, and 2) current contracts to discontinue at the end of the current funding period/strategic plan. She also provided an updated strategic planning timeline.

Commissioner members of the Ad Hoc Strategic Planning Committee introduced each of the Priority Areas, and reminded their colleagues to reference the rationale document for additional detail.

The Early Health Foundations Priority Area and recommended resource allocation package was introduced by Ad Hoc Committee Member Commissioner Ali Ventura. She summarized the emphasis on early intervention during the critical first years of children's lives, and a First 5 focus on helping improve system-wide coordination of care. The investment package recommended for this Priority Area includes continuation of First 5 investment toward the following projects: Help Me Grow, BABES*, Perinatal Mental Health Support Services, Vision Screening, County Children's Oral Health Program Manager, Children's Preventive Oral Health Treatment, and Health Access Training Project.

*Staff recommended BABES for continued funding at a similar level during the first year of the 2024 Strategic Plan, with gradual tapered First 5 support over time after that, with the expectation that this longstanding investment with a proven track record and value should be increasingly support through County and/or other sources.

New investment opportunities within this priority area include support for a network of early intervention providers to assess and provide short-term treatment for children with mild-to-moderate delays.

Discussion and Public Comment ensued. The following Commissioners announced recusals for the balance of the discussion on the Early Health Foundations Priority Area package: Commissioner Borenstein (BABES, Oral Health Program Manager), Commissioner Tedford (Children's Preventive Oral Health Treatment), Commissioner Ortiz-Legg (BABES, Oral Health Program Manager).

Commissioner Belch commented relative to Help Me Grow that attention to tech solutions to build a more cohesive database of resources for families and providers would be very helpful as a county. She also recommended that the Health Access Training Project get more directly aligned with the Children and Family Wellness Collaborative (advisory group to local implementation of the Family First Prevention Services Act).

Commissioner Borenstein concurred with Commissioner Belch's emphasis on the importance of shared data.

Commissioner Ventura highlighted the importance of multilingual/multicultural capacity within this Priority Area, and pointed out that this capacity is called out as a goal.

Public Comment Part 1 (re: Early Health Foundation Priority Area):

Natalie Beller, a certified lactation educator/member of the Central Coast Breastfeeding Coalition/Center for Family Strengthening board member, expressed concern about reduction of lactation consultants for WIC families. She encouraged leveraging funding to ensure that this free service remains.

Elizabeth Merson, Public Health Division Manager, echoed the concern and underscored the value of breastfeeding to maternal and infant health. She also highlighted First 5's impact over the years, commented that Mixtec patients access BABES. She explained the challenges related to match funding that depend on First 5 financial contribution.

Jennifer Miller, Public Health Division Manager, further underscored the concern, and spoke from personal experience the importance of breastfeeding support for new mothers, and that it should remain available to all regardless of family circumstance/income. WIC builds opportunity for this type of support for families who couldn't otherwise afford/access it – low income, Spanish and Mixteco speaking.

Steven Crandall, retired Juvenile Court judge/member of the Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) Leadership Team, requested that FASD be added to the First 5 Strategic Plan. He pointed out that this condition is the most common form of prenatal substance use exposure, and is often misunderstood. California lags behind other states in its attention to the issue.

Linda McClure, former Director of SLO County WIC services, thanked First 5 for 24 years of BABES funding. She emphasized that the program and system is working well and that the First 5 investment should continue.

The Parent Engagement, Education and Connection Priority Area and recommended resource allocation package was introduced by Ad Hoc Committee Member Commissioner Linda Belch. She summarized the goal to facilitate increased participation by families in communal learning and peer growth opportunities through replication of promising practices. Currently funded projects recommended for continued First 5 support include South County Parent Pods and Parents Helping Parents. New investment opportunities are recommended to help with expansion on parent engagement models - with a focus on North County as well as countywide parent leadership opportunities. In addition, staff recommends active collaboration with the leadership team that coordinates the SAFE System of Care, to ensure that young children and their families have equitable access and service support within SAFE.

Discussion and Public Comment ensued.

Commissioner Ortiz-Legg requested that First 5 help with “one-stop-shop” approach to connecting families with resources and opportunities.

Public Comment Part 2 (related to Parent Engagement, Education, Connection)

Lisa Fraser, Executive Director of the LINK/Center for Family Strengthening, underscored the importance of First 5 working/coordinating with existing parent groups. She also pointed out the impending challenges with decreasing MHSA funding toward prevention/early intervention. We all need to be thinking about how to braid funds to support good work.

Prior to the introduction of the Early Learning and Child Care Priority section of the presentation and discussion, Commissioner Brescia announced his recusal (due to conflict associated with California State Preschool contract with First 5). He opted to leave the meeting during the ensuing portion. Commissioner Borenstein stepped in to chair the meeting during his absence.

The Early Learning and Child Care Priority Area and recommended resource allocation package was introduced by Ad Hoc Committee Member Commissioner Bob Watt. He summarized the goals associated with this priority – e.g. continued focused attention on broadening cross-sector awareness and responsibility for addressing child care/advancing the sector, attention to increasing challenges in the infant/toddler care subsector, and continued support for work to advance family-friendly workplace culture and practice. Any new First 5 investment opportunities are recommended to be shaped with guidance and partnership between First 5 and the Early Care and Education Planning Council. Commissioner Clarkson is the designated Planning Council representative on the Commission.

Public Comment Part 3 (related to Early Learning and Child Care)

Raechelle Bowlay, Coordinator of the Early Care and Education Planning Council, articulated that the mission/mandate of her organization is to provide planning expertise related to early care and education to the community via the County Office of Education and the County Board of Supervisors. It acts as a neutral body that analyzes need based on evolving circumstances. It stands ready to provide insight into optimal uses of First 5 funding as part of the next strategic planning period.

Ms. Keene summarized First 5 contract investments recommended for discontinued funding in the coming Strategic Plan. These include Early Childhood Nature-Based Experiences, Home Visiting Coordination, California State Preschool, Partnership for Resilient Families, and Basic Needs Family Support. In total these recommendations free up approximately \$700,000 to redirect toward new and/or realigned efforts. Commissioner Borenstein announced a recusal as related to the Home Visiting Coordination contract.

Public Comment part 4 (related to recommendation for non-renewal of First 5 contracts)

A letter was submitted as public comment by Sheldon Smith, Assistant Superintendent, SLO County Office of Education. The letter was distributed at the meeting to all Commissioners and read aloud to those present. It expressed perspective on the recommendation to discontinue multi-year First 5 funding support for California State Preschool (CSPP) programs. Dr. Smith shared gratitude for the many years of First 5 funding, and explained that the proposed conclusion of the existing contract will have a stalling effect on other SLOCOE projects, notably a planned ECE Training Center.

Ms. Wendt provided some clarification – that the recommendation for nonrenewal of the existing SLOCOE contract is based on its current scope, which is limited to supplementing CSPP funding to allow for “over-income” enrollments in the program. The strategic planning process has laid out a clear framework for continued First 5 investment in early learning and care across a range of potential investment areas based on current need and conditions. The recommendation is to consult with the Early Care and Education Planning Council regarding First 5’s optimal role as funder, network-builder and advocate.

Raechelle Bowlay, Early Care and Education Planning Council Coordinator, commented that she recognizes that the recommendation is for non-renewal of current contracts as they are currently defined, which if limited in scope need to be reevaluated and funding deployed in other ways that support and acknowledge the current ECE landscape.

Lisa Fraser, Executive Director of the LINK/Center for Family Strengthening, oversees the Partnership for Resilient Families which receives First 5 funding. This investment helps the LINK bilingual bicultural staff capacity to provide family advocate services for North County families amid an increasing need for support.

Commissioner Ortiz-Legg expressed support for any new path for First 5 investment that directs resources to those communities most in need.

Ms. Keene then presented on proposed Areas for Strategic Support – basic needs, early literacy, nutrition and physical activity, safety and healing, and substance use prevention/treatment. She emphasized that these areas are in many ways align with Priority Areas above. First 5 resources and time will be deployed in these areas to amplify messaging and awareness, ensure integration within other priority areas.

Public Comment Part 5 (Strategic Support Areas)

Marilu Gomez, Family Advocate with the Paso School District, emphasized the importance of early literacy, parents are children's first teachers, urged First 5 to continue its active support in this area.

Ms. Wendt provided a brief summary of the remaining timeline for Strategic Plan completion before the end of the fiscal year, and reminded that staff must be able to begin moving forward with resource allocation related to contract negotiations/development in a concrete way.

Mr. Wells added the reminder that staff needs direction from the Commission on which recommendations to move forward with, based on materials submitted, discussion and questions raised.

[Commissioner Brescia returned to the meeting and resumed chair responsibilities.]

Commissioners moved to Item 6 to formulate and vote on motions to provide direction to staff per comments above.

ITEM 6: Future Agenda Items

Commissioner Borenstein introduced a motion to give direction to staff to begin the process of developing contracts for those items that did not have any public or commissioner comment. Commissioner Belch seconded.

Discussion and *Public Comment*:

Commissioner Ventura reminded that BABES will need additional discussion or a revised recommendation as the one program with a current recommendation to “taper” over time.

Elizabeth Merson, Division Manager with Public Health, asked that First 5 provide additional guidance to Public Health staff on what information is needed to inform their decision on BABES. Commissioner Brescia responded that this request does not pertain to the motion.

The above motion passed 6:1 (Brescia opposed; Ortiz-Legg left the meeting prior to the vote and Ruvalcaba-Heredia was absent).

Commissioner Belch posed a second motion to agendize an action item at the next meeting for discussion and vote on the projects currently recommended for nonrenewal. These include CA State Preschool Program (SLOCOE), Basic Needs Family Support (CAPSLO), Partnership for Resilient Families (LINK), Early Childhood Nature-Based Experiences (SLO Botanical Garden). Motion also includes discussion and action on current recommendation to begin tapering First 5 funding for BABES over time.

Commissioner Borenstein modified the motion to add “consideration of ways to incorporate FASD into the strategic plan.

The motion as modified was seconded by Commissioner Watt.

Motion passed 6:0:1 (Commissioner Brescia abstained).

Public Comment:

Crystal Reisner, with CAPSLO Migrant/Seasonal Head Start, expressed gratitude for the meeting today. She will share notes with her time. She is looking forward to attending more First 5 meetings in the future. She works with teachers, families and children in Nipomo, Lompoc, Guadalupe, and Santa Maria.

Steven Crandall, FASD Leadership Team, requested an opportunity at a future meeting to agendize a presentation on FASD and First 5's role. Commissioner Brescia instructed him to make an appointment with Ms. Wendt.

ITEM 7: Adjourn
5:45 p.m.