

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

**COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES**  
December 3, 2025 (Approved January 28, 2026)

**Current Commissioners Present**

Leslie Mehigan (Vice Chair)

Community at Large

Michelle Auran, MD

Medical Representative (FAAP)

Penny Borenstein, MD

SLO County Public Health Department

Patty Clarkson, EdD

Early Care & Ed Planning Council

Joe Koski, EdD

SLO County Office of Education

Nancy Kuster

SLO County Dept. of Social Services

Erica Ruvalcaba-Heredia, EdD

Community at Large

Alison Ventura, PhD

Community at Large

**Commissioners Absent/Excused**

Dawn Ortiz-Legg (Vice Chair)

SLO County Board of Supervisors

**Staff Present**

First 5 Staff: Wendy Wendt, Jason Wells, Misty Livengood, Maggie Payne

First 5 Intern: Elizabeth Goebel

Commission Counsel: Craig Steele

**Call to Order**

Vice Chair Mehigan called the meeting to order at 3:00 p.m.

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

None

**ITEM 2 (ACTION ITEM) - Consent Agenda**

- a. Approve October 22, 2025 minutes
- b. Approve 2026 Commission Meeting Calendar

*Public Comment: None*

Commissioner Ventura made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda with modifications. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Ruvalcaba and passed unanimously.

### **ITEM 3: First 5 Annual Evaluation Report**

First 5 Executive Director previewed the agenda item by expressing gratitude for the work that the Evaluation Team has led over the last several years.

First 5 Evaluation Team Member Laura Keene presented on this item. She first reminded Commissioners of the new Theory of Change framework that was introduced at the October 2025 Commission meeting. She also pointed out several new visuals that first appear in this year's report (thermometer and awareness-will-action continuum).

The evaluation report this year offers a high-level assessment of the FY24-25 year. The fundamental question asked was "How have First 5 efforts contributed to advancing First 5 goals from the 2024-28 Strategic Plan.

Significant policy shifts at all levels of government impacted supports for young children and families (e.g. immigration enforcement, budget cuts). Local organizations, including First 5, mobilized creativity and innovation in the face of change. The First 5 Early Childhood System Stabilization Fund is such an example.

Evaluation team member Laura Keene summarized highlights of the report. She reminded that the Theory of Change serves as a lens for the evaluation findings.

#### Sample of Direct Funding Findings:

- HEALTH -- 90% of targeted encounters by funded partners were reached. Many partners experienced staffing challenges, but most have filled gaps and are rapidly rebuilding capacity.
- PARENT ENGAGEMENT programs reached 99% of targeted encounters.
- CHILD CARE investments have shifted away from funding slots to funding system capacity.

#### Sample of Network Building/Advocacy Findings:

- HEALTH – MediCal Engagement, Immigrant Support Coalition, Help Me Grow Network, Martha's Place Transition
- PARENT ENGAGEMENT – Communications/Outreach activities out of the First 5 shop.
- CHILD CARE – FFW, Uplift Child Care Coalition, ARPA

Discussion ensued.

Commissioner Borenstein asked why ARPA Child Care Investment is listed in the "Action" category along with the Evaluation report's continuum of progress (awareness-willingness-action).

Ms. Wendt explained that the initial action – County Board of Supervisors allocation of \$3 million in ARPA funds toward child care support – was approved several years ago, with significant participation and influence by First 5 and other partners' advocacy. At that time, the funds were appropriated directly to the SLO County Office of Education, which in turn has managed a process through the County Early Care and Education Council (ECEC) to distribute support to local child care businesses and professionals through non-competitive and competitive grant processes. Nearly 100% of the allocated funds have been spent.

Commissioner Borenstein asked how these slots that were created will continue after ARPA dollars run out. Staff offered to invite Raechelle Bowlay from the ECEC to present on the ARPA investment at a future Commission meeting.

Commissioner Koski asked if all initiatives were expected to go from Awareness to Will to Action. Evaluation team answer: Yes, but the pace depends on the project and initiative. Ms. Wendt added that sometimes First 5 efforts catalyze other work. The Immigrant Support Coalition is an example through which partner organizations were able to come together and identify additional areas of needed work. Ms. Keane noted that even as these initiatives continue to move along without the direct influence of First 5, its convening strengths and abilities allow for more work to be done by others.

Associate Director Jason Wells offered that these new visuals are very helpful and give us a great way to track progress and look at the work being done in different ways

*Public Comment: None*

Commissioner Borenstein made a motion to accept the Annual Evaluation Report. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Clarkson and passed unanimously.

#### **ITEM 4: Staff Reports**

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

- Early Childhood Systems Stabilization Fund Request for Applications (RFA) was released on October 30, 2025. As of this Commission meeting date, 3 applications have been received. Staff expect more to be submitted by the application deadline of December 5, 2025. Commissioner Mehigan inquired if the application opportunity is well known across the community. Answer: Yes – the funding opportunity was broadly advertised. Commissioner Borenstein asked for clarification on the total \$600,000 in stabilization funds that was approved by the Commission. Ms. Wendt reminded that the total was approved across a three-year time period: Year 1 -- \$300,000; Year 2 -- \$200,000; Year 3 -- \$100,000. This RFA was for a total of \$150,000, with grant range from \$5k-\$50k. An additional \$100,000 has already been distributed out via the Community Foundation SLO County Together for SLO Initiative. The remaining

\$50,000 is being held for additional strategic investment if needed this year. Unspent funds will be carried into the FY26-27 budget year.

- Uplift Child Care Coalition Session 1 convenings took place in November.
- First 5 was a sponsor at the Central Coast Breastfeeding Coalition Milk Drive. 2,700 ounces of milk were donated. The San Jose-based Milk Bank services the Sierra Vista NICU.
- Tolosa Children's Dental Center is accepting new patients at its Paso Robles location
- Parent Connection is offering a Positive Parenting series.
- First 5 Association is part of the newly launched Choose Children Campaign, designed to lift up children's issues as part of the 2026 Gubernatorial Campaign.
- The First 5 California Stronger Starts Road Show will be present at the Atascadero Winter Wonderland December 12.
- Commissioners were reminded to check out the First 5 Community Happenings webpage and social media channels for up-to-date information on upcoming family-friendly events around the county.

Maggie Payne, Special Projects Coordinator, reported on the following:

- Uplift Child Care Coalition attendance at November Session 1 convenings was at over 65 individuals representing all six Central Coast counties and multiple sectors. Session 2 will take place in late January.
- Help Me Grow Centralized Access Point has hired two new behavioral specialists and is now fully staffed. The Help Me Grow Network held an in-person meeting in November. Network "theme teams are working on 1) a network directory, 2) an updated directory of pediatric providers, including specialty care, and 3) advance planning for a Pediatric Town Hall scheduled for April 29, 2026. Commissioner Borenstein expressed interest in seeing the updated Pediatric provider lists. Commissioner Mehigan asked to be part of the Pediatric Town Hall planning group.

Ms. Wendt reported on the following:

- The December 9 Board of Supervisors Meeting includes an update on the Martha's Place Sustainability Plan.
- The First 5 Association is offering a series of zoom-based workshops targeted to Commissioners:
  - Inside First 5 Association of California (12/18/25, 12:00 pm -1:00 pm)
  - First 5 Commissioner Onboarding: Understanding the Network, Role, and Impact (1/22/26 10:00 am-11:30 am)
  - Regional Commissioner Roundtables (5/19/26 9:30 am -11:00 am)

Commissioner Koski commented that he attended a well-delivered Association workshop on the power of storytelling in advocacy work. He added that the workshop set a high bar for his future participation as a First 5 Commissioner.

*Public Comment: None.*

### **ITEM 5: Future Agenda Items**

ARPA Child Care funding update, including a report on how the money was used in the child care sector, and plans for longer term sustainability.

Commissioner Ventura presentation on her research on technology use and early bonding.

### **ITEM 6 – Commissioner Announcements and Updates**

Reminder of special location for the January 2026 meeting – at the SLO County Office of Education “MOT Training Center” at 3420 Watson Drive, San Luis Obispo – directly above the main SLOCOE building.

Commissioner Borenstein provided further details on the Martha’s Place Sustainability Plan. The Board Letter is posted, and will include a high-level presentation by County Behavioral Health Department Director Star Graber. Commissioner Borenstein feels optimistic about the FY26-27 year.

Commissioner Borenstein also provided an update on the reopening of the WIC office in Paso Robles. She added that the California Department of Public Health is holding a meeting with information on planned defunding of oral health programs.

Commissioner Mehigan asked how she and her colleagues can assist with getting more people to apply for the First 5 Stabilization grant. Mr. Wells urged Commissioners to encourage people in their networks to apply.

### **ITEM 7: Adjourn**

4:25 p.m.

Light holiday reception ensued for Commissioners, staff and members of the public.