

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

COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES
January 28, 2026 (Approved March 25, 2026)

Current Commissioners Present

Dawn Ortiz-Legg (Chair)
Leslie Mehigan (Vice Chair)

SLO County Board of Supervisors
Community at Large

Michelle Auran, M.D.
Penny Borenstein, M.D.
Patty Clarkson, Ed.D.
Joe Koski, Ed.D.
Nancy Kuster
Erica Ruvalcaba, Ed.D.
Alison Ventura, Ph.D.

Medical Representative (AAP, Ch 2)
SLO County Public Health Department
Early Care & Educ. Planning Council
SLO County Office of Education
Department of Social Services
Community at Large
Community at Large

Current Commissioners Absent

None

Staff Present

First 5 Staff: Wendy Wendt, Jason Wells, Misty Livengood, Maggie Payne
First 5 Intern: Elizabeth Goebel
Commission Counsel: Craig Steele
Commission Evaluators: Laura Keene, Becca Carsel

Call to Order

Chair Ortiz-Legg called the meeting to order at 3:01 PM.

ITEM 1 - Public Comment – Items not on the agenda

None

ITEM 2 (ACTION ITEM) - Consent Agenda

- a. Approval of the December 3, 2025 Minutes
- b. Approval of FY25-26 Q2 Financial Report
- c. Confirm BOS Commissioner Appointment – Dawn Ortiz -Legg (one-year term Jan-Dec 2026)

Public Comment: None

Commissioner Ventura made a motion to approve Consent Agenda a/b. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Ortiz-Legg and passed 8:0 (Borenstein absent for vote)

Commissioner Koski made a motion to approve Consent Agenda c. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Kuster and passed 7:0 (Ortiz-Legg recused; Borenstein absent for vote)

ITEM 3 – Approval of Grant Agreement Slate – Early Childhood Systems Stabilization Fund

Associate Director Jason Wells presented an overview of the process that led to the proposed grant agreement slate. The program’s purpose for FY25-26 is to directly invest a total of \$150,000 in First 5 funds toward sustaining essential programs/services for families with children prenatal to age 5 impacted by budgetary losses and/or policy shifts. This is in addition to \$100,000 already contributed to the Community Foundation SLO County’s *Together for SLO County* Initiative.

A Request for Applications was released on October 30, 2025. Applications were due December 5, 2025. A Grant Application Review Committee met on December 18 to determine recommendations, which are being presented for Commission approval at the January 28, 2026, meeting. The Grant terms are anticipated to begin February 1, 2026, and conclude June 30, 2026.

A total of twelve (12) applications were received with requests totaling \$311,700. The Review Committee reached a consensus to recommend nine (9) applications for funding. A grant agreement and scope of work is recommended for each grantee. A one-time payment to each grantee will be issued following Commission approval. Grantees will be required to submit a year-end report documenting how the funding was spent and how many children/families/providers were served.

First 5 SLO County Early Childhood System Stabilization Fund FY25-26: Funding Recommendations		
Agency Name	Agreement Amount	Funds Support
Womenade SLO	\$5,000	Emergency assistance to families with young children facing housing, food, utility, and transportation crises; requests funds primarily for direct family assistance for ~10 families with children 0-5.
South County Youth Coalition (SCYC)	\$5,000	Emergency assistance to families with young children facing housing, food, utility, and transportation crises; requests funds primarily for direct family assistance (for ~25 families) plus modest administrative/bookkeeping costs.
Center for Family Strengthening – Parent Connection	\$25,000	Parent Connection key staff (program director and bilingual/bicultural parent educators), outreach/marketing, technology, basic-needs stipends, and limited indirect costs.
Food Bank Coalition of San Luis Obispo County (SLO Food Bank)	\$30,000	Staff and food purchases tied to children’s programs (such as backpacks and produce distributions) so families with young children continue to receive healthy food.
Cuesta College Children’s Center	\$10,000	Child care class expansion through purchase of essential classroom furniture and equipment (tables, chairs, shelves, rug, dramatic play kitchen, etc.)
CASA of San Luis Obispo County (Court Appointed Special Advocates)	\$10,000	A portion of the CASA Volunteer Training Manager’s salary/benefits to sustain recruitment, training, and supervision of CASA volunteers serving children 0-5 in foster care.
San Luis Obispo Child Development Resource Center	\$20,000	Trauma-informed therapy and in-class behavioral support for children ages 2-5; funds help restore therapist and rehabilitation specialist hours (individual, family, group, and in-class support).
Pregnancy and Parenting Support of San Luis Obispo County (PPS)	\$20,000	Staff time for bilingual/bicultural family doulas/car-seat technicians, Baby Bank supplies (diapers, formula, safe-sleep items, car seats, etc.), and core overhead to keep the Baby Bank and warmline operating.
Community Action Partnership of San Luis Obispo County, Inc. (CAPSLO)	\$25,000	Restoration of SAFE Lead Case Manager time to serve children 0-5 and their families countywide.
TOTAL	\$150,000	

Discussion ensued.

Ortiz-Legg thanked Commissioner Clarkson for participating on the review committee.

Commissioner Mehigan asked for clarification on how soon the funds will be distributed.
Answer: Within 10 days.

Commissioner Auran asked if grantees will present at a future Commission meeting. Answer: This is not written into the grant agreement as a requirement, but inviting grantees is a possibility. Commissioner Ortiz-Legg commented that Commissioners would appreciate hearing from grantees in this manner.

Commissioner Borenstein asked if the grant term is only five months. Answer: Yes.

Public Comment:

Lisa Fraser, Center for Family Strengthening Executive Director, thanked the Commission for this creative approach, and willingness to support local organizations during a stressful time. She appreciates the investment into what the Parent Connection program does -- upfront parenting education when children are at their youngest to help strengthen families and prevent involvement with child welfare.

Molly Kern, SLO Food Bank Executive Director, expressed gratitude for the investment that will help the organization focus on the county's youngest residents. The Food Bank has faced \$1 million in federal cuts. Meanwhile, demand is up: Last year, 45,000 people were served each month. Now that number is up to 54,000 monthly. Seven percent (7%) of those served are children 0-5. First 5 funding gives the Food Bank a chance to grow our capacity to serve the community.

Commissioner Ortiz-Legg underscored direction to staff to provide a summary update at the conclusion of the grant period, in part as a mechanism to continue helping First 5 determine need and support for families during early childhood/parenting.

Commissioner Mehigan made a motion to approve \$150,000 in Grant agreements among 9 grantees (see list above). The motion was seconded by Commissioner Ruvalcaba and passed unanimously.

ITEM 4 – Review and Approval, First 5 SLO County Contracting and Procurement Policy Update

Executive Director Wendy Wendt introduced this item. She thanked First 5 Legal Counsel Craig Steele for providing guidance on a full review and updating of the First 5 SLO County Contracting and Procurement Policy.

Mr. Steele added that one behind-the-scenes task is that the auditor asks legal counsel whether they have reviewed key policies. He pointed out that staff and legal team will only bring forward to the Commission those policies that are deemed as needing to be brought up to date.

Commissioner Ortiz-Legg expressed appreciation for this exercise. She is happy that Mr. Steele is taking a fresh look at the policy portfolio.

Public Comment: None.

Commissioner Ventura made a motion to approve the Updated Contracting and Procurement Policy. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Borenstein and passed unanimously.

ITEM 5 – Review and Endorsement, First 5 Association 2026 Policy Priorities

Ms. Wendt presented on this item. The First 5 Association – a network of county-level First 5 agencies – develops and ratifies an annual list of Policy Priorities. Historically, First 5 SLO County staff have shared this state-level document as a point-of-information. This year and potentially in the future, First 5 SLO County staff are recommending that the local Commission review and endorse the Association Policy Priority document as a guiding framework for its own local, regional and state public education/advocacy activities. This approach allows for stronger alignment in messaging and community awareness building efforts.

Discussion ensued.

Commissioner Ortiz-Legg commented that the Association Policy Priorities seem comprehensive and cover a lot of ground. She added that in a geographically spread-out county like San Luis Obispo, First 5 needs to ensure that it is reaching all areas to support families regardless of proximity to core services.

Commissioner Ventura inquired about the First 5 Association Policy Priority category that focuses on First 5 sustainability. How do we leverage this focus at the local level, and what in particular is the Association pursuing on our behalf? Staff offered several examples – some local First 5s work with County government to include early childhood priorities in the County's Legislative Platform. This reinforces messaging at the state level. There are also efforts at state and local level to promote First 5's potential role in administering mandates or program innovations launched out of state agencies such as CA Department of Social Services, CA Department of Public Health, etc.

Commissioner Ventura asked if the local Commission is interested in the Sustainability category, perhaps more Commission resources should be assigned to this work in the future.

Ms. Wendt provided some examples of other local First 5's that have supplemented their core Tobacco Tax appropriation with other revenue sources that support mission-driven work: Successful tax measure in Sonoma County; MediCal billing in Yolo County.

Commissioners Ventura and Ortiz-Legg suggested that further analysis of our options in this area is warranted – possibly through a subcommittee with Commissioners and staff. Commissioner Ortiz-Legg further suggested to endorse the Priorities as they are, and then ask for a deeper conversation to diversify/strengthen our local revenue portfolio.

Public Comment: None.

Commissioner Ventura made a motion to endorse the First 5 Association 2026 Policy Priorities as they align with the local Strategic Plan, and learn more about sustainability from other counties and other state partners. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Clarkson and passed unanimously.

ITEM 6 – Staff Reports

Misty Livengood, Outreach and Communications Coordinator, provided the following updates:

- First 5 contributed \$100,000 to the Community Foundation *Together for SLO County* Initiative. Grant awardees were announced in December 2025.
- A First 5 Funded Partners meeting was held at TriCounties Regional Center, and included presentations by the SLO Food Bank, WIC, Department of Social Services, and North Star Strategies. The latter was a talk on navigating AI in the context of human services work.
- Ms. Livengood provided updates on happenings hosted by Funded Partners, including Pregnancy and Parenting Support, and the South County Youth Coalition.
- South County Youth Coalition is offering its next Parent Support classes in March.
- Social Media promotions continue to flow out of the First 5 Communications shop, including Water Safety Month (January), and Children's Dental Health Month (February).
- Rob Reiner was remembered as a Father of First 5, having been a lead champion of Proposition 10.
- First 5 CA Stronger Starts Road Show hosted a booth at the Atascadero Winter Wonderland festival.
- Month of the Child events are approaching during the month of April. One event on "pause" this year is Children's Day in the Plaza.

Commissioner Ortiz-Legg concurred that the Children's Day in the Plaza "pause" makes sense.

Ms. Wendt provided updates on the following:

- First 5 SLO County is hosting its third Pediatric Town Hall on April 29, 2026. More news to come on speakers, theme and venue.
- The SLO County BHTA Integrated Plan draft is available for public comment; First 5 staff and partners submitted written and spoken feedback requesting attention on the 0-5 population in the final Plan document.
- The Immigrant Support Coalition continues to meet on a monthly basis, facilitated by Becca Carsel in her role as lead of the First 5-funded Health Access Training Project.

Maggie Payne, Special Projects Coordinator, updated the Commission on progress with the Uplift Child Care Coalition. Five convenings of Session 2 focused on deeper wisdom sharing on innovations reinforcing 1) the child care workforce, 2) child care infrastructure and facilities, 3) resource and referral navigation for families, 4) employer-supported child care, and 5) community investment in child care.

PUBLIC COMMENT: None

ITEM 7: Executive Director Evaluation: Process Introduction

First 5 Legal Counsel Craig Steele introduced this item. He explained the historical role of Legal Counsel to coordinate the annual personnel evaluation for the Executive Director (ED) at First 5 SLO County, and is comfortable to continue in this tradition. The process involves a self-evaluation submitted by the ED, coupled with a written performance review form completed by all nine Commissioners and compiled into a summary document by Legal Counsel. A closed session is scheduled for the next Commission meeting for final review and discussion with the ED. Note that the evaluation is not directly connected to an individualized salary increase. Ms. Wendt follows the same salary step and COLA increase schedule as other First 5 SLO County staff.

He shared his perspective on the value of the ED evaluation. The Commission's role in carrying this out is one of its most important functions, both as her employer and supervisor, and as a way to evaluate the organization as it functions under her leadership. He encouraged 100% participation in the process. He emphasized that this is Commissioners' opportunity to help the ED think/move forward for her own professional growth and for the growth of the organization.

Ms. Wendt will complete a self-evaluation. This year, Mr. Steele's office will create and distribute an evaluation form in February for Commissioners to complete. A closed session item during the March meeting will be agendaized for the Commission to discuss the evaluation and review with Ms. Wendt.

Commissioner Auran asked to view past evaluations for context.

Commissioners asked if comments are reported anonymously to the ED, and pointed out that anonymity contributes to greater honesty in providing feedback. Answer: It has been the practice historically for Commissioner comment themes to be summarized and individual answers compiled without attestation. It is up to the Commissioners how to convey sensitive feedback to the ED. During closed session or as follow-up, the ED will have an opportunity to respond to/reflect on plans to address construct feedback.

PUBLIC COMMENT: None

ITEM 8 (ACTION ITEM) - Election of 2026 Officers: Chair and Vice Chair

Commissioners Ortiz-Legg and Mehigan expressed interest in continuing in their respective roles as Chair and Vice Chair.

Public Comment: None

Commissioner Borenstein made a motion to approve the nomination slate: Commissioner Ortiz-Legg as the 2026 Chair and Commissioner Mehigan as the Vice Chair. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Kuster and passed unanimously.

ITEM 9: Future Agenda Items

- March 25, 2026 Meeting: Presentation by Raechelle Bowlay (SLO County Early Care and Education Planning Council) on local ARPA funding for child care sector
- May or June Meeting: Commissioner Ventura presentation on current research.
- June or September Meeting: Mini-presentations by Stabilization Fund grantees.
- Future meeting (date to be determined): Effects of immigration policy/enforcement on children and families. What is/can be the role of county systems?

PUBLIC COMMENT: None

ITEM 10 – Commissioner Announcements and Updates

Commissioner Ortiz-Legg thanked Commissioner Koski for arranging the space at the MOT Center. Commissioner Kuster added that it is a nice venue. Commissioner Koski mentioned that it could be used for future meetings, and that in addition there is a new SLOCOE-administered meeting space in Paso Robles that would work well. Commissioner Koski attended the F5 Association On-boarding workshop for new Commissioners and was impressed with the quality and content.

Commissioner Ortiz-Legg provided an update on the County-hosted Truth Act Forum, a publicly noticed meeting held on January 27, 2026. The forum was intended to inform the public about how the County Sheriff's Office interacts with federal immigration authorities

under California's SB 54, including what is permitted and what is restricted. The Sheriff shared information on incarcerated individuals and limited interactions with ICE, which are allowed only under specific circumstances, such as cases involving certain serious or violent crimes.

In response, Supervisors Paulding and Ortiz-Legg joined together to create an Ad-Hoc committee to provide information and potential recommendations to the Board of Supervisors:

- Identify what services are available and/or needed to support families of those deported or held by ICE.
- Identify what impacts the current immigration actions have on the Latinx community, the industries where they work, the schools, etc.
- Clarify the practices of local County offices and agencies in managing this situation.
- Examine the value of ICE Free Zones – Do they provide security?
- Determine what education is needed to clarify the legal interaction of County Sheriff and ICE, under California State Law SB 54, rather than “collaborating with ICE” community perceptions.

This Ad-Hoc Committee will provide a report to the Board of Supervisors on April 7th, 2026.

PUBLIC COMMENT: None

ITEM 11 – Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 4:59 p.m.