

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

**COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES**  
March 25, 2020 (Approved May 14, 2020)

**Current Commissioners Present**

Bruce Gibson (Chair)

SLO County Board of Supervisors

James Brescia

SLO County Office of Education

Erica Ruvalcaba-Heredia

Community at Large

Melinda Sokolowski

Child Care Planning Council

James Tedford

Medical Representative (AAP, Ch 2)

Alison Ventura

Community at Large

Bob Watt

Community at Large

**Current Commissioners Absent**

Penny Borenstein (Vice Chair)

SLO County Public Health Department

Devin Drake

Department of Social Services

**Staff Present**

First 5 staff: Wendy Wendt, Jason Wells, Misty Livengood, Sarah Reinhart Kris  
Roudebush

Commission Counsel: Natalie Frye-Laacke

**Call to Order**

Chair Gibson called the meeting to order at 3:00 PM.

**ITEM 1 –Chair Comments**

Chair Gibson welcomed Commissioners, staff and public to the first-ever virtual meeting of the First 5 SLO County Commission, in compliance with the Governor’s Executive Order related to health and safety during the COVID-19 pandemic. Associate Director Jason Wells provided a brief primer on “Zoom etiquette.”

**ITEM 2 - Public Comment – Items not on the agenda**

Becca Carsel, Contractor for the First 5 Health Access Project, inquired if there would be a First 5 update on CoVID response. Chair Gibson responded that Item 5 is dedicated to this topic.

**ITEM 3 – Commissioner Announcements**

Commissioner Watt thanked First 5 Executive Director Wendy Wendt for helping LINK staff member Danilda Reyes with Food Bank distribution in Cambria.

#### **ITEM 4 (ACTION ITEM) - Consent Agenda**

- a. Approval of the January 22, 2020 Minutes
- b. Approval of the February 20, 2020 Special Meeting Minutes
- c. Receipt and Approval of First 5 CA Annual Report FY 2018-19 as required by the Children and Families Act

*Public Comment: None*

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

#### **ITEM 5 – Update on COVID-19 and Related First 5 Activities**

Executive Director Wendy Wendt summarized the effects of COVID-19 and shelter-in-place ordinance on local demographics, local response, and office logistics:

Effects on our Demographic

- Child Care
- Domestic Violence
- Access to Basic Needs Supplies – food (WIC supplies disappearing), cleaning supplies, diapers, etc.
- Drop in Income/Job Security
- Immigrant Family Isolation
- Preventive and Non-Emergent Health Care and Early Intervention on Pause or Slow Down
- Early Development Support Organizations in Short and Long Term Crisis

What we are doing locally

- Planning for Emergency Child Care (Wendy)
- Connecting with Funded Partners on Status (Jason)
- Planning for Emergency Funding (Wendy)
- Daily Talk Read Sing Livestreams (Jason)
- Compilation/Dissemination of Resources for Families Compilation
  - Activity Kits for Families Sheltering at Home (Misty)
  - Information in Spanish (Sarah)
- Recalibrating We Are the Care – Child Care value is more evident than ever (Kris)
- Connection to State
  - Advocacy/Policy (Wendy)
  - Communications (Misty)

Office Logistics/Misc

- Remote office fully functional
- Possibility of FEMA reimbursement for COVID related work, investments

*Commissioner Comments:*

Commission Ventura pointed out the nonprofits like children's museums are also struggling, may be left out of support plan because they are not deemed "essential."

Commission Ruvalcaba-Heredia commented that immigrant families are struggling to pay utility bills.

Commission Gibson encouraged advocacy for any effort that streamlines applications for existing social services. He also voiced his perspective that regulations barring undocumented immigrant populations from supports should be waived.

Commissioner Sokolowski pointed out the CAPSLO family advocates and Head Start staff can help provide support for families to maneuver through red tape.

*Public Comments:*

Becca Carsel, Health Access Training Projects, pointed out the undocumented families cannot get unemployment; evictions are looming and concrete financial support is needed.

**ITEM 6 (ACTION ITEM) -- Approve Emergency Response Funding Policy**

Ms. Wendt introduced this item with a request for Commission approval to approve new Emergency Response Policy that would allow for a special budget allocation toward emergency response in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. This is an unprecedented move for First 5 San Luis Obispo County, in an unprecedented time, and will allow for nimble funding decisions in this or possibly other disaster situations. Other county First 5's in regions that have suffered through wildfires have established similar funding strategies.

First 5 Attorney Natalie Frye-Laacke explained that the Commission needs two steps to activate such a fund. First, a policy must be established to articulate scope/use of funding, mechanism for uses and fund dissemination.

Ms. Wendt laid out the draft policy, that includes clear definitions of "local emergency" and "urgent needs," establishes a cap of \$75,000 for a single local emergency, and articulates a protocol for dissemination decision-making involving the Executive Director in consultation with and final approval from the Commission Chair and Vice Chair.

*Commission Discussion:*

Commission Tedford inquired how \$75,000 was determined as the maximum amount. Ms. Wendt responded that in consultation with First 5 Counsel, this seemed like a good conservative place to start with a new funding policy.

Commission Gibson suggested that the policy include language that relies on the county or state to declare an emergency that would then allow First 5 to activate the fund. Associate Director Jason Wells expressed concern that there may be a circumstance in which the county has not yet declared an emergency and then First 5 would be limited in its ability to act

expeditiously. Commissioner Gibson suggested building in language that allows for flexibility to address “urgent conditions.”

Commissioner Sokolowski likes the idea of maintaining local control.

Commissioner Gibson asked if First 5 SLO County has sufficient reserves. Wendt answer: yes. He also asked if we have the ability to make a budget adjustment in the middle of the year like this. Frye-Laacke answer: with a meeting and a proposal that is voted on.

Ms. Wendt proposed a three-layer approach:

- Establish a modest amount in First 5’s annual budget for emergency response
- Maintain a policy for out-of-budget decision making between meetings
- In the case of a major future emergency, a Commission meeting and vote would be required to dip into reserves.

Commissioners requested a change to the draft policy that allows for “emergency” to be defined according to a county declaration. Ms. Frye-Laacke proposed the following updated language:

*A "Local Emergency" occurs when the County of San Luis Obispo has made a Proclamation of Local Emergency pursuant to California Government Code Sections 8558(c) and 8630.*

*Public Comment: NONE*

Commissioner Watt moved to approve the Emergency Response Policy with changes per Ms. Frye-Laacke’s recommended change as identified above. Commissioner Brescia seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

## **ITEM 7 (ACTION ITEM) -- First 5 SLO County COVID-19 Response – Approve Funding Level and Priority**

Ms. Wendt introduced this item, explaining that now that the Emergency Response Policy is in place per Item 6, Commissioners are requested to approve an action to define the priority and mechanism for fund distribution. She introduced a proposal for First 5 to partner with the Community Foundation San Luis Obispo County, which already has activated a Disaster Support Fund and has established expertise/protocols for rapid deployment of resources.

Heidi McPherson, CEO of the Community Foundation, explained the Disaster Support Fund and introduced opportunities for First 5 to partner. The Fund opened on March 13<sup>th</sup> with \$10,000 seed funds, and rapidly raised an additional \$50,000. The Foundation also surveyed local nonprofits regarding immediate needs. Foundation staff are planning a rapid turnaround timetable that is two weeks from announcement to deployment. No administrative fees will be charged. The focus of grants will be on agencies that address urgent needs – food access, child care, domestic violence victim support, mitigating economic insecurity. Grants will be unrestricted and amounts will range from \$5k-\$20k.

*Commissioner Comments:*

Commissioner Gibson expressed support for the idea of teaming up with the Community Foundation in a “funder collaborator” model as a way to expeditiously and accurately direct funds to address urgent needs. He suggested directing Ms. Wendt along with the Commission Chair and Vice Chair to activate this approach.

Ms. Frye Laacke recommended assigning an alternate to Dr. Borenstein (Vice Chair) given her current and exclusive focus on her responsibilities as Chief Health Officer for the County of San Luis Obispo. Commissioner Watt offered to take this role.

Commissioners directed Ms. Wendt to proceed toward a funder-collaborator plan with the Community Foundation.

*Public Comment: None*

### **ITEM 8 – Strategic Planning 2020**

Associate Director Jason Wells provided an overview on assigned program funding for the beginning of the next strategic plan. Staff seeks Commission direction/action on amounts to allocate for the as-yet unassigned balance.

Health and Development: \$90,000

Early Learning: \$295,980

Resilient Families: \$295,980

Commissioners asked for Counsel clarification on their ability to vote on strategic planning decisions that may be related to their respective agencies. Ms. Frye-Laacke recommended a conservative interpretation if voting on strategic planning decisions that may be related to funding proposals submitted by a Commissioner’s home agency in the future. Broad-based conversations and response to requests for information by other Commissioners or staff are appropriate.

After deliberation on the merits of issuing several pre-defined RFPs within each of the above funding categories, Commissioners opted to direct staff to develop more broad-based RFPs for the full amount in each category, and allow community entities to bring forward innovative proposals that address needs in that category.

*Public Comment: None*

Commissioner Ventura moved to approved maximum annual funding levels for new program funding of \$90,000 in Health and Development, \$295,980 in Early Learning, and \$295,980 in Resilient Families. Commissioner Watt seconded. Commissioners Ruvalcaba-Heredia and Sokolowski recused from voting. Motion passed with remaining Commissioner votes in favor.

### **ITEM 9 – Approve Establishment of an Ad Hoc Audit Committee**

Ms. Wendt introduced this item, explaining the need to select a new external auditor and a related request to identify an ad hoc audit selection committee. Commissioners Watt, Brescia and Gibson volunteered.

*Public Comment: None.*

### **ITEM 10 --- Executive Director Evaluation – Process Introduction**

Commission Counsel Natalie Frye-Laacke updated the status of performance review for the Executive Director. Last year's evaluation covered a two-year time period from January 1-7 through December 31, 2018. This year's timeframe will be January 1, 2019-December 31, 2019. She recommended a 360 evaluation this year, which would include staff and partner input, as well as a self-evaluation and goal-setting exercise completed by Ms. Wendt. Materials will be distributed to all participants following this meeting. Closed session will be held during the May 2020 Commission meeting to review Ms. Wendt's evaluation findings.

Commissioner Ventura supported the merit of a 360 evaluation.

Commissioner Brescia suggested that while valuable, a 360 evaluation during the COVID pandemic is not good timing. Other Commissioners agreed.

Commissioner Gibson proposed sticking with a Commissioner-only evaluation this year along with Ms. Wendt's self-evaluation, with plans to conduct a full 360 evaluation next year. Commissioners agreed.

*Public Comment: None*

### **ITEM 11 – Staff Reports**

Misty Livengood, Communications & Outreach Officer, provided updates on various First 5 activities.

- Shift in focus of Month of the Child amid the pandemic – May Hands on Heroes ad will showcase ALL child care providers.
- Hands on Heroes prior to this meeting: Kelsey Sullivan (February), Carmen Castaneda (March), Shana Paulson (April)
- We Are the Care – there has never been a more critical time to build on advocacy efforts related to child care access.
- Ms. Livengood and Mr. Wells attended the First 5 CA summit in February.
- Early Literacy team at SLOCOE has recently helped launch the county's first-ever "Libromat."
- Talk Read Sing livestream has shifted to a daily episode with a rotating cast of characters. Commissioners are encouraged to participate!

*Public Comment: None*

### **ITEM 12 -- Adjourn**

5:10 p.m.