

FIRST 5 SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY
CHILDREN AND FAMILIES COMMISSION

COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES

October 23, 2024 (APPROVED)

Current Commissioners Present

Penny Borenstein, MD (Chair)
Dawn Ortiz-Legg (Vice Chair)

SLO County Public Health Department
SLO County Board of Supervisors

James Brescia, EdD
Nancy Kuster
Leslie Mehigan
Erica Ruvalcaba-Heredia, EdD
Patty Clarkson, EdD
James Tedford, MD
Alison Ventura, PhD

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

Commissioners Absent/Excused

None

Staff Present

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

Call to Order

Chair Borenstein called the meeting to order at 3:04 p.m.

ITEM 1 – Commissioner Announcements and Updates

Commissioners and staff congratulated Sharlene Agrusa of Parents Helping Parents on her retirement and thanked her for years of strong partnership to serve children and families.

Maggie Payne was introduced as First 5's new Special Projects Coordinator. She shared some of her background – she grew up in San Jose, is a Cal Poly graduate. She has experience overseeing early childhood education programs in the Bay Area and most recently at the Atascadero Children's Center. She is also still serving part time as a preschool instructor at the North County Cuesta Campus Child Development Center. She has two young sons – one four and one 18 months.

ITEM 2 - Public Comment – Items not on the agenda

None.

ITEM 3 (ACTION ITEM) - Consent Agenda

- a. Approve September 18, 2024 minutes
- b. Approve Q1 24-5 Financial Report
- c. Approve 2025 Commission Meeting Calendar

Public Comment: None

Commissioner Ortiz-Legg made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Tedford and passed

Re: Item 3c -- Executive Director Wendy Wendt thanked Commissioners for coming to consensus on leaving the existing calendar in place. She also commented that the January 22, 2025 meeting date will need a different location than the SLO County Office of Education Board room. Commissioner Kuster confirmed that the DSS Room 101 is available.

ITEM 4 (PUBLIC HEARING/ACTION ITEM): Commission Review, Accept FY2023-24 Annual External Audit

Ms. Wendt introduced this item. First 5 SLO County has contracted for a fifth year with Moss Levy Hartzheim (MLH). A three-person team from MLH was on-site at First 5 for 1 day. Firm partner Alex Hom attended the Commission meeting to make a brief report and answer questions. Ms. Wendt shared that the audit included no compliance findings and no internal controls findings. She briefly summarized the agency's financial position at the end of FY 2023-24.

Mr. Hom concurred with Ms. Wendt's summary, and commented that the audit process was straightforward and clean. He commended Ms. Wendt and her staff for their thoroughness, helpfulness and overall accuracy.

Commissioner Borenstein inquired about the interest revenue – higher than in prior years. Ms. Wendt explained that interest returns are in line with the County (First 5 funds are kept with the County Treasury).

Ms. Wendt pointed out that audit standards of practice recommend that First 5 switch auditors at least every six years. Next year would be the sixth year with Moss Levy Hartzheim.

Public Comment: None.

Commissioner Tedford made a motion to accept the External Audit. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Ventura. Motion passed unanimously.

ITEM 5 (ACTION ITEM): Commission Review and Approval of FY2023-24 Annual Report to First 5 California

Compliance exercise every year. Wendy does financials, Jason does program data.

Comment on duplication issue – duplicate sliding scale.

AR-1 is Revenue/Expenditure Section

AR-2 is Demographic Worksheet

AR-3 is County Evaluation Summary plus County Highlights

Mr. Wells outlined programmatic and fiscal data to be submitted to First 5 CA by October 31, 2024 in compliance with state Annual Report requirements, and in alignment with the annual audit report. He emphasized that the report exercise gives us a chance to celebrate the work of the staff, families, and children in our community. In addition, our numbers contribute to a state report, part of telling a statewide story.

He noted that the annual report information contributed to First 5 CA through this process is somewhat distinct from the evaluation work being performed by the local consultant team (Becca Carsel et al).

Mr. Wells also summarized the County Highlights narrative submitted to First 5 CA as part of the report. Topics include completion of the Strategic Plan, the regional home visiting collaborative and Thrive Forum, lead agency role for regional IMPACT Legacy initiative, and the completion of the Shared Services Alliance pilot grant program.

Public Comment: None

Commissioner Ortiz-Legg made a motion to approve First 5 SLO County's FY2023-4 State Annual Report submission. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Clarkson and passed unanimously.

ITEM 6 (ACTION ITEM): Staff Recommendations re: RFPs

Mr. Wells presented on this item. He reminded Commissioners that today's recommendation is for Commission to approve funding recommendations and give direction to staff to move forward to contract negotiations with three organizations who have been selected through a grant submission and review process as part of First 5's Requests for Proposals (Parent/Child Engagement and Early Learning and Care). He reviewed the timeline leading up to the recommendations. A total of eight proposals were submitted -- five in response to the Parent/Child Engagement RFP, and three in response to the Early Learning and Care RFP.

Discussion and Commission votes ensued separately for each of the three proposals recommended for funding: Mixteco Indígena Community Organizing Project (MICOP), SLO County Office of Education (SLOCOE), and Community Action Partnership of San Luis Obispo (CAPSLO).

Parent-Child Engagement in North County/North Coast (One Funding Recommendation)

Recommendation:

- Agency: Mixteco Indígena Community Organizing Project (MICOP)
- Proposal: Aprendiendo con Mamá y Papá (Learning with Mom and Dad)
- Funding Recommendation: \$400,000
- Term: January 1, 2025-June 30, 2028

DISCUSSION:

Commissioner Ruvalcaba-Heredia expressed strong support for the proposal, emphasizing that there is great need for this type of support in North County for indigenous families.

Commissioner Ortiz-Legg asked if MICOP has this type of experience. Ms. Wendt responded that MICOP has been operating First-5 funded parent/child engagement groups in Ventura County for over a decade. Ana Huynh, MICOP Program Manager, added that a similar program is offered in Santa Maria.

Commissioner Mehigan inquired what topics will be covered in the program. Response – parents as role models, cognitive development, social skills, discipline, safety, healthy living, etc. The topics will also be adapted based on participant input/interest in information.

Commissioner Borenstein asked for clarity on the budget and timeframe. Mr. Wells responded that details will be presented in December with the contract drafts.

Public Comment:

Ms. Huynh thanked the Commission for this opportunity.

Gwendolyn Garcia, Parent Connection Coordinator with Community Action Partnership, congratulated MICOP on the pending grant award, pledged support and partnership as it develops.

Marilu Gomez, Family Advocate with Paso Robles Public Schools, expressed strong support for the program. She asked if there is a set curriculum or if parents have a say in the program framework. Ms. Huynh responded that the program is parent-led, and tailor made according to families' needs and language variants.

Jennifer Johnson, Public Health Nurse, asked about hours the program will operate. Response: After work hours and on weekends, flexible for families based on their schedules.

Commissioner Ortiz-Legg made a motion to approve the funding recommendation and to direct staff to enter into contract negotiations with MICOP for the Aprendiendo con Mamá y Papá. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Ruvalcaba-Heredia and passed 8-0 (Commissioner Brescia recused).

Early Learning & Child Care Systems (Two Funding Recommendations)

Recommendation #1

- Agency: San Luis Obispo County Office of Education (SLOCOE)
- Proposal: Expansion of Ticket 2 Teach (T2T)
- Funding Recommendation: \$300,000
- Term: January 1, 2025-June 30, 2028

DISCUSSION:

Commissioner Ventura asked if the First 5 funding will increase the number of people over those currently served by Ticket 2 Teach. Joe Koski, SLOCOE Assistant Superintendent, Educational Support Services, clarified that the First 5 funding will add to existing General Fund and grant support and enable strengthening of the pipeline into the program as well as leadership development opportunities for existing ECE professionals.

Ms. Wendt clarified that the Early Care and Education RFP expressly requested applications from existing projects or initiatives that would benefit from First 5 funding – whether for expansion, enhancement, or lengthened duration.

Commissioner Borenstein asked what the impetus is for SLOCOE engagement in this type of work. Mr. Koski responded that SLOCOE has long been committed to understanding and building support systems in early childhood education as a predictor of and feeder into the k-12 system.

Commissioner Ortiz-Legg expressed support and gratitude for the concept of funding continued good work as opposed to seed funding something completely new.

Commissioner Ventura made a motion to approve funding recommendation and to enter into contract negotiations with SLOCOE for Ticket 2 Teach. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Ortiz-Legg and passed 8-0 (Commissioners Brescia and Clarkson recused).

Recommendation #2

- Agency: Community Action Partnership of San Luis Obispo County (CAPSLO)
- Proposal: Building Connections for Infant and Toddler Development (Building Connections)
- Funding Recommendation: \$350,000
- Term: January 1, 2025-June 30, 2028

DISCUSSION:

Ms. Wendt noted the connection between this proposed program and the strategic plan – specifically the focus on building infant toddler program capacity, and supporting providers in addressing challenging behaviors and other social-emotional developmental issues.

Maggie Payne, First 5 Special Projects Coordinator, underscored this need. Those in the field have noticed a significant shift in early childhood behaviors, including great need to help support healthy social-emotional development in the post-Covid era.

Shana Paulson, Director of CAPSLO Child Care Resource Connection, emphasized the value of dedicating professional development support to the infant-toddler environment. She added that there will also be a parent element to the program.

Commissioner Ortiz-Legg made a motion to approve funding recommendation and to enter into contract negotiations with CAPSLO for Building Connections for Infant and Toddler Development. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Clarkson and passed passed 8-0 (Commissioner Brescia recused).

ITEM 7: Staff Reports

Misty Livengood, Communications Coordinator, provided an update on the following activities

- Pacific Coast Business Times profile on First 5s in SLO, Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties, specifically related to child care and family-friendly workplaces.
- Staff team met with Assemblymember Dawn Addis to discuss shared priorities
- First 5 staff is planning to present an agency update at the Board of Supervisors early in 2025
- Staff attended regional Pediatric Summit held in Solvang and hosted by First 5 Santa Barbara County. Regional work was presented on Help Me Grow and Home Visiting. The National founder of Help Me Grow – Dr. Paul Dworkin – was the keynote speaker.
- First 5 hosted the first in-person Funded Partners Meeting since the pandemic. The gathering was held at Tri Counties Regional Center.
- The First 5 Health Access Training Project held the final session of an outreach & messaging training series on effective methods for sharing information with immigrant families via print and digital media.
- SLO County UndocuSupport has released a series of videos in Spanish and Mixteco that provides information on how to access services (e.g. medical, bank, legal, social services). Premiere screenings were held at the Palm Theater in San Luis Obispo and at Oak Park Housing in Paso Robles.

- First 5 is the sponsor of several Dia de los Muertos events throughout the County, as well as an upcoming Birth and Baby Expo hosted by the Central Coast Childbirth Network.
- First 5 staffed a resource table at a Parent Institute hosted by SELPA.
- First 5 will be attending the upcoming Bridges to Resilience Conference in Santa Barbara.

Public Comment: None

ITEM 8: Uplift Coalition Notice of Funding Opportunity: First 5 SLO County Participation

Ms. Wendt and Ms. Payne presented on this item.

The Uplift Coalition is a six-county Central Coast initiative that addresses economic development and the future of the region for *all* who live and work here. Uplift has produced a series of reports based on data and stakeholder input that identify critical areas of opportunity and need. Child Care features prominently in these reports and in a Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) as a key “economic mobility” and “community development” strategy that is necessary to ensuring a healthy economic outlook for the Central Coast.

Within child care, four areas are called out in both the final report and the NOFO –

- Child care workforce
- Infrastructure (i.e. facilities)
- Employer-supported child care
- Usability of child care referral supports

The NOFO invites “predevelopment” proposals across a broad range of strategies, including child care. Up to \$9 million will be awarded to successful proposals. Proposals can be submitted at the “Concept” level (up to \$50,000), “Accelerator” level (up to \$250,000), or “Launchpad” level (\$1,000,000). The time frame for the work by selected grantees will be February 2025 through August 2026. An implementation phase is anticipated to follow.

First 5 SLO County staff facilitated two informational zoom sessions with child care system innovators in anticipation of the deadline for submission of Letters of Intent. Through this process, it was recommended that First 5 SLO County submit a Letter of Intent to continue with this convening work and to propose development of an “Uplift Regionwide Child Care Coalition” at the “Accelerator” funding level.

Other SLO County partner organizations have also submitted LOIs, including Cal Poly and the SLO Chamber of Commerce.

Commissioner Clarkson expressed support for the proposal, commenting that this moment lends itself to connecting multiple organizations in a joint mobilization around child care.

Public Comment:

Shana Paulson, Director of CAPSLO Child Care Resource Connection, commented on this critical “economic elevation” of child care.

ITEM 9: Presentation: Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder FASD

Judge Charles Stephen Crandall (retired, San Luis Obispo County Superior Court) introduced this item. He is currently active on county FASD Leadership Team. He reminded Commissioners that members of the team have attended several recent Commission meetings and made public comment. He encouraged other interested parties to consider joining the Leadership Team.

He expressed two goals for the presentation: first, to reintroduce the seriousness of this issue, and second to gather data from Commissioners’ agencies on prenatal exposure to alcohol.

In many parts of the country, communities are honoring “Invisible Disabilities Week.” Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder can involve permanent behavioral and cognitive challenges for individuals exposed to alcohol in utero. He emphasized the issue in the context of First 5’s strategic plan – specifically the Early Health Foundations priority area and the Substance Abuse Treatment strategic support area. His team is interested in gathering relevant existing data from among the agencies represented on the Commission. He stressed that San Luis Obispo County has a unique opportunity to make progress on this issue – the county is relatively small, and has a history of collaboration. We have also proven our commitment to this work through such initiatives as Martha’s Place, which was founded as an FASD assessment center.

Rayne Rice, mother of a daughter with FASD (also a CASA employee), shared her personal story. She adopted her daughter from a family member who was a multi-substance user. Martha’s Place diagnosed the child, who accessed various support services, both through the Regional Center and through the schools. Ms. Rice is concerned that most pediatricians don’t screen for FASD. Often children who may have FASD are screened for and/or treated for other conditions such as autism. She urged local agencies to gather updated information to better understand the FASD landscape in SLO County.

Judge Crandall introduced the next speaker, Mr. Sid Gardner, President of Children and Family Futures – a nonprofit focused on child abuse prevention and resilience for families affected by trauma, substance use and mental health disorders. Mr. Gardner is a widely recognized advocate and content expert on FASD.

Mr. Gardner presented data from a California Department of Public Health survey (conducted every two years) . The survey includes questions on alcohol consumption, including whether a person consumed alcohol in the 3rd trimester of pregnancy. On the most recently published survey results (2019-21), 7.5-8% of California respondents answered “yes.” In San Luis Obispo County, this figure was 10%. This means that ~250 babies were born with alcohol exposure.

Mr. Gardner urged county leaders in San Luis Obispo to compile data that would better illustrate the issue and help us understand to what extent children are being missed.

Judge Crandall proposed coming back to a Commission meeting in six months to determine progress.

Commissioners acknowledged that this is an important issue and agreed to engage as appropriate in further examination. Ms. Wendt offered to coordinate a follow-up conversation with Mr. Gardner and Commissioners Borenstein, Kuster and Tedford.

ITEM 10: Future Agenda Items

- Contract Approvals
- Uplift Application
- First 5 Fiscal Sustainability

Public Comment: None

ITEM 11: Adjourn (5:34)