

FIRST 5 SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY
CHILDREN AND FAMILIES COMMISSION

COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES

September 24, 2025 (Approved October 22, 2025)

Current Commissioners Present

Dawn Ortiz-Legg (Chair)	SLO County Board of Supervisors
Michelle Auran, M.D.	Medical Representative (AAP Chapter 2)
Penny Borenstein, M.D.	SLO County Public Health Department
Patty Clarkson, Ed.D	Early Care and Education Council
Joe Koski, Ed.D.	SLO County Office of Education
Alison Ventura, Ph.D.	Community at Large

Commissioners Absent/Excused

Nancy Kuster	Department of Social Services
Leslie Mehigan	Community at Large
Erica Ruvalcaba-Heredia, Ed.D	Community at Large

Staff Present

Commission staff: Wendy Wendt, Jason Wells, Misty Livengood
Commission Counsel: Natalie Frye-Laacke
Evaluation Team: Becca Carsel, Laura Keene

Call to Order

Chair Ortiz-Legg called the meeting to order at 3:03 PM.

ITEM 1 – New Commissioner Intro

Commissioner Ortiz-Legg welcomed incoming Commissioner Joe Koski to his first meeting. Dr. Koski attended via Zoom due to illness. First 5 Legal Counsel Natalie Frye-Laacke confirmed that Dr. Koski is authorized to attend remotely per AB2302. Ms. Laacke reminded that this circumstance will require all action items to include a roll call vote at today's meeting.

Dr. Koski joins the Commission as representative of the San Luis Obispo County Office of Education, where he serves as Assistant Superintendent for Educational Support Services. He brings to his Commissioner role 38+ years in education, and believes that early learning and high quality child care programs are the best early intervention for young children.

Commissioner Ortiz-Legg also introduced new First 5 intern Elizabeth Goebel, a fourth-year Public Health major at Cal Poly with a minor in City and Regional Planning.

ITEM 2 –Public Comment – Items not on the agenda

None

ITEM 3 - Consent Agenda

- a) Approve June 25, 2025 minutes
- b) Approve Q4 FY24-25 Financial Report
- c) Approve Correction to Long-Range Financial Plan
- d) Approve Commission Vice Chair Appointment – Leslie Mehigan
- e) Approve Contract Amendment with Holly Goldberg, Uplift Consultant

Public Comment: None

Commissioner Borenstein made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Ventura and passed 5:0 (Koski abstained).

ITEM 4 – Closed Session: Legal Counsel Candidate Interview

The Commission adjourned to Closed Session for discussion of Public Employment – Legal Counsel, pursuant to California Government Code Section 54957. Commission returned. Ms. Laacke announced no reportable actions taken.

Public Comment: None

ITEM 5 –Approve Contract with Richards, Watson & Gershon (RWG Law) for First 5 General Legal Counsel Services

Executive Director Wendy Wendt presented on this item. An ad hoc nominating committee including First 5 staff and Commissioners Ortiz-Legg and Auran recommends contracting with RWG Law for General Legal Counsel services.

Over more than a decade, First 5 SLO County legal counsel services have been provide by Adamski Moroski Madden Cumberland and Green LLP (AMMCG). In June 2025, First 5 staff and Commission were informed that AMMCG is moving away from public sector client work and will be ending its contractual relationship with First 5, pending confirmation of a new firm.

A Request for Applications was released in July 2025; submissions were reviewed by the ad hoc Committee and interviews scheduled. RWG Law was selected among the submitted proposals for nomination to the full Commission. Lead Counsel candidate Craig Steele comes to the role with decades of experience in public sector representation, notably First 5 LA where he served for many years as General Legal Counsel and at one point as interim Executive Director.

Mr. Steele commented that he is looking forward to working with First 5 San Luis Obispo County, having moved to the area three years ago and is based at the local RWG office in downtown San Luis Obispo. He expressed a deep appreciation for the important work of the

First 5 Commissions throughout the state on behalf of young children. Taylor Foland, also an attorney based at the San Luis Obispo Office, will serve as Assistant Legal Counsel for First 5 SLO County.

Ms. Wendt expressed gratitude to AMMCG and especially to Natalie Frye-Laacke for her guidance over the years, including through the search process for a new firm.

Ms. Laacke explained that RWG Law provides occasional legal services to the County of San Luis Obispo. Mr. Steele confirmed that he sees no direct conflict given that his firm's work with the County is not directly related to First 5 or its contracts with the County. Mr. Steele and Ms. Laacke recommended that RWG and First 5 sign a Conflict Waiver. Ms. Laacke suggested that the Commission authorize Ms. Wendt to sign the Waiver in anticipation of an October 1, 2025 contract start date.

Commissioner Borenstein made a motion to approve a contract with RWG Law for General Legal Counsel services, and to direct Ms. Wendt to review and sign a Conflict Waiver. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Ventura and passed unanimously.

ITEM 6 –Approve Contract with Koble Collaborative for Facilitation Services (Uplift Child Care Coalition)

Special Projects Coordinator Maggie Payne introduced this item. The Uplift Child Care Coalition grant budget includes a line item for facilitation services associated with coalition-building activities. First 5 released a Request for Qualifications during the summer of 2025. Koble Collaborative has been selected to provide facilitation – design, implementation, documentation – for 15 Learning Community sessions being planning for fall and winter 2025-26.

Carolyn Berg, lead facilitator with Koble Collaborative, described her firm's experience providing facilitation and strategic planning support on a variety of regional projects. She also has experience in her past role at the County of San Luis Obispo working with First 5 SLO County and other child care advocates to help stabilize the child care sector during the pandemic. Ms. Berg's business partner Annie Chung was also present and underscored their team's excitement about the opportunity to work with First 5 and the Uplift Child Care Coalition.

Public Comment: None

Commissioner Ventura made a motion to approve a \$22,500 contract with Koble Collaborative for Uplift Child Care Coalition facilitation services . The motion was seconded by Commissioner Ventura and passed unanimously.

ITEM 7 – Approve Contract with Atascadero Chamber of Commerce for Family Friendly Workplaces Program

Mr. Wells introduced this item. For the past four years, First 5 SLO County has invested \$75,000 per year toward the creation and development of a Family Friendly Workplaces program based at the San Luis Obispo Chamber of Commerce. In the spring of 2025, the SLO Chamber confirmed that it would no longer be able to carry the program, but is in support of its continued operation in a new organizational home. First 5 invited interested parties to submit a letter. At the June 2025 Commission meeting, First 5 staff recommended the Atascadero Chamber of Commerce as the optimal candidate - given their interest, capacity to raise matching funds and provide supplemental staffing support, and their link to the North County business community. The Commission directed staff to develop a contract for review and approval at the September 24, 2025 Commission meeting.

The contract submitted for approval is \$150,000 over 21 months (October 1, 2025 through June 30, 2027) to align the program timeline with other First 5 funded projects. A third year option is built in, dependent on meeting contract deliverables. Ms. Christina Levre-Latner, who has staffed the SLO Chamber-based program, will continue in this role at the Atascadero Chamber.

Commissioner Ortiz-Legg inquired about the geographic focus of the program now that it will move to a new base in North County. Ms. Latner reminded the Commission that the program has always been and will continue to serve the entire county. Ms. Latner has established a strong foundation in San Luis Obispo and South County, and looks forward to building greater ties in North County as well. Sectors of particular interest are agriculture/winery employers and others in hospitality.

Atascadero CEO Josh Cross described his organization's commitment to fundraising on behalf of this program; He commented that the Atascadero Chamber Board of Directors is very enthusiastic about the opportunity, and has already seen the effects of the Family Friendly Workplaces program on several small businesses in North County. He pledged in-kind support, including his and other staff members' time, office fees, etc.

Public Comment: *None*

Commissioner Borenstein made a motion to approve a 21-month contract for \$150,000 with the Atascadero Chamber of Commerce for operation of the Family Friendly Workplaces Program. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Ortiz-Legg and passed unanimously.

ITEM 8 – Early Childhood System Stabilization Fund – Approve \$100,000 Allocation to Community Foundation Together for SLO County Critical Response Initiative

Mr. Wells introduced this item.

In June 2025, the Commission approved a new three-year allocation plan for an Early Childhood System Stabilization Fund, to be available as a response to impacts on young children and families resulting from major funding and policy changes at the federal, state and local levels. \$300,000 was assigned to FY25-26, \$200,000 to FY26-27, and \$100,000 to FY27-28. An ad hoc Committee was identified (Commissioners Kuster, Mehigan, Ortiz-Legg) to advise staff on strategies for fund dissemination.

A three-pronged approach is recommended for the first year:

1. *\$100,000 contribution to the Community Foundation's Together for SLO County Critical Response Initiative, with the understanding that First 5 will participate in the review process and that grant recipient portfolio will include organizations that provide essential services for young children and families.
2. \$150,000 Request for Proposals (up to \$150,000 total), to be released later in FY25-26 for efforts that address specific identified emerging needs or service gaps in early childhood/family systems of support. Eligible organizations will include nonprofits, schools, and other public agencies that align with the First 5 strategic plan; applicants may or may not already be a First 5 funded partner.
3. Up to \$50,000 for strategic co-investment in collective impact efforts in partnership with other institutions/funders to support long term sustainability for programs that provide vital resources or services and are currently facing sustainability challenges

**(presented for approval at today's Commission meeting)*

The balance of the discussion related to the first proposed approach – a First 5 contribution to the Community Foundation. Michelle Fries, Foundation Director of Grants and Programs, added that included in the opportunity will be an option for grantees to receive pro bono support around sustainability strategies. The County of San Luis Obispo is looking to also partner by folding into Together for SLO County \$1.2 million in one-time funds for support to nonprofit organizations providing critical services to the most vulnerable populations in the county. The Foundation's goal is to reach up to \$3 million in total contributions from both public and private sources.

Commissioner Ortiz-Legg stressed the importance of ensuring essential services to vulnerable populations. She also appreciated the Community Foundation's broad expertise, and praised the technical support feature offered through the Community Foundation as an extra level of reinforcement.

Commissioner Auran asked how long the Foundation funding program been in place. Ms. Fries responded that the fundraising campaign just launched a month ago. The grant application process will open up to nonprofits the first week in October. Grant review will take place in mid November, with a

goal to get funds out the door before the end of 2025. The grants are designed as unrestricted operating grants, ranging in size from \$50,000 to \$150,000.

Public Comment: *None*

Commissioner Koski moved to approve \$100,000 contribution from the First 5 Early Childhood System Stabilization Fund to the Community Foundation's Together for SLO County Critical Response Initiative. Motion seconded by Commissioner Clarkson and passed unanimously.

ITEM 9 – Annual Evaluation Report Preview

Ms. Wendt introduced this item. For the past four years, Carsel Consulting Group has provided evaluation services for First 5 SLO County. The Evaluation team has assessed both the impacts of First 5's funded programs, and also has evaluated the value of First 5 itself as a catalyst for positive change in early childhood systems.

Evaluation Team member Laura Keene described the team grounds its work in a Theory of Change, model which it developed in 2022 with extensive input from First 5 Commissioners, staff and community stakeholders. This year, the team has updated the look and feel of the Theory of Change, and is presenting at today's meeting for Commission review and in anticipation of presenting the final FY24-25 Evaluation Report at the December 2025 Commission meeting.

Discussion:

Commissioner Ortiz-Legg inquired whether the Evaluation team has polled families on their familiarity with First 5. Have we gathered this type of data? She also expressed interest in knowing how people are getting information [about resources]. Have we done data-gathering on how people get their information? Answer: population-level surveys are costly and may not be as successful as provider surveys and community focus groups.

Commissioner Borenstein added a question on *how* to measure system-change indicators beyond counting direct services and children/families served.

Commissioner Ventura praised the new graphic. She looks forward to seeing a more detailed breakdown of associated indicators.

Public Comment: None

ITEM 10 -- Staff Updates

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

- First 5 was featured on a recent KCBX episode of Central Coast Voices. Jason Wells was joined by funded partners from MICOP and the South County Youth Coalition, who discussed their respective work to expand parent-child engagement program offerings.

- The Uplift Child Care Coalition held an Zoom kick-off over the summer attended by over 60 people and that included a welcome by Assemblymember Dawn Addis. The Coalition is now planning toward the launch of a regionwide Learning Committee series later in the fall of 2025.
- First 5 staffed a table at a Parent Institute hosted by SELPA.
- Event Sponsorships this season include Atascadero Movie Night and an upcoming breastmilk drive hosted by the Central Coast Breastfeeding Coalition.
- First 5 staff participated in a WIC Yoga event for local parents and young children in celebration of August as National Breastfeeding Month.
- SLO Help Me Grow has updated its website and now has a billboard on Highway 101.
- The United Way of SLO County has posted a Local Resource Guide page on its website adjacent to the 211 link.
- Mr. Wells attended the annual School Nurses Appreciation Dinner hosted by funded partner Optometric Care Associates.

Commissioner Ortiz-Legg announced the CAPSLO 60th Anniversary resource fair scheduled for this weekend in Mission Plaza.

Public Comment: None

ITEM 11 - Future Agenda Items

Commissioner Borenstein requested a presentation/update on the County WIC program.

Ms. Wendt reminded of the following regularly scheduled October Commission Meeting items:

- Public Hearing/presentation on First 5 SLO County's submission to First 5 California Annual Report (due October 31, 2025)
- Presentation/Receipt of Annual External Audit (due to state October 31, 2025)

Public Comment: None

ITEM 12 – Commissioner Announcements

None

ITEM 13 – Adjournment

4:46 p.m.