

PRESS RELEASE



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Contact: Courtney Armstrong

Courtney@first5association.org

(510) 323-9320

First 5 Network Responds to State Budget Impacting California's Youngest Children

Worst of proposed cuts to early childhood investments averted. First 5 Network remains cautiously optimistic on delayed program expansions

SACRAMENTO, CA (July 1, 2024) - The First 5 Network today expressed a mix of support and caution following the state budget signed by Governor Gavin Newsom. Despite an unprecedented budget deficit, important early childhood investments will be maintained or expanded. These include funding approximately 11,000 new child care slots, but pauses expansion of slots by two years to FY2026-27; preserving funding for the expansion of Medi-Cal health care coverage to all income-eligible Californians; maintaining funding for health enrollment navigators at clinics; a rate increase for community health workers, promotoras and representatives – a major focus of advocacy for the First 5 Network and California’s early childhood field; and preserving investments in CalEITC, Young Child Tax Credit (YCTC) and Foster Youth Tax Credit (FYTC).

The Network applauds the state’s commitment to fund continuous Medi-Cal coverage eligibility for children birth to age five starting in 2026 but remains concerned that delay in adopting this protection will result in more young children losing access to health coverage. The Network will continue to urge the state to move forward with submitting the necessary federal waiver request for continuous coverage this year.

The Network also appreciates the Legislature and Administration’s compromise to the proposed May Revise cuts to the CalWORKs Home Visiting Program. Despite the \$30 million reduction in FY2023-24, and the temporary reduction by up to \$25 million in FY2024-25, the budget bill language clarifies that this reduction is not intended to impact service delivery or staffing, but instead adjusts program funding to match enrollment.

“This state budget will add pressure to local communities, including First 5s and early childhood providers, to deliver more services with less funding,” said First 5 Association Executive Director, Avo Makdessian. “We will work with our local First 5 leaders and the state to ensure families can access every available support.”

“The California Children and Families Commission (First 5 CA) commends Governor Gavin Newsom and the Legislature for working together to continue their commitment to early childhood well-being in the face of a significant budget deficit,” said First 5 CA Executive Director, Jackie Wong. “The preservation and expansion of key investments, such as funding 11,000 new child care slots and continued investment in early literacy such as the CA Imagination Library Partnership and the CA Child Tax Credit, demonstrate a deep understanding of the critical needs of our youngest residents. We appreciate the Legislature and Administration's efforts to minimize the impact of budget adjustments on vital programs like the CalWORKs Home Visiting Program, ensuring that service delivery and staffing remain intact. These actions reflect a balanced approach to safeguarding children's well-being while navigating fiscal challenges, while bringing us closer to the trauma informed, healing centered and culturally responsive systems for children, families and communities.”

The First 5 Network remains committed to doing more with less for the communities it serves. Despite the state budget challenges, the Network is steadfast in its mission – to ensure the basic rights and essential services of children prenatal-to-five are not eroded by financial shortfalls. The First 5 Network hopes to work with the Legislature and the Administration to ensure this year’s budget is implemented with as little impact to children as possible, and next year’s budget continues to prioritize California's youngest residents and their families.

“Budgets reflect our values, and children are invaluable,” said First 5 LA President and CEO, Karla Pleitéz Howell. “With over 2 million children under five in California, essential programs like home visiting, CalWORKs, and Medi-Cal continuous eligibility are crucial for their thriving. First 5 LA thanks the governor and legislature for their steadfast commitment to early learning and these vital services. As we look to the future, prioritizing children and families is key to securing a brighter future for our communities.”

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About First 5 Association

The First 5 Association of California (F5AC) elevates the voice of the 58 county First 5s, created by voters in 1998 to ensure our youngest children are healthy, safe and ready to thrive in school and life. The First 5 Network impacts the lives of more than 1 million kids, families and caregivers each year. F5AC advocates for the state's youngest kids, uniting partners and leveraging funding to improve and scale up California's early childhood programming piloted by county First 5s. Learn more at www.first5association.org

About First 5 LA

As one of the state's largest funders of early childhood and an independent public agency, First 5 LA advocates for children and their families, amplifies community voice, and partners for collective impact so that every child in Los Angeles County reaches their full developmental potential throughout the critical years of prenatal to age 5. Learn more at www.first5la.org.

About First 5 California

First 5 California First 5 California was established in 1998 when voters passed Proposition 10, which taxes tobacco products to fund services for children ages 0 to 5 and their families. First 5 California programs and resources are designed to educate and support teachers, parents, and caregivers in the critical role they play during a child's first five years--to help California kids receive the best possible start in life and thrive. For more information, please visit www.cafc.ca.gov.