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## First 5 Association of California Honors Assemblymember Mia Bonta as 2026 Champion for Children

SACRAMENTO, CA (April 9, 2025) — First 5 Association of California, representing First 5 commissions across the state serving more than 1.2 million children and families each year, has named Assemblymember Mia Bonta as its 2026 *Champion for Children*, recognizing her leadership as Founding Chair of the California Legislative Children’s Caucus and her ongoing commitment to policies that put children and families first.

Earlier this year, Assemblymember Bonta formally launched the bipartisan Children’s Caucus alongside child advocates and more than 40 legislators. The Caucus is focused on priorities including child care access, children’s health, education, housing security, economic security, and child welfare. Assemblymember Bonta also has a proven legislative record of supporting young children and their families, and continues that work on the Assembly committees for health (where she is chair), education, and budget.

"California's future depends on how well we support children in their earliest years. Nearly one in five California children lives in poverty — in the fourth-largest economy in the world. We know California can do better for our kids. My mission is to bring lawmakers together across both parties and both chambers to put children at the center of our policymaking. The First 5 Network is a critical partner in this work, and I'm honored to receive this recognition from First 5 Association of California," **said Assemblymember Mia Bonta (D-Oakland)**. "I will always stand alongside, and wholeheartedly support children and the organizations dedicated to ensuring every child has the opportunity to grow up healthy and ready to succeed."

Assemblymember Bonta’s child-centered legislation includes **AB 51 (2024)**, which created the California Universal Preschool Planning Grant Program to expand access to preschool for 3- and 4-year-olds, **AB 298 (2025–26)**, which would eliminate out-of-pocket health care costs for Californians under age 21, and **AB 1996 (2026)**, which establishes a statewide advisory council to develop and evaluate strategies to cut child poverty in half over the next decade

The *Champion for Children* award is presented annually by the First 5 Association of California to recognize legislative leaders whose work reflects an enduring commitment to children from prenatal to age five and their families. The award is presented on the Association’s Advocacy Day, which gathers representatives from First

5s across the state in Sacramento to help policymakers understand the resources and policy changes needed to support young children and families.

At this year's Advocacy Day, which takes place on Tuesday, April 14, the Association will, in part, be urging lawmakers to protect mental health services for infants and young children following a major overhaul of the state's behavioral health funding system. You can read more about that effort [here](#).

"Assemblymember Bonta understands that when we invest in families early and organize policymaking around young children's needs, we set communities across California up for a successful future. That requires political will, and Assemblymember Bonta continues to demonstrate her courage and commitment in launching the Children's Caucus to make policies work better for children and families," **said Avo Makdessian, Executive Director of First 5 Association of California**. "The First 5 Network is thrilled to award Assemblymember Bonta with the 2026 Champion for Children award for elevating the needs of children and families."

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### **About First 5 Association of California**

First 5 Association of California represents First 5 commissions across the state. Together, First 5 supports over 1.2 million children and families each year, advancing policies and investments that ensure young children are healthy, safe, and ready to learn. The Association works to advance state and federal public policies and funding that support California's young children and families. Our policy work is informed by local communities and local First 5 commissions and is grounded in a whole child / whole family lens. We do this while centering the fact that low-income communities, communities of color, and historically marginalized Californians face disproportionate impacts due to systemic racism, wealth inequality, and environmental hazards. Learn more at [www.first5association.org](http://www.first5association.org).