



# First 5s to Champion Early Childhood Investments on Annual Advocacy Day

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## First 5s To Champion Early Childhood Investments on Annual Advocacy Day

SACRAMENTO – The statewide network of First 5s will meet with legislators April 19 for the annual First 5 Advocacy Day, to lift up key early childhood legislation and budget proposals and promote its Whole Child, Whole Family policy agenda.

Among key issues First 5s will be discussing with legislators are both healthcare and Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH).

The first five years are a critical time in a child's development, with 90 percent of brain development happening during those crucial early years. Addressing trauma and mental health concerns early is especially important. Despite growing need, and the importance of reaching young children early, the mental and behavioral health needs of California's young children are not being met by existing programs.

During Advocacy Day, First 5s will be expressing support for a \$250 million budget augmentation for IECMH services to prevent and mitigate mental health concerns, promote healthy social-emotional development, and train existing providers of infants and toddlers.

In addition to IECMH, First 5s will also be calling attention to continuous Medi-Cal eligibility for children ages 0-5. Continuous eligibility under the national public health emergency related to COVID-19 has prevented children from "churning" on and off Medi-Cal coverage, or losing coverage altogether. But, when this policy expires, as it is likely to this year, many children could lose vital health coverage. First 5s will be expressing their support for AB-2402 (Rubio), which

extends continuous coverage for all children in the Medi-Cal program until their 5th birthday, ensuring they have uninterrupted access to needed medical care.

“First 5 believes that all of California’s youngest children deserve to be healthy, safe, and ready to succeed in school and life. When children experience Medi-Cal churn, or lose health coverage, they miss out on key preventive care and developmental screenings at a pivotal time in their development,” said Deborah Kelch, First 5 Association Interim Executive Director. “And, after two years of the COVID-19 pandemic, children and families are navigating stress, trauma and mental health difficulties, without access to appropriate supports and services. As we meet with legislators, we will aim to highlight the importance of investments in Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health and continuous Medi-Cal coverage—and urgency to act now.”

Funding for Home Visiting programs will be a key issue as First 5s meet with legislators. First 5s will urge state leaders to increase funding for home visiting programs, including supporting \$50 million in ongoing General Fund, proposed in the Governor’s January budget, for the California Department of Public Health’s (CDPH) California Home Visiting Program (CHVP) and the Black Infant Health (BIH) program.

“Home visiting has continued to be a critical link of support for families throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, especially for families facing challenges that the crisis has exacerbated. We know that early interventions and family supports such as home visiting are more important now than ever,” said Kim Belshé, First 5 LA Executive Director. “Funding proposed in the governor’s budget will promote flexibility in the state’s home visiting programs to better meet the needs of diverse communities. Whether families receive support at an in-home visit, in a community setting or via telehealth, we must meet families where they are and where they feel most safe.”

First 5s will express continued support for policies encouraging healthy development, social-emotional wellbeing, and safe, stable and nurturing environments, including policies that strengthen early learning and literacy and Paid Family Leave.

The research shows that the current wage replacement rate for the state’s Paid Family Leave program prevents many from accessing this state benefit because families have to choose between paying for their basic needs and taking family leave. Building on longstanding investments in family support systems, First 5s continue to lift up the importance of supporting vital caregiver and child bonding with unwavering support of Paid Family Leave expansion.

“To address educational disparities, an early literacy investment embedded within a whole child frame is essential. As a refugee child whose first language was not English, my time with my mom reading and going to the library was a critical part of my development and transition into American culture,” said Jackie Thu-Huong Wong, First 5 California Executive Director. “We are excited our state’s leaders and champions for children are investing in the literacy of our youngest children, an issue the First 5 California Commission has championed for nearly a decade through our Talk.Read.Sing.© campaign. The Governor’s \$10 million in the

proposed budget for early literacy and book distribution for young children via our partnership with CDPH, underscores the power of partnership in helping to create the safe, stable, nurturing environments necessary to address inequities and healthy development. We look forward to continuing our work with the Legislature and the Administration to support our youngest Californians and their families.”

#### About First 5 Association

First 5 Association of California is the voice of the 58 First 5 county commissions, which were created by voters in 1998 to ensure our young children are healthy, safe, and ready to learn. Together, First 5 touches the lives of more than one million kids, families, and caregivers each year, and strengthens our state by giving kids the best start in life. Learn more at [www.first5association.org](http://www.first5association.org).

#### About 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.ccfc.ca.gov](http://www.ccfc.ca.gov).

#### About First 5 LA

As the state’s largest funder of early childhood, First 5 LA works to strengthen systems, parents and communities so that children are ready to succeed in school and life. An independent public agency, First 5 LA’s goal is to support the safe and healthy development of young children so that by 2028, all children in L.A. County will enter kindergarten ready to succeed in school and life. Learn more at [www.first5la.org](http://www.first5la.org).

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