



POLICY ON FUNDING FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

First 5 Ventura County administered by the Children & Families First Commission of Ventura County (the Commission) as established by California Law and local Ordinance envisions a future where all Ventura County children will thrive in healthy supported environments with loving and nurturing caregivers in the home and throughout the community. This future embraces the value of an active partnership between families, service providers, civic leaders, the faith-based community, local business and the community at-large, honors and respects the diversity of our community and prioritizes the need to ensure optimal health and development for young children and their families.

The Commission holds “inclusiveness” as one of its core values including the rights of individuals to participate or not in a faith of their own choosing without coercion or unwanted exposure to faiths not their own. Therefore, the Commission has embraced a policy of neither providing funding/support for religious activities nor appearing to promote a particular religious belief over others by way of its funding practices.

In addition to the explicit understanding that Prop 10 funds are to be used exclusively for the benefit of children birth to five years old in accordance with California Law, Ventura County Ordinance and Commission’s approved Strategic Plan, the following guidelines are meant to further clarify the relationship between Prop 10 objectives and Faith-based partners.

Funding Guidelines for Faith-based Organizations

First 5 Ventura County administered by the Children & Families First Commission of Ventura County thoughtfully establishes the following safeguards to protect religious freedom and maximize inclusiveness. Those safeguards are as follows:

1. The Commission shall not discriminate against an organization, which is or applies to be a contractor based upon its status as a “faith-based” organization so long as it is willing to adhere to the guidelines, policies and procedures that the Commission has established for all organizations receiving Prop 10 support.
2. The Commission shall not attempt to regulate or abridge the rights of a “faith-based” organization to retain independence over the definition, development, practice and expression of its religious beliefs.
3. The Commission expects that no eligible program beneficiary would be denied access to services due to their race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, age, sex, marital status, sexual orientation, disability, veteran status, citizenship or known disability.
4. The Commission expects all Prop 10 funds (with one exception) to be used for non-religious activities and expects that no eligible program beneficiary will be subjected

(before, during or after the program activity) to religious messages when he or she participates in Prop 10-funded services. Program activity is defined as all verbal, written and visual information provided directly or indirectly (decorations, background music, etc.) to the participant in the course of their participation in Prop 10-funded activities.

The exception comes into play only when secular alternatives would be readily available such as a voucher system and then only because it is the participant or guardian who is making an informed choice between a "Faith-based" service and Prop 10-funded secular alternatives that are realistically and conveniently accessible.

5. The Commission anticipates the ability to conduct fiscal and programmatic audits of all organizations that receive Prop 10 support. Minimally, each funded organization must have proper accounting practices such that the funds are not co-mingled and a accurate delineation between Prop 10 related expenses and non-Prop 10 related expenses can be traced.

Because religious organizations have different legal requirements concerning the disclosure of financial information, the Commission minimally requires that appropriate firewalls (e.g. separate bank accounts) between Prop 10-funded services and the core religious activities of a faith-based organization be developed. While the exact nature of this firewall is the prerogative of the organization it must minimally be able to define structures that will ensure that Prop 10 dollars can not be channeled into other religious activities of "Faith-based" organizations.

6. The Commission expects Prop 10 funded service providers and program recipients to comply with all the legal requirements and restrictions imposed upon government-funded activities as articulated in the Religion Clauses of the First Amendment to the United States Constitution.