



Memo

To: Commissioners, First 5 Ventura County

From: Lauren Arzu, Director of Human Resources & Operations (On behalf of the Administration and Finance Committee)

Date: January 28, 2021

Re: Recommendation to update Advocacy Policy and Policy Platform

Background

In October 2017, the Commission adopted a new Advocacy Policy, which provides guidance on advocacy activities and calls for annual updates to the Policy Platform. The Advocacy Policy states that staff determines whether a policy matter is in alignment with the Strategic Plan and Policy Platform, and how the issue will affect children prenatal through age five and their families, and/or First 5 Ventura County (F5VC), before engaging in advocacy activities.

The Policy Platform is designed to outline a comprehensive set of recommendations to support children prenatal through age five, their families, and service providers. Using the Policy Platform as a guide, F5VC staff is able to engage in timely, strategic advocacy activities. The Policy Platform is closely aligned with our Strategic Plan, and outlines a policy agenda for F5VC that can be shared with champions of early learning throughout Ventura County to maximize our impact through collaboration and consistency in messaging.

Over the past year, F5VC participated in a variety of advocacy activities including signing onto letters of support, meeting virtually with legislators, participating in First 5 Association statewide advocacy activities, and educating the public and policymakers particularly through social media. First 5 advocated successfully for childcare workers to be classified as essential workers and for CARES funding to be directed towards childcare providers.

The Advocacy Policy and Policy Platform need to be revised to achieve alignment with the updated Strategic Plan for 2020 – 2022.

The proposed Advocacy Policy and Policy Platform were updated to reflect the revised priorities outlined in the Strategic Plan. Both items were reviewed and approved by the Administration and Finance Committee and Commission. The Policy Platform is reviewed and updated annually by the Commission.

Recommendation

The recommendation is to adopt the updated Advocacy Policy (Attachment 1) and Policy Platform (Attachment 2) that outline parameters for advocacy activities and a set of recommendations to support children prenatal through age five and service providers.



POLICY FOR ADVOCACY ACTIVITIES

BACKGROUND

First 5 Ventura County's (F5VC) strategic investments ~~place greater emphasis on~~ emphasize systems change and capacity building. The Commission's FY 20~~2015-20~~ Strategic Plan calls for advocating for young children and families by building a shared vision and creating public/political will for programs for young children. This policy establishes the parameters for advocacy activities and expressly permits First 5 Ventura County to advocate for young children strategically, proactively, and in a timely manner.

CRITERIA FOR ENGAGING IN POLICY AND ADVOCACY ACTIVITIES

- The Commission remains non-partisan.
- The Commission develops and endorses a Policy Platform to guide F5VC advocacy efforts and identify relevant policy areas. The Policy Platform is aligned with the following ~~four~~ priorities identified in the F5VC Strategic Plan:
 - ~~Children grow up healthy~~ Comprehensive Child Health and Development
 - ~~Children enter school ready to learn~~ Quality Early Learning
 - ~~Parents have the knowledge and resources they need~~ Strong and Resilient Families
 - ~~Communities are engaged in supporting and prioritizing children~~ Program and Systems Integration
- The Commission may take positions on federal, state and local policy matters, which may include legislation, regulations, local ordinances, and ballot measures, that affect:
 - Ventura County's children, prenatal to age five and their families
 - F5VC's ability to work towards its mission
 - F5VC's status or its operations, including opportunities to preserve, increase, and expand funding streams dedicated to early childhood
- The Commission may develop positions:
 - Proactively – taking a leadership role to convene stakeholders on a policy matter
 - Reactively – responding to a proposed policy matter

PROCESS FOR ACTING ON POLICY MATTERS

The Executive Director shall determine whether a policy matter is in alignment with the Strategic Plan and Policy Platform, how the issue will affect children prenatal to age five and their families, and/or First 5 Ventura County. If the policy matter is in alignment, staff shall research how similar organizations supporting young children are advocating on the issue, particularly the

position being taken by the First 5 Association and First 5 California, and then the Executive Director shall determine which activities to engage in.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AUTHORITY

The Executive Director has the authority delegated by the Commission to engage in advocacy activities, including but not limited to:

- Provide testimony at public hearings
- Provide written comments and/or letters on proposed policy matters and ballot measures
- Meet with legislators and elected officials
- Write or co-sign letters to legislators and policy makers
- Collaborate with county agencies, funders, nonprofits, etc.
- Interact with the media
- Educate the public and policymakers (trainings, white papers, educational forums)
- Develop parent leadership
- Convene experts
- Publish policy and advocacy related information on the website, in newsletters, and on social media

The Executive Director and the Commission Chair shall have signature authority on letters and written comments. Both the Executive Director and Commission Chair shall co-sign letters and written comments whenever possible.

The Executive Director shall report on policy and advocacy actions taken at regularly scheduled Commission meetings and provide copies of any signed letters.



2020-2021 POLICY PLATFORM

F5VC's Policy Priorities are aligned with the ~~four~~ strategic priorities and goals outlined in our ~~202015~~ – ~~20220~~ Strategic Plan. These priorities are intended to help us achieve the vision that all children are born healthy, thrive in nurturing healthy, supported environments, and enter school prepared and eager to learn.

1. ~~Children Grow Up Healthy~~Comprehensive Child Health and Development
 - a. Ensure all children prenatal to age 5 and their families have access to and utilize comprehensive health and dental insurance
 - b. Increase routine screenings for prenatal substance use, developmental delays, childhood trauma, and parental mental health, and improve the system for referral and follow-up through our Help Me Grow system of care
 - ~~b.c.~~Enhance primary care practices to include social and emotional development
 - ~~e.d.~~Address the social determinants of health and promote general healthy practices such as good oral health, healthy eating, physical activity, and breastfeeding, and avoiding exposure to harmful substances including tobacco, marijuana, and illicit substances
2. ~~Quality Early Learning~~Children Enter School Ready to Learn
 - a. Promote the importance of the early years (prenatal – age three) and early relational health including home visitation programs and developmental screenings, optimum attachment and bonding, and early literacy experiences, particularly through Family Resource Centers
 - b. Increase access to high quality early care and education programs for young children and their families, including through facilities, funding, and available spaces
 - ~~b.c.~~Promote early literacy as a pathway to school success
 - ~~e.d.~~Strengthen the compensation and professional qualification of the early childhood workforce
3. ~~Parents Have the Knowledge and Resources They Need~~Strong and Resilient Families
 - a. Increase parent and caregiver knowledge, understanding, and awareness of opportunities for early childhood development, healthy lifestyles, and the impact of trauma and toxic stress
 - b. Increase social connections and support for parents, through policies promoting improved family leave, flexible work schedules, and family friendly benefits
 - c. Provide parents, families, and the community with relevant, timely and culturally appropriate information, services, and support, especially for immigrant families who regularly report fear of utilizing services
4. ~~Communities are Engaged in Supporting and Prioritizing Children~~Program and Systems Integration
 - a. Support parent leaders and communities to prioritize the health, education, and well-being of young children
 - b. Address and prevent childhood poverty, abuse, and neglect
 - c. Increase awareness among policymakers and business owners around the importance of investing in early childhood

- d. Ensure a complete and accurate count of children 0—5 in the 2020 Census. Align and integrate systems of care at the state and local level to ensure that young children and their families have timely and seamless access to supports and services that best meet their needs