

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**First 5s Across California Rally to Champion Early Childhood Investments**

SACRAMENTO, CA (April 19, 2023) - [Today the statewide network of First 5s will meet with legislators to champion early childhood legislation and investments for California's youngest children.](#) Assembly Majority Leader Eloise Gómez Reyes will join First 5s by addressing the network in a virtual gathering.

The first five years of a child's life are crucial for brain development, health, readiness to learn, and lifelong success. [For nearly 25 years, First 5 commissions in 58 counties have served as a backbone for early childhood investments and systems in California.](#) Building systems of care, supporting resilient families and communities, ensuring children and families' access to health care, and providing quality early learning will be key items on the agenda.

First 5s will also elevate the need for additional investments for [Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health \(IECMH\)](#) services that support child development and mitigate future mental health concerns. Improving the mental health of California's youngest children is a top priority for the entire network.

"We are excited to share with legislators First 5s important role in creating trauma-informed, healing-centered, culturally responsive systems to meet the holistic needs of children, families and communities." said Jackie Thu-Huong Wong, First 5 California Executive Director. "Twenty-five years ago, Californians voted to support a vision to uplift and center the importance of early childhood for the future of our state. First 5s have set forth to create the safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments necessary for a child's healthy development. And as we support a movement towards a whole child, whole family, whole community framework, we are thankful for Governor Newsom's and the Legislature's leadership and partnership in implementing a roadmap that ensures every child can thrive."

This is also a critical time for local First 5s that rely on tobacco tax revenues to invest in communities. As tobacco tax revenues continue to decline, and with the recent passage of California's flavored tobacco ban, available First 5 funding is expected to decrease by a staggering \$453M by 2030 affecting every community in the state.

"The weight of the rising cost of living, pandemic relief coming to an end, and expanding wealth gaps between communities are crushing California families with young children. Today, First 5s are lifting up these realities to state leaders and offering opportunities to leverage the First 5 network to invest in our youngest residents," said Avo Makdessian, First 5 Association Executive Director. "At the same time, the statewide First 5 infrastructure itself is under threat due to declining resources. We look forward to working with our state leaders and community partners to increase resources for young children and ensure the First 5 infrastructure built over 25 years continues to have the stability to deliver those resources in every community."

"Over the last three years, families and the systems that serve them stepped up to meet the urgency of the moment," said Karla Pleitéz Howell, First 5 LA Executive Director. "Let's keep the momentum going with sustained and continued investments to further strengthen whole child systems of support in California that build a more prosperous and equitable future for the state's youngest children."

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### **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.cafc.ca.gov](http://www.cafc.ca.gov).

## **About First 5 LA**

As the state's largest funder of early childhood and an independent public agency, First 5 LA works to strengthen systems, parents and communities to support the safe and healthy development of young children guided by our North Star that every child in Los Angeles County will reach their full developmental potential throughout the critical years of prenatal to age 5. Learn more at [www.first5la.org](http://www.first5la.org). For latest news and information, follow us on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [LinkedIn](#).