



March 20, 2019

CA Assembly Blue Ribbon Commission
on Early Childhood Education
State Capitol, Room 219
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Co-Chairs McCarty and Rubio,

On behalf of First 5, we thank you for the opportunity to submit written comments in response to the Assembly Blue Ribbon Commission on Early Childhood Education's (BRC) draft report.

First 5 is a network of the 58 local First 5 county commissions and the State Commission working to build strong, effective, and sustainable systems serving California's young children. First 5, for purposes of this letter's positions, consists of the [First 5 Association](#), the nonprofit membership organization for the state's 58 First 5 county commissions; [First 5 Los Angeles](#), the First 5 local county commission for Los Angeles county; and [First 5 California](#), the state agency and Commission, also known as the California Children and Families Commission.

We would like to thank the BRC for their work over the past two years to put together a report that lays out a long-term, holistic vision for a high-quality early care and education (ECE) system in California. We would also like to express our sincere appreciation to this Commission for taking a whole-child and family-centered approach in crafting a plan that builds a comprehensive ECE system that meets the diverse needs of our state's infants, preschoolers, and school-age children as well as working parents.

Specifically, we would like to highlight the following recommendations that were included in the report that address core pillars of a quality ECE system:

- *Reforming the Reimbursement Rate System*— We commend the BRC for including the recommendation to set a goal of shifting to a single, regionalized state reimbursement rate system for child care and early learning services. Achieving this reimbursement rate system will improve the state's ability to increase teacher compensation, adequately resource ECE programs, and incentivize quality improvement efforts. Through this reform, the state can achieve a more equitable system to support children and families and maximize public benefit.
- *Early Identification and Intervention*—A critical component of ensuring children are ready to succeed in school and life is addressing developmental delays from the earliest moments possible. Providing timely developmental screenings tied to early intervention services is a proven way to support child learning and development. Too many children in California are denied opportunity because they are not screened or referred to services at the appropriate

time. We are deeply appreciative that the BRC draft report recognizes the role of early identification and intervention in preparing children to succeed, and we look forward to working with the Administration and Legislature to advance policies which will guarantee children receive the developmental services to which they are entitled.

- *Quality Improvement System (QIS)*—As co-leaders in the Quality Improvement local and state systems, we appreciate the thoughtful recommendations to improve our QIS system and the recognition of the need for all providers to have access to professional support. We look forward to working with the Legislature and the Administration to make our system more accessible and centered on child outcomes.
- *Expanding Access* – We applaud the BRC’s commitment to the universal goal of quality, accessible learning opportunities and we agree with the recommended approach of beginning to accomplish this goal through a “targeted universalism” approach focused on those children facing the greatest opportunity gaps.

To further strengthen the BRC Report, we respectfully request your consideration to include the following recommendations:

Expanded Revenue for Plan Implementation

With a bold and comprehensive long-term plan set forth in the BRC report, we recognize that the implementation of the policy proposals in the plan will require significant investments. We urge the Commission to take the important next step of identifying revenue sources that can fund the proposals outlined in the report, both by maximizing existing revenue streams and identifying new sources of funding. In addition, we recommend the Commission consider opportunities to reduce barriers for local governments to generate new revenues to support early learning programs.

Utilize Existing Governance Structures

We appreciate the BRC’s recognition that a state body, inclusive of key stakeholders, is necessary to advise the Legislature, Governor, and State Superintendent of Public Instruction on early childhood, and specifically early childhood education. First 5s throughout California, including First 5 California – the state’s Children and Families Commission – stand ready to leverage the existing advisory power of the network to serve this role and engage additional stakeholders.

Ensure Access to Quality Improvement

We recommend that all early childhood programs and providers have access to, and are able to participate in, the state’s QIS/Quality Counts California if they serve children and families in our state or federal subsidy programs. A qualified, professional workforce plays a pivotal role as the state looks to provide more high-quality early learning opportunities for its young children. California must create and enhance a coordinated system of support around the ECE Workforce.

Four-Year-Old Children Have Access to Child Development Programs

First 5 strongly believes that children should have access to a quality, enriching, developmentally appropriate experience in a variety of early learning settings that best meet the diversity of needs for working families. We recommend that all four-year-old children are provided with a child development component as part of their care. Children utilizing child care without an educational component are missing essential learning opportunities that are critical to their development. A child's early years are a critical period when rapid brain development is occurring and when quality early learning experiences are most crucial. The state should offer families that utilize CalWORKs or Alternative Payment (AP) vouchers for child care additional access to a child development program to supplement their child's early learning, as applicable.

Ensure Workforce Has Training to Support Child Development

In order to ensure children are receiving an enriching learning environment, all early care providers should be required to receive, and have affordable access to, the training necessary to better support child development. In addition to training on health and safety requirements, early care providers should have access to training and professional development on the basics of child development. Pathways to achieve this requirement should be developed for both the existing workforce and incoming workforce.

Leverage ECE Settings to Connect Families to Other Services and Supports

We appreciate the BRC's acknowledgement that other services, like home visiting, play a critical role in child development. We also acknowledge that many of these services are funded by various public programs, like CalWORKs and Medi-Cal. Subsidized early learning settings provide a critical connection point for families, and create an opportunity to ensure families are aware of other public services and supports for which they may be eligible. We recommend that ECE providers have the resources and tools available to help families understand and connect to the array of programs for which they may be eligible. It is critical that we take a whole-family approach to address the social, emotional, and physical needs of children and their families so that they can reach their full potential.

We appreciate your consideration of the recommendations outlined in this letter. We thank you for your visionary leadership in this process to ensure that our youngest children and working families have access to quality, affordable ECE opportunities. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Monique Ramos from California Strategies, at mramos@calstrat.com.

Sincerely,

First 5 Association of California, First 5 California, and First 5 Los Angeles