



May 23, 2018

CA Assembly Blue Ribbon Commission
on Early Childhood Education
Sub-Committee to Improve Access
State Capitol, Room 219
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Co-Chairs Ignatius and Olenick,

On behalf of First 5, we are pleased to provide our recommendations for the Assembly Blue Ribbon Commission on Early Childhood Education's (BRC) consideration for their Summer Commission Hearing.

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 are appreciative of the BRC's work and the opportunity to lay out a long-term, holistic vision for a high-quality early care and education (ECE) system in California. We encourage this Commission to be bold and visionary in building a comprehensive ECE system that meets the diverse needs of our state's infants, preschoolers, and school-age children as well as working parents.

To that end, First 5 makes the following recommendations:

We recommend the following state actions to ensure families have access to a variety of high quality early care and education options:

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.

Ensure Access to Child Development Programs

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 is 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 family child care homes (FCCHs) or Alternative Payment (AP) vouchers for child care additional access to a child development program to supplement their child's care.

Build and Retain a Skilled Workforce

We strongly recommend providing ECE professionals with adequate compensation and professional development opportunities to build and retain a skilled child care workforce. Insufficient wages play a major role in high turnover rates, which negatively impact the well-being of young children, especially infants and toddlers, who need stable and consistent caregivers to thrive and learn. Additionally, providing child care staff with adequate compensation is inextricably connected to creating and sustaining high-quality early care and education programs. We believe that the state should prioritize investments to improve wages to help attract and retain a skilled workforce.

In order to ensure children are receiving an enriching learning environment, all early care providers should have an understanding of child development to ensure children are reaching their optimal development. In addition to training on health and safety, 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.

AB 212 programs should also be expanded to allow all child care providers, including Title 22 providers, to participate in stipend opportunities linked to educational attainment or a Quality Improvement (QI) site continuous improvement plan. Expanding professional development opportunities will help enhance the knowledge and skills of providers to support the learning and development of our youngest children as well as promote career advancement for professionals in the field.

A minimum of three annual professional development days should be restored to Title 5 contracts, in order to support on-going professional growth for all teachers, staff, and site leaders, tied to the site's continuous improvement plan.

Support Continuous Quality Improvement

We recommend continued investments in quality improvement efforts for our early care and education system, with an emphasis on preserving and expanding a mixed delivery system that meets families where they are.

First 5 has made significant investments in building the infrastructure of Quality Counts California, the only statewide system of locally-implemented quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS) with stable funding that provides resources and supports for providers to support continuous quality improvement. We recommend increasing capacity and building upon existing infrastructure that is responsive and inclusive to all systems of quality care that provides an entry point for all providers. It is imperative that we meet the unique needs of parents and families.

We recommend the following state action to increase access to early care and education for children and families facing particular barriers:

Expand Family Child Care Homes (FCCHs) to Fill Needs in Rural Areas

Family Child Care Homes (FCCHs), paired with Family Child Care Home Education Networks (FCCHEN), are an important child care option to provide immediate child care access to the entire state and particularly, to meet the acute demand in rural areas. California's rural counties face the lowest access to quality child care because of geographic challenges and FCCHs is a key component to fill the need in these areas. FCCHs have a critical role in the early learning system to help meet the unique needs of families, whether to accommodate their non-traditional work schedule. We recommend increased investments to expand FCCHs in the state.

Address Access Issues in Regional Areas

The state should ensure that access to subsidized early care and education programs is equitable across geographies. Even in large urban areas, there are severe disparities in child care access, with pockets of communities, and in particular communities of color, that have little or no access to quality care. We recommend that the state understand equity of access at the local level and address access issues in underserved communities to ensure that families across the state have equal access to high quality early care and education programs.

We recommend the following statewide systemic changes to improve access for children and families:

Reform the Reimbursement Rate System

The state should set a goal of creating and fully funding a single, regionalized state reimbursement rate system for child care and early learning services that compensates all providers for the full cost of providing care by reimbursing them at rates that reflect the economic diversity of California, strengthens our mixed delivery system and includes the costs of meeting different quality standards and regulations. We recommend creating and adopting a tiered reimbursement rate system that recognizes the cost of care and the additional cost of quality care. A tiered reimbursement structure provides financial incentives to child care providers to provide quality early learning experiences by being compensated accordingly.

Build the ECE Facilities Infrastructure

Addressing the state's inadequate supply of ECE facilities is a key component to improving child care access. The state should consider both short-term and long-term strategies to build up the ECE facilities infrastructure, including the following:

- Create a start-up fund for subsidized child care centers, to provide the facility, equipment, and staff recruitment start-up costs necessary to open new child care "classrooms" or to convert existing child care spaces to serve a different age-group;
- Leveraging state and local bonds, such as K-12 facilities bonds and park bonds;

- Enacting land use policies and procedures that remove barriers and encourage child care facilities development; and
- Encouraging city and county planners to consider the need for child care facilities in new and future development to create more family friendly communities.

Implement a Universal Screener

We recommend creating a comprehensive universal screener to conduct an assessment on children and their families and connect them to ECE programs and other necessary services, such as social safety net programs, housing assistance, cash aid, and Earned Income Tax Credit. 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 encourage your visionary leadership in this process to ensure that our youngest children and working families have access to quality, affordable early care and education opportunities. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Becca Patton, Senior Policy Strategist for First 5 LA, at RPatton@First5LA.org.

Sincerely,

First 5 Association of California, First 5 California and First 5 LA