



April 7, 2021

Governor Newsom  
State of California  
State Capitol, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Senate Pro Tempore Atkins  
California State Senate  
State Capitol, Room 205  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Assembly Speaker Rendon  
California State Assembly  
State Capitol, Room 219  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: CHILDHOOD READING AUGMENTATION BUDGET PROPOSAL**

As an organization working to ensure all children receive the best possible start in life and thrive, First 5 California supports the \$5 million proposal in the January Budget to provide books to low-income children to improve child development and literacy.

If we hope to prepare children for California's future and reduce achievement disparities, California must prioritize the early learning of its youngest residents. A wide body of research has demonstrated that exposure to books and positive parenting practices such as being read to in the first three years of life are critical to robust brain development. Many programs and organizations are hard at work in California to provide books and early literacy supports to young families.

For example, First 5 California's Talk. Read. Sing.<sup>®</sup> campaign was initiated out of an understanding of the importance of a word-rich environment to support the brain development of infants and toddlers. The campaign encourages parents and caregivers to prioritize talking, reading, and singing, and provides parent-friendly messages about the importance of early brain development. First 5 California also invests in new parent kits delivered to families at the birth of their child through hospitals, home visiting programs, and family resource centers throughout the state, linking materials with resources that help families utilize the contents. Additionally, to leverage and grow capacity and distribute books to more children and families across the state, in 2020, First 5 California allocated \$1.5 million to support an infusion of books to counties for

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distribution to California's high promise children. These investments promote and model evidence-based serve-and-return responsive communication between a young child and an adult.

This proposal furthers these programs by contributing additional resources to ensure more infant and toddlers have access to early literacy supports. It is in alignment with the Governor's Parent Agenda by providing needed resources to families and supports the California Surgeon General's goals to increase community-based family engagement and reduce the achievement gap. Early literacy programs encourage maternal/child bonding which promotes resiliency and therefore provides positive mitigation against adverse childhood experiences.

We know the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) model of distributing books to families is effective based on the return on investment seen in the Little by Little program in Los Angeles County. The program, which is administered at WIC sites, is part of a holistic approach to better serve low-income families by actively engaging parents and providing additional layers of parental education and support. During each visit, families receive high-quality books and informational handouts that address child development milestones and that encourage family engagement in strengthening literacy practices within the home. A study from the Little by Little pilot phase revealed children who received Little by Little services had higher school readiness and language scores than those who had not.

First 5 California believes targeted early literacy interventions can improve outcomes for an entire generation of California's children. For these reasons, First 5 California is pleased to support this \$5 million budget proposal to advance opportunities for California's youngest and most vulnerable children to achieve lifelong success. If you have questions regarding First 5 California's position, please contact Max Vargas, Deputy Director of External & Governmental Affairs, at [mvargas@ccfc.ca.gov](mailto:mvargas@ccfc.ca.gov).

Sincerely,



Camille Maben  
Executive Director

cc: Keely Martin Bosler, Director, Department of Finance  
Dr. Tomás J. Aragón, Director, California Department of Public Health  
Senator Nancy Skinner, Chair, Senate Budget Committee  
Assemblymember Phil Ting, Chair, Assembly Budget Committee

*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.ccfc.ca.gov](http://www.ccfc.ca.gov).*