

May 30, 2023

Jacqueline Thu-Huong Wong, Executive Director  
 Department of General Services, Procurement Division  
 c/o First 5 California  
 2389 Gateway Oaks Drive, Suite 260  
 Sacramento, CA 95833

Dear Executive Director Jacqueline Thu-Huong Wong and the Department of General Services, Procurement Division:

Over the past two decades, our organizations have fiercely pursued our shared mission: To help children reach their full developmental potential throughout the critical years of prenatal to age 5. To that end, nearly 10 years ago, First 5 LA made a critical strategic investment in the ongoing linkage and analysis of administrative data concerning children and youth, and the Children’s Data Network (CDN) at the University of Southern California was born. The CDN configures records in different agency “silos” longitudinally, at a child level, for entire cohorts of children born in California. The goal of the CDN was, as it is now, to build and maintain a “village well” – an environment for generating knowledge more efficiently about children and youth in California to be used for evidence-informed program and policy development.

Our investment in that well has paid dividends.

- The CDN now stewards the *single largest set of linked administrative records concerning children and youth in the United States*, allowing us to better appreciate the multifaceted experiences of our children and families.
- Their innovative, impactful, and equity-focused research products (among them the [California Strong Start Index](#)) and work as an extension of state and local government (namely, to [reconcile client records for the largest public benefit programs and registries in California](#) each year (including Birth, Death, Medi-Cal, WIC, CalWORKs, CalFresh, Developmental Services, and Child Protection)) has helped us better understand the public service trajectories, needs, experiences, and outcomes of LA County’s children, inform community needs assessments, set benchmarks and assess progress toward strategic goals, stay abreast of and in alignment with county, state, and national policy conversations, and quickly answer urgent, program- and policy-relevant questions.
- In addition, their experience helping to build the state operated Data Hub – the secure environment in which many of the emerging child-focused data systems (e.g., ECIDS/Brilliant Beginnings) are being hosted and will connect to others (e.g., the Cradle-to-Career Data System) – has generated keen insight into data-related challenges and opportunities that have implications for our work in the years ahead.

In short, the CDN’s data expertise, relationships, and perspectives on existing and emerging child-focused data in initiatives, how they work together, and what more can be done has been invaluable. As such, I am writing to express First 5 LA’s support of [Supporting a Strong Start for CA Kids: The](#)

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*Children's Data Network's Proposal to Augment, Connect, Support, and Collect Population-Based Data about Young Children.*

This multi-year investment would, in the short-term, generate crucial new information about young children in California. First, it would allow other counties and the state, at large, to immediately benefit from some of the child-specific analyses the CDN conducts for LA County – furthering child-focused data equity statewide. Importantly, as other child-focused initiatives get off the ground, it would also provide an accounting of what data is and is not available related to children ages 0-5 and opportunities for linkage with already integrated records, which would be vital for budgeting, program development, client and community needs assessments, and strategic planning.

Longer-term, however, this investment would also address a critical gap in information about the needs and experiences of the entire population of young children and families – not just those who engage in services. Gathered directly from parents who recently gave birth in California, this information would help us understand the array of services available to new parents state-wide and county-wide, as well as characterize who does and does not engage, and why.

Thank you for considering this important investment and for your commitment to the young children and families of California.

If you have any questions regarding this letter of support, please contact me at [kpleitezhowell@first5la.org](mailto:kpleitezhowell@first5la.org).

Sincerely,



Karla Pleitéz Howell  
Executive Director  
First 5 Los Angeles