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August 14th, 2023

Dear First 5 California Commissioners,

I am writing on behalf of International House Davis to thank you for your support of newcomer and refugee families in California and urge you to continue this important support with consistent, long-term funding. International House Davis has been a First 5 Yolo partner organization delivering English Language learning services in Yolo County as a part of a tri-county newcomer family support grant. We have seen the incredible impact that a trauma-informed, culturally-responsive approach to teaching English has had, helping newcomer parents and caregivers integrate into their communities and gain confidence in their ability to care for themselves and their children. English language support is a small but important part of the wrap-around services that newcomer families need to thrive.

I hope you will consider the importance of consistent, stable funding over time, and the potential harm that is caused when programs are forced to start and stop due to gaps in funding. Over the course of 6 months, International House Davis built trust in the Afghan newcomer community that we were serving. Women were less fearful of leaving their apartments and were becoming familiar with hearing English spoken. They were spreading the word to friends and neighbors about the program. Due to the uncertainty of continued funding, we were disappointed to stop services. We are concerned that this stoppage will erode the trust in the community and halt positive progress.

We look forward to building upon the foundation that the newcomer grant support provided, rebuilding trust, growing the program and expanding access if given the opportunity. We hope you will consider broadening the definition of "new arrival", recognizing that refugee families who have been in the United States for more than three years still need support. When working in a community, we would like to be able to create inclusive programs that do not block access to family members and neighbors who are in need but may not fit a narrow definition of new arrival.

Thank you once again for your continued support of families that deserve the opportunity to contribute to their communities and to the vibrant diversity of California.

Sincerely,

Shelly Gilbride, Executive Director