

# PRESS RELEASE



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## **California Must Prioritize Young Children, Despite Budget Deficit**

*The First 5 Network Calls for Safeguarding Essential Services to Children*

SACRAMENTO, CA (January 11, 2024) - The First 5 Network appreciates the Governor and administration for maintaining their commitment to early childhood education, infant and early childhood mental health, and protecting early childhood systems of care as part of the proposed 2024-25 budget plan. Despite the difficult budget year, the First 5 Network is committed to ensuring the well-being of the state's youngest residents and their families.

“First 5 California continues to be grateful to the Governor and Legislature for last year’s unprecedented, values-based investments in children, families and communities. Although the budget shortfall will be a challenge for our state, we believe the Governor’s 2024 budget proposal is a carefully crafted and thoughtful first draft that addresses the state’s budget deficit while maintaining crucial investments for our youngest Californians, their families, as well as early learning and care educators,” said Jackie Thu-Huong Wong, First 5 California Executive Director.

“We appreciate the commitment to long-term investments to build the infrastructure necessary to continue to create healing centered, trauma informed, culturally responsive systems that will ensure equity for all Californians during this time of economic uncertainty. This is highlighted by his continued commitment to the Children and Youth Behavioral Health Initiative, among many other programs. We look forward to continuing to work with the administration and the Legislature in crafting a final budget that reflects California’s priorities.”

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Recognizing that 90 percent of brain development takes place during the first five years of life, First 5s deliver essential programs and services to over 600,000 children per year. These include family strengthening programs, infant and early childhood mental health services, and high-quality early learning and literacy. In addition to state revenue challenges, First 5's tobacco tax revenue continues to decline, and First 5 investments are at risk of cuts. Without new funding, many First 5 programs will end. In light of these projections, the First 5 Association of California will seek state investments to protect critical services for California's youngest children.

"While belt-tightening during lean budgets is necessary, it is also an opportunity to double down on our best investment – and there is no better investment than California's young children," said Avo Makdessian, Executive Director of First 5 Association.

"Our state leaders have made tremendous strides for young children and their families over the last few years with investments in the expansion of Medi-Cal, universal transitional kindergarten, and early learning rate reform. The budget proposal from Governor Newsom keeps to that commitment of protecting investments in early childhood serving systems despite a significant state deficit," said Karla Pleitéz Howell, Executive Director at First 5 LA. "We look forward to working with state agencies, the Legislature, and the administration to center communities facing the greatest systemic barriers by committing to ongoing funding for core programs and services, so that every child in California has the resources needed to reach their full developmental potential."

The First 5 Network looks forward to continued collaboration of the Legislature and Governor to ensure this invaluable work continues unabated.

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## **About First 5 Association**

The First 5 Association of California (F5AC) elevates the voice of the 58 county First 5s, created by voters in 1998 to ensure our youngest children are healthy, safe and ready to thrive in school and life. The First 5 Network impacts the lives of more than 1 million kids, families and caregivers each year. F5AC advocates for the state's youngest kids, uniting partners and leveraging funding to improve and scale up California's early childhood programming piloted by county First 5s. Learn more at [www.first5association.org](http://www.first5association.org)

## **About First 5 LA**

As one of the state's largest funders of early childhood and an independent public agency, First 5 LA advocates for children and their families, amplifies community voice, and partners for collective impact so that every child in Los Angeles County reaches their full developmental potential throughout the critical years of prenatal to age 5. Learn more at [www.first5la.org](http://www.first5la.org).

## **About First 5 California**

First 5 California 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.cafc.ca.gov](http://www.cafc.ca.gov).