



First 5 Ventura County Commissioners

March 26, 2021

To: Members of the Ventura County Board of Supervisors and CEO Mike Powers

Re: Five percent set-aside of American Rescue Plan funding to mitigate impact of COVID-19 on the healthy development and wellbeing of children prenatal to age 5.

The American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act of 2021 presents a historic opportunity to support our youngest, most vulnerable population like never before. Families with young children, five and under, have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. However, investments in the First 5 Years of life have a higher rate of return than any period later in life.

First 5 Ventura County stands ready to partner with you to ensure the successful implementation and execution of the Recovery Fund – and to ***assure that the unique needs of children prenatal to age 5 are not overlooked.*** On behalf of children and families, we urge you to ***set aside five percent of the ARP for the first five years!***

Problem

The pandemic has been devastating for our children and families, and has brought to the forefront the huge disparities that exist in our communities. People of color and those with the fewest resources have borne the brunt of this pandemic, facing extreme economic insecurity. Impacts from the pandemic include:

- 42% of households are worried about paying for at least one **basic need** like food, rent or utilitiesⁱ
- 29% of Latinx and 31% of Black families with children are facing **three or more economic and health-related hardships** during the pandemic.ⁱⁱ
- Ventura County **permanently lost 778 licensed child care slots** between March 2020 and January 2021ⁱⁱⁱ, forcing working moms to leave their jobs
- **Pediatric visits** were down an estimated 24% nationally from pre-pandemic baselines in December 2020 and the number of **vaccination** doses administered to California children dropped by more than 40% at the start of the pandemic.^{iv v}
- 52% of children within families with financial hardship are facing **emotional distress**^{vi}
- Prolonged community stress is an **Adverse Childhood Experience**, which has a negative impact on health outcomes later in life.

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Decades of research in the field of child development have made clear the conditions necessary for young children and their families to thrive, and **First 5 Ventura County is your local expert** in investing public funds to improve outcomes for young children.

Solution

Set aside 5% of American Rescue Plan funding provided to city and county governments for the First 5 years of life.

Through the ARP, local governments will receive \$130.2 billion, resulting in a direct Ventura County allocation of \$164 million, and an allocation of \$139 million for our 10 cities. In Ventura County, **57,000 infants, toddlers and preschoolers** make up roughly **7%** of the county's overall population – and 100% of our future. An equitable approach should be used to distribute these funds.

Children are too young to vote but too important to ignore! The County of Ventura and our ten cities must take action now to bring immediate, equitable relief to families, child care providers and communities. The ARP enables us to commit to the success of children by **investing in them as early as possible**, and addressing the economic, racial, and health disparities made worse by the pandemic. Strong families and a bolstered economy mean strengthened communities in which infants and toddlers can learn, grow, and thrive.

Proposed Strategies

With ARP funding through December 2024, we have a tremendous opportunity to address the identified critical needs caused by the pandemic, support the most vulnerable young children and their families, and provide appropriate interventions now that will have long-term positive outcomes for years to come. While details of a comprehensive “5 for 5” strategy will build on further assessment of other investments through ARP, address identified gaps, and take into account the voice of the community, initial proposed strategies include:

- Family Child Care Technical Assistance and Capacity Building
 - Provide a comprehensive package of **business technical assistance**, access to innovative **child care management software**, and **financial stipends** to family child care providers, in partnership with the Economic Development Collaborative (EDC), Child Development Resources (CDR) and the Ventura County Office of Education
 - **Waive business license fees** for family child care providers through December 2024
- Early Childhood Education/Child Care Infrastructure and Facility Development
 - Provide grants and low cost loans to **stabilize current child care operators** and spur the development of new licensed child care capacity
 - Provide facility grants and low cost loans to **establish regional early childhood hubs** that provide a dedicated space for cross-sector early childhood service and program delivery, and can serve as Centers of Excellence for multiple disciplines and professions to work collaboratively (e.g. Parent and Child Together classes, case management, parenting education, early childhood and parental mental health counseling, Early Head Start/Head Start, development screenings, speech services, etc.)
- Early Childhood and Family Support Service Capacity
 - Increase **screenings** for maternal mental health, social determinants of health, children's developmental milestones, and ACEs and link families to services

- Expand and strengthen network of care by deploying parent **navigators/service coordinators** to support families in accessing services, such as health insurance, health and mental health services, prenatal care, WIC, access to basic needs, etc.
- Provide opportunities for **parental bonding** and attachment disrupted by the pandemic
- Expand access to **mental health services** for child care providers and families, early childhood mental health consultation for young children, and trauma informed care training

Existing Governance and Local Control through First 5 Ventura County

The existing 9-member First 5 Commission (appointed by the Board of Supervisors) of diverse cross-sector leaders is an ideal oversight board with extensive experience in:

- providing strategic guidance for funding priorities and processes, impact assessment, and accountability measures
- identifying existing resource and gaps
- working across existing programs to strengthen systems and leveraging funding to address identified gaps

Building on the existing Early Childhood Taskforce (comprised of F5VC, CDR, and VCOE), First 5 Ventura County would also establish a **“5 for 5” Advisory Committee** with participation from a diverse group of parents, community based organizations, agencies, and service providers placing an emphasis on equity and inclusion.

For more than 20 years, First 5 Ventura County has been the County’s partner and a proven steward of public funds to ensure resources reach children and families who are most in need.

Summary

We urge you to set aside 5% of American Rescue Plan funding provided to city and county governments for the first 5 years of life. If not addressed now, ACEs and toxic stress caused by the pandemic can have a tremendous negative impact on the developing brain, long-term health outcomes and school success. Women, people of color, and children have been disproportionately affected. The impact on children’s social emotional well-being and healthy development may not be immediately evident, but data show that pediatric well visits and immunization rates have declined, developmental delays are less likely to be identified, and entry in the child welfare system has increased over the last year. The child care industry, a driving force behind economic recovery and an industry in its own rights, is at the brink of collapse.

First 5 Ventura County has been a committed partner during the COVID-19 crisis response, and we remain committed to our county’s ongoing recovery efforts. However, our First 5 (Proposition 10, 1998) funds alone cannot meet the great and growing needs of our young children and their families. **The investments we make in the *First 5 Years* of life now will benefit Ventura County for years to come.**

ⁱ Data from RAPID-EC, March, 2021: <https://www.uorapidresponse.com/policy-action>

ⁱⁱ Padilla, Christine and Thomson, Dana, *More than One in Four Latino and Black Households with Children Are Experiencing Three or More Hardships during COVID-19*, Child Trends (January 13, 2021). <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/more-than-one-in-four-latino-and-black-households-with-children-are-experience-During-three-or-more-hardships-during-covid-19>

ⁱⁱⁱ Data from the California Department of Social Services Community Care Licensing Division, January, 2021: <https://app.box.com/s/hsgbvgqptmjer2u0cdp5nrc5ic4tqat4>

^{iv} Ateev Mehrotra et al., *The Impact of COVID-19 on Outpatient Visits in 2020: Visits Remained Stable, Despite a Late Surge in Cases* (Commonwealth Fund, February, 2021). <https://www.commonwealthfund.org/publications/2021/feb/impact-covid-19-outpatient-visits-2020-visits-stable-despite-late-surge>

^v California Department of Public Health, *Staying Safe & Getting Vaccinated During the Pandemic*, Press Release:NR20-090 (May 18, 2020). <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/OPA/Pages/NR20-090.aspx#YourActionsSavesLives>

^{vi} Data from RAPID-EC, March, 2021: <https://www.uorapidresponse.com/policy-action>