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## Proposed ballot measure targets funding for Pomona youth and family programs



Jesus Sanchez, with Pomona Kids First, speaks to those in attendance at Tony Cerda Park in Pomona on Saturday, Feb. 12, 2022. The group hopes to have an initiative on the November ballot which would amend the city's charter to create the Pomona Fund for Children and Youth financed through general purpose revenue. It would also create the Department of Children and Families that would administer these funds.



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Efforts are underway to redirect some of Pomona's general fund revenues to programs and services that support youth and families.

The [Pomona Kids First Initiative](#), a proposed measure backers hope to place on the November 2022 ballot, would create a new "Children and Youth Fund." If approved by voters in November, the initiative would redirect 1% of general fund revenues in the 2022-23 fiscal year, before jumping to 5% the next year year. The measure would allow for 1% increases in subsequent years and set a 10% cap on fund transfers.

The initiative is a direct response to what organizer Iris Villalpando, 20, says has been "a lack of investment in youth in Pomona."

A graduate of the Pomona Unified School District, Villalpando said there has never been enough programs or resources to keep youth busy after school, which resulted in many finding trouble.

"I saw students constantly fall between the cracks and ask for more resources, whether for school, jobs, mental health but there was never any answers," Villalpando said. "But now, there's a way where we can provide them with this opportunity and make some change in Pomona."





Iris Villalpando, with Pomona Kids First, speaks to those gathered at Tony Cerda Park in Pomona on Saturday, Feb. 12, 2022. The group hopes to have an initiative on the November ballot which would amend the city's charter to create the Pomona Fund for Children and Youth financed through general purpose revenue. It would also create the Department of Children and Families that would administer these funds. Approximately 50 people attended the event. (Photo by Will Lester, Inland Valley Daily Bulletin/SCNG)

A coalition of youth, longtime Pomona residents and community members is leading the initiative process, according to a news release. The timing, organizers said, is due to the current “public health and economic crisis impacting” kids and families throughout Pomona.

The coalition says the city does not provide “significant funding for children and youth programs” in the current fiscal year budget. The city allocated \$170,185 for youth programming in 2020-21, but that line item wasn't included in the \$121 million budget for 2021-22.

“Given the significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the stability of youth's mental, physical, and emotional wellness, now more than ever, youth need structural support from their city,” organizers said in the news release.

Some of the possible fund uses include youth justice programming, job training, domestic violence services, art classes, outdoor education and more. The fund will





Hellen Chavez, 15, Jeannette Cruz, 16, and brothers Emmanuel, 11, and Ricardo Chavez, 13, listen to speakers during a Pomona Kids First rally at Tony Cerda Park in Pomona on Saturday, Feb. 12, 2022. The group hopes to have an initiative on the November ballot which would amend the city's charter to create the Pomona Fund for Children and Youth financed through general purpose revenue. It would also create the Department of Children and Families that would administer these funds. Approximately 50 people attended the event. (Photo by Will Lester, Inland Valley Daily Bulletin/SCNG)

Citing results from the Pomona Student Union's 2020 COVID-19 Community Mental Health Participatory Action Research Project, initiative backers want to focus on providing mental-health programming. According to poll results, 41% of Pomona youth surveyed were aware of school mental health services, and 24% of those surveyed said they would feel comfortable accessing school-based mental health services.

The initiative calls for the creation of the Department of Children and Youth, which would report to the city manager. The department would oversee the Children and Youth Fund. Additionally, the proposed measure would establish an oversight commission made up of members between the ages of 15 and 24 that would monitor and develop policies for the new fund.

Organizers kicked off a signature-gathering campaign Saturday, Feb. 12, at Tony Cerda Park. About 50 people gathered to learn about the initiative. Organizers said the event Saturday was the first of many outreach opportunities it has planned.

To qualify the proposed measure for the November ballot, organizers said, they need



Organizer Luis Castro-Limon, 17, is optimistic the initiative will resonate with community members. The Diamond Ranch High School senior believes the initiative has the power to “change the lives of many youth” in the city.

“For me, it’s a lot about the next generation of youth and making sure they are supported because for a long time I didn’t feel that,” Castro-Limon said. “This can change that or at the very least, start that change.”

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Javier Rojas is a reporter covering news in Pomona, Claremont and La Verne. He is an award-winning journalist and photographer that has previously covered city government, immigration and Latino culture. Born and raised in East Los Angeles, he is a lifelong Dodgers fan.

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