



Memo

To: Commissioners, First 5 Ventura County

From: Petra Puls, Executive Director

Date: June 16, 2022

Re: Recommendation to authorize contracting with the County of Ventura to receive up to \$3.5 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact on families--lapses in healthcare, declines in mental health, financial strain, parental stress, parental and child resilience, and social isolation. Adverse effects have been pronounced in more vulnerable populations, exposing the need for greater community supports. If not addressed, Adverse Childhood Experiences (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.

The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) of 2021 presents a historic opportunity to support our youngest, most vulnerable populations like never before and to ease the toll the pandemic has had on child, family, and community wellbeing. In March 2021, First 5 Ventura County, in partnership with a larger coalition of early childhood organizations including the Ventura County Office of Education and Child Development Resources, request that cities and the County set-aside five percent of ARPA funding to mitigate the impact of Covid-19 on the healthy development and wellbeing of children prenatal to age 5.

F5VC revised the proposal to reflect evolving family and community needs, the vision and direction of the Ventura County Essentials For Childhood (E4C) Collaborative to prioritize wellness, and the Department of Treasury's final guidance. The revised proposed project outlines efforts to promote equitable outcomes for historically underserved populations and geographic neighborhoods and identifies strategies for addressing their health and educational disparities by expanding the First 5 Neighborhoods for Learning services to encompass "wellness". ARPA funding would be used to hire additional staff and increase Early Childhood and Family Support service capacity countywide and to provide universal primary prevention services through a light-touch home visiting pilot program, Welcome EVERY Baby, targeting pregnant women and families with infants and toddlers in the McKinna/Kamala neighborhood of Oxnard.

In April 2022, the Board of Supervisors (BoS) authorized the County Executive Office to reserve a portion of the estimated \$164 million in ARPA funds for various projects, including \$3.5 million for early childhood learning and support. This action was intended to demonstrate to the community, as well as potential project partners, the Board's commitment to funding these programs and projects using ARPA. County staff is planning to return to the Board for final approval of the NfL expansion project on July 12, 2022.

Recommendation

The recommended action would grant authority to the Executive Director to contract with the County of Ventura to receive up to \$3.5 million in ARPA funds to address the negative impact of COVID-19 on the health and wellbeing of families with young children and pregnant mothers, pending approval by the Board of Supervisors.