



Memo

To: Commissioners, First 5 Ventura County

From: Petra Puls, Executive Director

Date: December 15, 2022

Re: Recommendation to Approve Unspent Neighborhoods for Learning (NfL) 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 support. 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.

To ease the toll the pandemic has had on child, family, and community wellbeing, in April 2022 the Board of Supervisors (BoS) authorized a \$3.5 million set-aside of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds for First 5 Ventura County's proposal to expand early childhood learning and support services through Neighborhoods for Learning, with final approval initially expected in early July 2022. Anticipating BoS approval in July, the Commission previously granted 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. The approval of the comprehensive \$164 million ARPA spending plan was delayed until October 2022.

Expecting implementation of ARPA-funded activities to begin in Fall 2022, F5VC began recruitment to fill the 11 FTE and has successfully onboarded several new staff over the past couple of weeks. However, recent conversations with the County's Executive Office now indicate that the contract start date would be pushed back to Spring 2023.

In light of the significant delay in the contract start date and having already identified new staff to fill ARPA-funded positions, staff recommends using a portion of FY2021-22 unspent Neighborhoods for Learning funds as bridge funding until the contract with the County of Ventura can be finalized. The amount requested is up to \$500,000 for the period of November 1, 2022 to March 31, 2023. The current amount available in FY2021-22 unspent funds within the NfL Initiative is \$1,044,519 and is more than sufficient to meet the amount requested.

Funding would be used to cover personnel and operating expenses associated with increasing early childhood education and family support service capacity countywide and to launch 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. If approved, this action would update the Commission's FY 2022-23 operating budget accordingly.

Recommendation

The recommended action would approve the use of up to \$500,000 in available unspent NfL funds to be used as bridge funding through no later than March 31, 2023 when American Rescue Plan Act funding is anticipated to be available. Funds would be used to expand existing First 5 Neighborhoods for Learning services and activities and launch a new light touch home visiting pilot "Welcome Every Baby".