COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES

February 20, 2025

Commissioners Present: Matt LaVere, Dr. Cesar Morales, Dr. Christine Walker, Dr. Loretta Denering, Bruce Stenslie, Kimberly Naslund, Barbara Marquez-O'Neill, Rachel Champagne

Staff Present: Petra Puls, Lauren Arzu, Jennifer Johnson, Sam McCoy, Jina Jue, Sharon Elmensdorp, Lysa Urban, Christina Laubacher, Sky Limón, Courtney Pyle, Lilia Gurrola, Shelby Ferns, Jhoelle Aspuria-Arca, Mario Rodriguez, Marisol Hernandez, Grace Montejano, Tami Schupferling, Desiree Campos, Elisheva Hollis, Hope DeMoss, Veronica Reynoso, Christina Espinoza, Sandra Diaz, Estefani Diaz, Allie Dye, Maria Oliva Espinola, Laura Flores, Maria Galicia, Jennifer Guzman, Esbeyda Jimenez, Erika Martinez, Blanca Morales, Fabiola Morales, Sabrina Nuno, Marilyn Rincon, Brenda Sanchez, Sharon Torres, Nancy Uribe, Margarita Valadez, Chelsea Ventura, Carmen Victoria

Public Present: Regan Bynder

1. **Welcome and Introductions**

   Chair LaVere opened the meeting at 1:02 p.m. and asked Commissioners to introduce themselves.

2. **Agenda Approval and Review of Commission Packets**

   A motion was made by Commissioner Morales, seconded by Commissioner Walker, to approve the agenda. The motion passed unanimously.

3. **Public Comments / Correspondence**

   There were no comments from members of the public.

CONSENT AGENDA

4. **Approval of Minutes from January 16, 2025 Commission Meeting**

5. **Receive and File the First 5 Ventura County Expenditure Report as of December 31, 2024**

6. **Ratification of Committee Appointments**

   A motion was made by Commissioner Stenslie, seconded by Commissioner Denering, to approve the consent agenda. The motion passed unanimously.

REGULAR AGENDA

7. Public Hearing on the First 5 California Annual Report for FY 2023-24 – Petra Puls

F5VC is required by statute to hold a hearing each year on the First 5 CA Annual Report. Petra explained that 80% of tobacco tax revenues are distributed to county commissions and 20% is allocated to First 5 California (F5CA). She then shared policy and advocacy accomplishments including extending eligibility to the California State Preschool Program to children as young as 2 years of age; and simplifying access to Paid Family Leave and disability compensation. There was mention of F5VC's Diaper Distributions and the success of New Parent Kits - which have been distributed through a network of partners since 2001. Additionally, she touched on F5CA's Fatherhood Initiative.

Petra went on to discuss F5VC's role in supporting quality early learning through its participation in IMPACT Legacy. The Ventura County Office of Education and F5VC receive funding to bolster quality improvement initiatives aimed at enhancing Neighborhoods for Learning sites and strengthening the capacity of local librarians to implement Parent and Child Together (PACT) classes. F5CA also funds the Home Visiting (HV) Regional Technical Assistance grant; F5VC receives $180,000, enabling collaboration with other HV partners, such as Child Developmental Resources and Ventura County Public Health, to build capacity, strengthen relationships, and align programs and processes. This collaboration also allowed F5VC to participate in the Managed Care Plan Learning Community, which supports efforts to become a Medi-Cal provider.

Although F5VC submits a high-level annual report to F5CA each October, the detailed data and outcomes for Ventura County are presented in February each year. Petra explained that F5CA aggregates data from all 58 counties into four key result areas: Family Resiliency, Child Development, Child Health, and Systems of Care. Statewide, 35% of the children served were between zero and three years old – F5VC's percentage is much higher.

Lastly, Petra pointed out Ventura County specific information within the report, including a picture of Ventura County Executive Officer Dr. Johnson as a celebrity reader at the Take 5 and Read to Kids! 2024 event.

Chair LaVere opened the meeting for public comments at 1:16 p.m. There were no comments from members of the public. Chair LaVere closed the public hearing at 1:17 p.m.

A motion was made by Commissioner Stenslie, seconded by Commissioner Morales, to receive and file the First 5 California Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2023-24. The motion passed unanimously.

8. Report of Administration and Finance Committee

a. Recommendation to approve Policy Platform for 2025 – Petra Puls

Petra provided a brief overview of the Policy Platform, noting that it aligns with the Strategic Plan and is reviewed and updated annually by the Commission. She highlighted the updates to the 2025 Policy Platform priorities: 1) Sustainability – removing references to the Prop 31 flavored tobacco ban and adding a focus on protecting investments, 2) Quality Early Learning – emphasizing infants and toddlers, and 3) Strong and Resilient Families – including access to economic support to meet the basic needs of children.

A motion was made by Commissioner Stenslie, seconded by Commissioner Marquez-O'Neill, to approve the updates to the Policy Platform 2025. The motion passed unanimously.

b. Recommendation to select CPA firm to perform auditing services, beginning with the 2024-25 fiscal year – Petra Puls

Petra reminded the Commission that a Request for Proposals (RFP) for auditing services was released in November 2024, to begin with the 2024-25 fiscal year. The RFP sought bids for a five-year period, including the annual cost for both the financial and compliance audit, as well as for a Single Audit, if required for Federal funds. Petra reviewed the procurement procedures for selecting vendors. She stated that proposals were independently reviewed and rated by a review committee. Petra reported that, of the five proposals submitted, two were determined to be viable for consideration based on score, cost, and meeting the bid requirement of conducting interim audit procedures in May/June. She stated that the Administration and Finance Committee recommends selecting Brown Armstrong Accountancy Corporation to continue to provide auditing services for the Commission, as they have substantial First 5 commission auditing experience.

Commissioner Stenslie commented that the Committee finds Brown Armstrong to be thorough, experienced, and cost effective. There was discussion about the pros and cons of selecting the same auditor that the Commission has used previously. Staff noted that an additional partner is assigned each year for a secondary review of the audit and engagement partners can be rotated.

A motion was made by Commissioner Stenslie, seconded by Commissioner Morales, to approve the recommendation to select Brown Armstrong, Certified Public Accountants, as the vendor to perform auditing services, in accordance with Health and Safety Code, Section 130150, for an engagement of up to five years, for fiscal years beginning June 30, 2025 through June 30, 2029, with costs as follows: $22,570 per year for the financial and compliance audit; and, $2,800 per year for the Single Audit, if required to be conducted based on the level of Federal expenditures.

c. Recommendation to approve updated Employee Handbook – Lauren Arzu

Lauren highlighted the proposed revisions to the Employee Handbook stating that many are required changes based on recently passed laws. The proposed updates include:

- Updating the Equal Employment Opportunity and Harassment policies to include religious creed and medical conditions; in acknowledging intersectionality, language was added to state that any combination of the listed characteristics or perception that person has is protected, and under anti-disability laws language was also added to include pregnancy, childbirth and related medical conditions.
- Commission staff may not be supervised by an **immediate** relative.
- Requests for Outside Employment must be made to the Director of HR and Operations and Executive Director.
- The Whistleblower section specifies current and former employees and subcontractors will be protected.
- Employees who are re-hired within 6 months will have their accrued but unused sick hours restored up to 80 hours; employees who were employed by a F5VC contractor

withing five years and assigned F5VC funded duties may have their years of service accredited towards vacation and floating holiday accruals levels.

- Gender neutral language was added to the Sick Leave Policy, and Sick Leave can be also used if a **family member** is a victim of a crime.
- State Paid Family Leave now allows employees to receive 70 to 90 percent (depending on income) of their wages
- Family and Medical Leave act includes the employee **or a family member or designated person** who has been a victim of a crime, domestic violence, sexual assault or stalking.
- Leave Without Pay and Bereavement Leave may be approved by the Director of HR and Operations.

Commissioners commended Lauren and Marisol Hernandez, HR manager, for their due diligence in updating the handbook.

A motion was made by Commissioner Stenslie, seconded by Commission Marquez-O'Neill, to approve the update to the Employee Handbook. The motion passed unanimously.

9. Review and Discussion of Key Accomplishments and Findings from the First 5 Ventura County FY 2023-24 Annual Evaluation Report – Sam McCoy & Christina Laubacher

Sam McCoy presented on the 2024 Annual Report emphasizing three strategic priorities of focus: Strong and Resilient Families, Comprehensive Child Health and Development, and Quality Early Learning. He highlighted that F5VC serves entire families, reaching more than 3,000 individuals, and shared insights into the demographics of the families they support. Just over half of the parents and caregivers speak English, with a quarter speaking Spanish, and 17% speaking Mixteco. Sixty-six percent of families are Hispanic/Latinos and almost 50% of families earn below $30K each year and have less than a high school diploma. Almost all children have a medical home and are up to date with immunizations.

Sam reviewed each strategic priority, beginning with F5VC's efforts through the Parent and Child Together (PACT) program and the Fatherhood Initiative, emphasizing their role in building strong and resilient families. More than 2,000 families participated in PACT classes, many of which underwent screenings to identify family needs. Parents participated in parent education workshops. PACT parents reported significant improvements in their knowledge, abilities, and social support after the program compared to before. Moving to the second priority, he discussed how F5VC invests in Comprehensive Child Health and Development through developmental screenings, home visits, postpartum screenings, referrals for early intervention, and training clinicians to administer child developmental screenings. The third strategic priority, Quality Early Learning, saw parents reporting a significant increase in talking, reading, and singing with their children after attending PACT classes.

Sam then provided a brief overview of various aspects of Program and Systems, including communication and messaging, advocacy and policy development, capacity building and training, convening and collaboration, and finally, innovation and learning. He concluded by mentioning key initiatives and collaboratives, such as Neighborhoods for Learning, Help Me Grow, Welcome Every Baby, and the Mixteco Indigena Community Organizing Project (MICOP).

Commissioner Champagne inquired about the percentage of F5VC staff who speak the language of the communities that are served. Seventy percent of the staff that work with families speak Spanish

and MICOP's promotoras support Mixtec speaking families. She then complimented the hiring staff for hiring those that reflect the community it serves and suggested highlighting it in future reports.

Commissioner LaVere acknowledged and congratulated the fact that 99% of F5VC families are enrolled in health insurance.

Commissioner Champagne also asked if the statistics for education captured vocational training data. Sam shared that only educational background is captured during the intake interviews for PACT; but vocational training will be considered to be included in future reports.

Sam then presented the outcomes of the PACT program. He shared the annual reporting framework and then began his highlights about the Neighborhoods for Learning program, beginning with PACT classes. He emphasized that the design of the PACT program focuses on helping parents enhance their knowledge, confidence, and skills. He explained that PACT promotes equity in our community by narrowing income and education- related disparities. At the start of the program, low-income families rate their parenting skills lower, but by the end, they assess their knowledge, skills, and confidence on par with their higher-income peers. He then spoke about developmental and health screenings and care coordination with referrals, stating that 85% of those screened receive at least one service with partner agencies. In addition to PACT, parents benefit from parent workshops, parent leadership, and fatherhood engagement. Staff engage in professional development and abide by performance standards and follow guidelines for the classes and partake in evaluations for improvement.

Sam explained that there are various playgroup models, which make them challenging to research and contribute to a lack of consistency in the implementation process. As a result, the evaluation and outcome data for PACT focus on measuring Parental Self-Efficacy – assessing how parents perceive themselves, their knowledge, and their confidence. The Parenting Skills Ladder survey was used to gauge parents' feelings before and after attending PACT, showing significant improvements across all areas, which were categorized into three key constructs: parental knowledge, confidence, and abilities; social support; and ability to access services. Additionally, Sam highlighted that PACT successfully narrowed the gap between parents with high and low educational backgrounds, as well as between high- and low-income families. Sam also shared the results from the Program Improvement survey for returning families, noting that parents valued the service and reported improvements across multiple domains.

Commissioner Champagne commented that the survey results correlate with what research says about quality childcare in that it has its greatest impact on the most at-risk low-income families. She praised the Neighborhoods for Learning team for providing these quality services.

For the final part of the presentation, Christina shared outcomes from the Welcome Every Baby (WEB) light-touch home visiting initiative that is available to new and expecting parents. She presented enrollment data including demographics. The majority of the families are Hispanic/Latino, with 38% speaking Spanish, and 8% also speaking Mixteco. Over half have a high school education or less, and a quarter of the families earn less than 20K in income. Approximately 70% have public health insurance with 100% of those children being up to date on their well-child visits and immunizations upon exiting WEB. Christina also shared data from the Maternal Depression screening, revealing that 90% of women were screened, 18% of whom showed moderate or severe depression. As a result, 19 women were referred for supportive services. This highlights WEB's key role in addressing maternal mental health.

Christina then spoke about Social Determinants of Health stating that there were notable improvements between the first and last home visits. In addition, WEB effectively enhanced key protective factors: Family Functioning, Social Support, Parenting Knowledge, and Nurturing Relationships. One hundred percent of families reported being very satisfied with the Home Visiting Services through WEB.

Commissioner Walker praised the WEB staff for their work with new mothers. Commissioner Naslund commended the Neighborhoods for Learning staff for their work in the PACT program and shared her observations during one of her visits, while also voicing her support for developmental screenings. Commissioner Marquez-O'Neill showed appreciation for the WEB program and their focus on Oxnard areas. She inquired whether there is postpartum support for the Mixteco community. Sam will follow up with MICOP regarding what is being offered currently. Commissioner Marquez-O'Neill also inquired about why the completion rate for the Home Visiting program is 66%. Some families move but mostly, mothers return to work before completing the final visit. Commissioner Denering commended the staff and shared there is a perinatal behavioral health clinic in Oxnard that can provide access to interpreting services for Mixteco speakers.

A motion was made by Commissioner Walker, seconded by Commissioner Denering, to receive and file the First 5 Ventura County Annual Report for FY 2023-24. The motion passed unanimously.

10. Report from Executive Director – Petra Puls

Petra began her report by noting that the data from the PACT and Home Visiting Program evaluations are included in the background and landscape analysis section of the Strategic Plan binder. She then moved on to discuss Prop 10 tax distributions, which total around two million dollars, accounting for 41% of the budgeted revenues with 58% of the year already passed. The distributions are currently 10.9% lower than last year, but this decline is expected to be offset by incoming Prop 56 backfill and CECET (California e-cigarette tax) funds.

Petra shared that eight proposals were received for the Strategic Planning Consultant and outlined the procurement procedures for reviewing them. Petra also announced that the Neighborhoods for Learning, Help Me Grow, and Welcome Every Baby programs have now been combined into an Early Childhood Department. Parent education and engagement activities are being conducted throughout the county, with staff actively participating in community outreach events, such as dental health workshops. The Fatherhood Initiative continues with programs like *Play Date with Pops*. F5VC remains focused on training and capacity building; staff recently attended the Integrated Core Practice Model training as part of a larger VC Wellness System effort and will soon participate in verbal ee-escalation training. The WEB team has increased their caseloads by 40% partially due to their on-going participation in diaper distribution events. Petra also discussed the Medi-Cal Technical Assistance grant through the Providing Access and Transforming Health (PATH) TA Marketplace, which will assess current practices and ensure F5VC's HIPAA compliance at no cost.

She announced the upcoming *Read with Love* event and invited Commissioners to be a reader at the annual *Take 5 and Read to Kids!* event coming up in May. Petra then shared that the Home Visiting Coordination Grant will allow F5VC to host the first Home Visiting Summit in May allowing for networking and learning exchange for home visitors and community partners.

As for Immigration-related policies and advocacy, F5VC reaffirms that our programs are a safe place for everyone and we do not ask nor collect data regarding immigration status of families; staff are

actively tracking recent federal actions and their impact on families and getting resources to them such as: "Red Cards", Know Your Rights flyers, and Family Preparedness Plan templates, along with linkage to MICOP and El Concilio.

F5VC staff attended F5AC's Annual Summit and attended several sessions regarding policy and advocacy, parent leader engagement, and preparing for AI in Early Childhood Education. In addition, Petra stated that F5VC supports AB49 - California Safe Haven Schools & Child Care Act - which prohibits ICE officers from entering a school site or childcare facility.

11. Next Meeting

Thursday, March 20, 2025

12. This meeting was adjourned at 2:28 p.m.