COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES

March 20, 2025

Commissioners Present: Matt LaVere, Dr. Christine Walker, Dr. Loretta Denering, Kimberly Naslund, Rachel Champagne

Excused Absence: Dr. Cesar Morales, Barbara Marquez-O'Neill, Bruce Stenslie

Staff Present: Petra Puls, Lauren Arzu, Jennifer Johnson, Sam McCoy, Jina Jue, Sharon Elmensdorp, Lysa Urban, Sky Limón, Courtney Pyle, Mario Rodriguez, Marisol Hernandez, Sandra Diaz, Christina Espinoza, Veronica Reynoso

Public Present: No public attendees

1. **Welcome and Introductions**

   Chair LaVere opened the meeting at 1:05 p.m. and asked Commissioners to introduce themselves.

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

   A motion was made by Commissioner Walker, seconded by Commissioner Denering, 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 February 20, 2025 Commission Meeting**

5. **Receive and File the First 5 Ventura County Expenditure Report as of January 31, 2025**

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

REGULAR AGENDA

6. Report of Administration and Finance Committee – Commissioners Morales and Stenslie

a. Committee Updates - Jennifer Johnson

Jennifer Johnson shared that the Commission adopted an Investment Policy in 2009 and updated it in 2019. As part of the annual review of the Investment Policy, the Committee needs to determine 1) whether the one-year of operating funds should be invested in the County Pool or the State Pool - Local Agency Investment Fund (LAIF) and 2) whether funds beyond the one-year operating requirement should be maintained in the County Pool, Local Agency Investment Fund (LAIF), or be invested externally for FY 2025-26. Jennifer reported that the Commission has maintained its investments in the County Pool since its inception. The Committee reviewed data on current market rates for both long-term securities and investment pools. Jennifer noted there are only minor differences between the two pools among the three-, five-, seven-, and ten-year yields. Jennifer stated that the County Pool has historically outperformed the State Pool, and she discussed the efficiency in keeping funds with the County where monthly tobacco tax distributions are received. Therefore, the staff recommendation is to maintain all funds in the Ventura County Treasury Pool for FY 2025-26. She further stated that no changes to the Investment Policy are recommended at this time. Since no changes are being proposed, no action is required by the Commission

Jennifer then gave a rundown of the Budget Planning process stating that preliminary assumptions and preliminary staffing patterns will be used to build the budget. The administrative cost rate and the financial plan, along with the budget will be presented in April at the next meeting.

7. Recommendation to select Strategic Planning Consultant to Design, Lead and Facilitate Key Strategic Planning Activities – Petra Puls

Petra reported that the current Strategic Plan implementation timeline is slated to end in June 2026. F5VC solicited proposals for a Strategic Planning consultant to provide guidance, coordination, and support to implement a process that leads to a finalized Strategic Plan by March 2026. A total of eight proposals were received. Petra outlined the process for selection conducted by the review committee and announced that Applied Survey Research was chosen based on a comprehensive evaluation of their background, cost, and experience with community driven strategic planning, including with multiple First 5 agencies. The contract with Applied Survey Research will be effective April 1, 2025, through June 30, 2026, with a maximum cost of $52,500.

Commissioner Walker requested information regarding the total cost range of the submitted proposals. It was noted that the RFP Q&A estimated a cost of around $60,000 and noted that the committee would be mindful of selecting a cost-effective proposal due to declining revenues. The submitted proposals ranged from approximately $38,000 to $62,000, with most proposals at the $60,000 mark.

A motion was made by Commissioner LaVere, seconded by Commissioner Denering, to approve the recommendation to select Applied Survey Research as the Strategic Planning Consultant to Design, Lead and Facilitate Key Strategic Planning Activities. The motion passed unanimously.

8. Recommendation to Submit an Application for Resilience, Innovation, Sustainability, and Equity (RISE) Grant – Petra Puls

Petra reported that Gold Coast Health Plan has announced the RISE grant opportunity, aimed at improving access to physical and behavioral health care for Medi-Cal members in the county. This is a three-year initiative, with initial contracts running from July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2026. She outlined the grant's objectives and priorities, noting that F5VC staff are preparing a proposal to establish a family resource and wellness hub for families with children prenatal to age five in the Oxnard Plains area. The initiative aims to enhance immunization and well-visit rates and expand pre- and post-natal care. Collaboration with community partners will create a streamlined referral process.

Petra reiterated that the Executive Director has delegated authority to apply for grants and execute agreements for funding up to $500,000. Staff will be submitting an application for approximately $2 million. The recommended action is to approve the submission of the RISE grant application, exceeding the $500,000 threshold.

Commissioner Denering expressed support for the establishment of a wellness hub aimed at serving children prenatal to age five. The center will be a good resource to address mild to moderate behavioral issues in these children, with the goal of preventing escalation into the County system. Commissioner LaVere shared that there will soon be a community wellness center opening in Port Hueneme and commended the idea of the family resource and wellness hub.

A motion was made by Commissioner Walker, seconded by Commissioner Denering, to approve the recommendation to submit an application for the Resilience, Innovation, Sustainability, and Equity (RISE) Grant.

9. Strategic Planning: Landscape Analysis – Sam McCoy

Sam provided an update on the Strategic Planning Review process, outlining the topics covered in previous and upcoming meetings. In January, Sam presented F5VC and County Demographics, followed by the Annual Report, and Program Evaluations and Outcomes in February. The March presentation focused on the Ventura County Landscape, while the next meeting will include input from F5VC staff, parents, and an overview of state and national landscape information. He then highlighted F5VC's three current strategic priorities: Comprehensive Child Health and Development, Strong Resilient Families, and Quality Early Learning.

Sam provided key health indicators for Ventura County from 2022 related to Comprehensive Child Health and Development. Forty-nine percent of children ages zero to five were enrolled in Medi-Cal. Immunization rates stood at 71% for two-year-olds and 95% for kindergartners, while well-child visits were at 60%, with the WEB home visiting program achieving a 100% participation rate. Developmental screening rates increased from 41% in 2022 to 55.8% in 2024. Additionally, the county's rates for prenatal care, breastfeeding of newborns in hospitals, and newborns not classified as low birthweight were comparable to state averages.

Commissioner Champagne initiated a discussion on the potential impact on undocumented families if support services are reduced due to the current political climate. Sam will provide information at the next meeting on nationwide and statewide observations regarding immigration and related outcomes. Petra noted that F5VC is unable to assess the full impact, as immigration status of families served is not tracked, and undocumented families may avoid well-child visits and immunizations. Several

Commissioners agreed, stating that their respective agencies also do not inquire about immigration status.

Sam introduced the second strategic priority, Strong Resilient Families, and presented data from the Ventura County Human Services Agency (HSA). He reported that the demand for HSA services has more than doubled since 2007. He discussed the Real Cost Measure (RCM), the income required to meet basic needs focusing on housing affordability. A family of four requires approximately $98,000 annually to cover basic living expenses, yet over 27% of households in the county fall below this threshold.

Sam also reviewed 2-1-1 call data, noting that the top three needs identified by callers in the county are mental health, transportation, and housing support, with housing assistance being the most requested service. Regarding social determinants of health, he noted that childcare needs are ranked as the most significant need, followed by difficulties in reading hospital materials.

In response to previous commissioner inquiries, Sam provided an overview of homelessness data in Ventura County. He explained the definitions of unsheltered versus sheltered status and shared the count for both categories in 2020 and 2022, noting a 60% increase in homelessness from 2018 to 2022.

He then shared child maltreatment data, noting that nearly half of substantiated cases involved children under the age of five, with the highest rate of cases per 1,000 children occurring in infants under one year old. Sam also noted that the teen birth rate continues to decline in the county.

Sam presented an overview of Quality Early Learning initiatives. He highlighted F5VC's commitment to enhancing early learning experiences through PACT classes, Take 5 and Read, and more. He shared the Local Planning Council of Ventura County’s assessment of childcare access in the region. Their findings revealed that approximately half of the children from working families do not have access to licensed Early Childhood Education (ECE) spaces. Sam concluded by pointing out that preschool enrollment rates were significantly lower in Oxnard compared to other areas in the county. This disparity suggests a need for targeted interventions to improve early education access and participation in Oxnard.

Commissioner Champagne addressed the issue of affordable childcare, noting that middle-income households, rather than lower-income households, face the greatest challenges. She explained that these families fall into a gap where they are ineligible for subsidized childcare yet unable to afford private options, and available options don’t always meet family needs for full-day care. Commissioner Champagne also discussed a shortage in the childcare workforce, citing unlivable wages as a primary factor deterring individuals from entering or remaining in the field. The Commissioner stressed the importance of addressing these workforce and wage issues to improve childcare affordability and accessibility for middle-income families in the county.

Sam introduced the concept of Healthy Outcomes from Positive Experiences (HOPE), shifting the discussion towards a strength-based approach to childhood development. This framework emphasizes building resilience and positive experiences, contrasting with the deficit-focused model of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). Sam explained that a higher number of positive childhood experiences correlates with a reduced likelihood of depression and poor mental health outcomes later in life. To underscore this point, Sam quoted Dr. Carl Bell, "risk factors are not predictive factors because of protective factors."

10. Report from Executive Director – Petra Puls

The report began with Petra providing a reminder about the upcoming Form 700 submission deadline. She then proceeded to discuss the Early Childhood Programs, noting that PACT classes have commenced. Literacy events, including "Celebration of Books" and "Read with Love," were successful, attracting 120 families who also received complimentary diapers. Staff participated in Agency 101 and the Equity Conference. Additionally, staff conducted a Verbal De-escalation training course for staff and parent leaders. Lastly, she announced the upcoming Take 5 and Read to Kids! event scheduled for May 2nd, with its Proclamation Day set for April 29th.

F5VC is in the process of reviewing Memorandum of Understanding (MOUs) from both Gold Coast Health Plan and Kaiser Foundation Health Plan to formalize relationships and ensure appropriate resources are available for F5VC families. Staff will continue to monitor ongoing immigration-related developments and provide resources for families.

A regionwide Childcare Coalition has successfully secured grant funding from the Central Coast Uplift initiative. Under the leadership of F5 SLO, five central coast F5s collaborated on an application that will facilitate cooperative efforts among childcare advocates across the Central Coast region, enhancing the potential for impactful improvements in childcare services and accessibility.

Petra reported on recent developments within the First 5 Association of California (F5AC). The Association established a Managed Care Plan Learning Community to assist County Commissions in exploring opportunities to become Medi-Cal benefit providers. F5AC is implementing a new membership dues structure for the upcoming three-year period, which increases F5VC dues significantly. Petra noted that this marks the first adjustment to membership dues since 2016.

11. Next Meeting

Thursday, April 17, 2025

12. This meeting was adjourned at 1:59 p.m.