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An Increase in the State's Prosperity Must Align with Children's Needs

Budget priorities should address opportunity and achievement gaps for California's youngest children

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — The Governor's budget proposal highlights the real need to build an early learning system that meets California's preschool promise and better connects early education programming to our schools. However, it remains to be seen if the proposal laid out by the Governor, which block grants preschool and expands the child care voucher system, is the best way to build a strong foundation for our youngest learners.

After six years of economic recovery, our early learning and care system has not benefited from the state's booming prosperity, so the system's foundation has continued to erode. And as Governor Brown noted, it may be tempting to go on vacation when you have extra money, but you must fix the basics first. Prior year budgets and this proposal combined do not fix the basics and may, in fact crack, the cornerstone of our current system that serves children starting at birth.

This year's State Budget must rebuild a strong foundation for both our early learning and care system and California's youngest children's futures. The efficient, innovative, and accessible early learning and care system our children, families, and this Golden State deserve and need to prosper will require California's continued leadership, vision, and significant investment over multiple years. The foundation of this system has been weakened by years of deferred rate increases, new minimum wage increase pressures, and lost slots for children, particularly for babies and toddlers. This eroding foundation must be rebuilt through a significant commitment to a multi-year reinvestment for increased access, affordability, and quality in our entire system. The three pillars of increased access for all children, affordability for families and care providers, and high-quality program access are crucial to stabilizing and building an early learning and care vision worthy of the Golden State's children and families.

We thank the Legislature's leadership in both houses and the Legislative Women's Caucus for their dogged focus on and commitment to our youngest children's learning environments. We also thank Governor Brown for starting this crucial conversation this year with an eye on systems building. First 5 California looks forward to working with our K-12 and early learning partners to ensure that collectively we can meet the preschool promise, and strengthen our entire early learning system, to comprehensively address our achievement and opportunity gaps for California's children.

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About First 5 California

First 5 California, also known as the California Children and Families Commission, was established after voters passed Proposition 10 in November 1998, which added a tax on tobacco products to fund education, health, childcare, and other services for children ages 0 to 5 and their families. Its programs and resources are designed to educate teachers, parents, grandparents, and caregivers about the critical role they play during a child's first five years – with the overarching goal of helping more California kids grow up healthy and ready to succeed in school and in life. For more information, please visit www.ccfc.ca.gov.

About the First 5 Association of California

The First 5 Association of California is an advocacy organization working with the 58 First 5 commissions that provide a network of care for children 0 to 5. With hundreds of commissioner advocates, nonprofit partners and service providers working on the ground from Los Angeles to Shasta and every county in between, the First 5 Association of California builds strong, effective and sustainable systems to serve young children. See more at first5association.org.

About First 5 Los Angeles

First 5 Los Angeles is a leading early childhood advocate organization created by California voters to invest Proposition 10 tobacco tax revenues in Los Angeles County. In partnership with others, First 5 Los Angeles strengthens families, communities, and systems of services and supports so that all children in Los Angeles County enter kindergarten ready to succeed in school and life. Please visit www.first5la.org for more information.