



Dear Friend/Partner:

Recently we wrote to you explaining current threats to First 5 funding. In response to these threats, a number of you wrote to state legislators who represent Butte County. You may have received a letter from Senator Aanestad thanking you for contacting his office. I too received a letter, but was disappointed to find that the letter, while recognizing that county commissions in his district “are doing very good work,” also included inaccurate information about Proposition 10 and incomplete information about several county commission investments.

With all due respect to Senator Aanestad, I am writing to provide clarification. I hope you’ll take a moment to read through this letter so that you may have a better understanding of the comprehensive, creative work being conducted by our colleagues.

Senator Aanestad wrote: *“I understand the desire to ensure funding for the First 5 Commissions and appreciate the valid programs that are in place which make a difference in the lives of children. However, it is important to note that when voters approved Proposition 10 in 1998, it was to help improve the health of children five years of age and younger.”*

In truth, Proposition 10 has a much broader, more comprehensive approach to improving the lives of our state’s youngest children. The statute that California voters approved in 1998 (and reapproved in 2000 by a near 70% majority) addresses the *whole* child, not just physical health. The statute reads as follows:

“There is hereby created a program in the state for the purposes of promoting, supporting, and improving the early development of children from the prenatal stage to five years of age. These purposes shall be accomplished through the establishment, institution, and coordination of appropriate standards, resources, and integrated and comprehensive programs emphasizing community awareness, education, nurturing, child care, social services, health care, and research.”

“It is the intent of this act to facilitate the creation and implementation of an integrated, comprehensive, and collaborative system of information and services to enhance optimal early childhood development and to ensure that children are ready to enter school. This system should function as a network that promotes accessibility to all information and services from any entry point into the system.”

Senator Aanestad wrote: *“The California State Auditor has repeatedly criticized First 5 Commissions for poor contracting practices and for spending tens of millions of dollars on programs unrelated to the initiative’s goals.”*

This statement is simply untrue. The only State Auditor report on county commissions reviewed the practices of five commissions. It did not find anything related to “spending... on programs unrelated to the initiative’s goals” and made only one recommendation related to contracting practices – that two of the commissions adopt clearer policies and maintain more documentation of their allocations. The State Auditor has never found any illegality or impropriety by any county commission. Since that Audit report was released in 2004, every county commission has adopted clear policies on contracting and is independently audited every year to assure its contracts are consistent with those policies.

Senator Aanestad wrote: *“I was shocked to learn that the Los Angeles County First 5 Commission spent half a million dollars to develop a ‘social marketing campaign’ designed to shift public opinion regarding acceptance and inclusion of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender families – this has nothing to do with the healthcare of young children.”*

There are two major clarifications to make regarding Senator Aanestad's claims:

First, as stated previously, Proposition 10 is much more comprehensive than healthcare alone. It should be noted, however, that First 5 California and the First 5 county commissions have guaranteed that no child 0 – 5 will end up on a Healthy Families waiting list and are working to assure that no child will lose access to health care because of a family's lost employment or increased health care premiums. In addition, twenty-five First 5 commissions in the most populous counties fund Children's Health Initiatives, provide the state's largest and most stable funding source for health insurance for low income children ineligible for other state programs. Because of these funds, nearly 80,000 children have access to regular health care, approximately a fourth of them under the age of 6.

Second, the children in families served by the Gay and Lesbian Center in Los Angeles are mostly under five, adopted and disabled. The Center estimates that 75 percent of same-sex couples in L.A. County adopt through public agencies, and many of these children have come from foster care. The goal of the First 5 LA grant is to increase access to social services for these children by working directly with social institutions to remove the barriers to services to which these children are entitled. It should be noted that First 5 LA does not discriminate against children based on their family makeup; rather First 5 LA strives to serve all of the county's most vulnerable children.

Senator Aanestad wrote: *"Additionally, First 5 funds have been spent for infant massage, belly-dancing for pregnant women, family fun nights with movies, and photography lessons."*

Senator Aanestad is not an expert in early childhood development, so it is not surprising that he does not understand these investments. Unfortunately, he did not ask for information from the commissions or the grantees before he included these references in his response letter. Please note:

Medical research shows that **infant massage** is an appropriate protocol in instances where babies suffer from colic, teething, constipation and digestive problems, restlessness and sleeplessness. In addition, for hospitalized babies whose earliest exposure to touch is associated with pain and discomfort due to medical procedures, massage is a way to re-experience touch as a positive, loving encounter.

The reference to **belly dancing** refers to San Diego Youth and Community Services' Teen Options program that works with high-risk pregnant teens who have drug and alcohol problems. The overall goal of the program is to have babies born drug-free. One component of this comprehensive program educates teen moms on healthy nutrition and the importance of exercise. Among other components, it features bi-weekly physical activities that include walking, fitness, yoga and belly dancing. Belly dancing is not a core component of the program, but is an element designed to attract and keep these young women in the program – in contrast to many publicly-funded programs that have high drop-out rates. Since its inception, 100% of babies born to teen mothers in the Teen Options program have been born drug-free.

I don't know which commissions Senator Aanestad is referring to when he cites **family fun nights or photography**, but I can tell you that two years ago, the Butte County commissioners met with over 150 parents of children under the age of six. When the commissioners asked parents what they wanted in addition to what was currently funded, a majority of parents responded that they wanted free, family-friendly community events to which they could take their children. Parents said they wanted an opportunity to have fun with their children and meet other parents with young children, all in a safe environment. Since then, the Commission has funded two children's fairs for a total cost of less than \$5,000. I applaud our local commissioners for fulfilling parents' requests at a minimal cost.

First 5 recognizes that the state is facing an unprecedented financial crisis. The state may try to redirect local First 5 revenue to help it through the crisis, but ultimately it will be up to the voters to determine whether or not they will approve a diversion of the local funds. We hope that voters will fully understand the choice before them and base their decisions on accurate, complete information, rather than on misinformation such as that unfortunately cited in the Senator's letter.

For further information on First 5 and the state budget, please feel free to visit the First 5 Association at the following link: <http://www.f5ac.org/item.asp?id=3904>. For information on First 5 Butte County, please don't hesitate to contact us at 530-538-6464. We are available and pleased to discuss First 5 Butte County's successes and challenges.