

Commission Meeting Minutes

Date: Tuesday, October 28, 2025

Time: 1:00 PM – 3:00 PM

Call to order: 1:03 pm

Members: Chair, Dr. Faris Sabbah, Sandy Brown, Jennifer Herrera, Heidy Kellison, Monica Martinez, Kimberly Petersen, Sheree Storm

1. Call to Order and Establish Quorum

- Members Present: Jennifer Herrera standing in as Chair for Faris Sabbah, Sandy Brown, Heidy Kellison, Monica Martinez, Kimberly Petersen, Sheree Storm
- Members Absent: Dr. Faris Sabbah
- Quorum Established with 6 Members

2. Commission Member Remote Attendance Approval – Action Item

- No remote attendance requests.

3. Commission formally welcomed new Commissioner Heidy Kellison.

4. Review and Adopt Agenda – Action Item

- Motion to adopt agenda - M/S/P(U): Commissioner Kellison // Commissioner Petersen

5. Consent Agenda – Action Item

- Motion to approve consent agenda items - M/S/P(U): Commissioner Brown // Commissioner Storm

6. Community Oral Communications

- No Community Oral Communications

7. Commissioner Oral Communications

- Commissioner Petersen: County Human Services Dept. has reviewed applications for loans for childcare providers to improve their facilities. This will be on the board agenda on Tuesday to review recommended loan applications. We've received 48 applications and 23 will be moving forward for forgivable loans. We will be asking for about \$380,000 worth of loans.
- Commissioner Brown: Is the geographic distribution county-wide?
- Commissioner Petersen: Yes, the information that will be published tomorrow will include a detailed listing of all the applications received from every district and recommended funding for each.

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8. Public Hearing: Presentation and Approval of First 5 Santa Cruz County 2024-2025 Audited Financial Statements and Independent Auditor's Report – Action Item

- Commission opened public hearing and welcomed two auditors into the meeting, Garima and Roja from Harshwal Company.
- Director Brody reviewed audited financial statements and announced clean and timely audit.
- Auditor Garima: Reported a clean audit with no significant deficiencies.

Motion to accept and approve audit report: M/S/P(U): Commissioner Petersen// Commissioner Brown

9. Public Hearing: Presentation and Approval of First 5 Santa Cruz County's 2024-2025 Annual Report Submission to First 5 California – Action Item

- Director Brody reviewed Annual Report's appendices.
 - o AR1- Detailed Revenue Expenditure Summary
 - o AR2 - Demographic Report on all individuals served in our county
 - o AR3 - Summary of Evaluation Activities

Motion to accept Annual Report submission: M/S/P(U): Commissioner Storm//Commissioner Kellison

10. Public Hearing: Presentation and Acceptance of 2024-2025 Annual Evaluation Report and First 5 Santa Cruz County Strategic Plan Progress Report – Action Item

- Director Brody reported to the commission that after adopting a 5-year strategic plan and long-term financial plan in June, he sees no need for any immediate changes to the plan that we just adopted.
- Director Brody presented on and reviewed our strategic plan progress report.
 - o Core strategic plan with strategic priorities: Healthy Children, Thriving Families, Early Care and Education, Equitable and Sustainable Early Childhood Systems.
 - o This report is organized around those strategic priorities, and it has a number of important goals: 1. To provide an annual update on the overall wellbeing of the children and families in our community. 2. To document successes and challenges First 5 & partners faced in the last year. 3. To document goals we are hitting and progress we are making in the community.
- Special thanks to Holly Maclure for primarily authoring the report.
- Director Brody reviewed data pertaining to the state's Strong Start Index.
- Commissioner Petersen: There appears to be a big grey area in Watsonville, indicating lack of data?
- Director Brody: We noticed that as well, and it does seem out of the ordinary, it might be explained by either a reporting issue or simply just too few live births to measure.
- Commissioner Storm: It seems as though the bigger cities are not reporting strong numbers.
- Director Brody: We used to fund our own independent analysis, but we have a state-wide entity do that now. I still have some questions to look into in terms of how the data is gathered.
- Director Brody reviewed First 5's remarkable success rates of the Baby Gateway Newborn Enrollment Program in the Healthy Children portion of the Annual Report.
- Commissioner Herrera: What data source was used for this?
- Holly Maclure: Department of Healthcare Access, Information Services Division, they provide me with a customized report specifically for our county's emergency services.
- Commissioner Kellison: Has there been any focus on tracking the cause of decline in visits to the emergency room, specifically with ICE impact?

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- Director Brody: While that has not particularly been measured here, there are always going to be mitigating factors with year-to-year changes.
- Commissioner Herrera: In some particular activity in the past, we did see a significant drop in visits to hospitals and healthcare systems. It's something our health system is monitoring closely, but we haven't seen a measurable consistent shift yet.
- Commissioner Brown: What is going to happen with Medicaid, if people aren't going to be able to continue their enrollment, are you expecting continued decline due to loss of Medi-Cal? And fear, etc.?
- Commissioner Herrera: We are expecting decline due to fear and due to loss of Medi-Cal coverage, that's why it's been hard to produce high-confidence projections, especially with the perception changing right now at the national level through media.
- Director Brody: All of that just really adds to the importance of this work, and outreach enrollments, you don't have to do as much when the state level is really doing well, but as of right now, hopefully what we are seeing is that we will be able to continue these Baby Gateway enrollments for the foreseeable future. As of right now, there is no expected suspension of enrollments for children.
- Alicia Fernandez: This has been a question that has come up, what are families saying? So far, what we've seen, the population that we serve won't see many interruptions for children and newborns, but this is what we are monitoring and collecting data on. But one of our main priorities is communication, and we want to make sure that everybody knows that that is the case, and what to do next etc.
- Director Brody reviewed our Vision First Program.
- Commissioner Petersen: How does the initial contact with the child happen?
- Christine Sieburg: We contact the preschools, set up screening, get demographics and consent beforehand, we have screeners come out. Every child receives their results and optometrist information which accepts Medi-Cal.
- Vicki Boriak: Most places use a chart screening process which is heavily impacted by the child's engagement and ability to pay attention, but with the instrument-based system that we use, all of those obstacles are removed, and the screenings are so quick.
- Director Brody: One of the biggest issues is following up with the families, and getting them to agree to the full screening process. Currently, there are very limited optometrists that are covered under Medi-Cal in our county.
- Alicia Fernandez: We don't have a lot of eye doctors in our county who cover under age 5 who do take Medi-Cal. Normally, families are told about medical and dental but not about vision. Our county has improved over time, and now we have a really good collaboration with the county. Every month, we help make sure that the families are really involved with insurance.
- Vicki Boriak: 16-17% of all kids screened screen as being "out of range" across all races, ethnicities, class etc., year after year this statistic does not change. We see a high concentration in some centers, and none in other centers. Sometimes it takes 3-4 calls to get the family invested, they only get new glasses once every two years, so we need the parent to make sure they keep the glasses safe and that the kid wears them.
- Director Brody covered lowered child maltreatment rates and our Triple P Parenting program in the Thriving Families portion of the report.
- Director Brody reviewed Quality Counts, SEEDS and ELF programs as part of the Early Care and Education portion of the Annual Report.

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- Director Brody reviewed the Equitable and Sustainable Early Childhood Systems section of the report. Part of this section includes the Raising a Reader and Dolly Parton Imagination Library programs which have had great success.
- Commissioner Herrera: My family participates in Raising a Reader, and we got a visit from Baby Gateway, so it's great to see this as a recipient of the services, truly, a targeted universalism but also with a focus on the most vulnerable in the medical system.

Motion to accept the Annual Report: M/S/P(U): Commissioner Brown//Commissioner Storm

11. Contract Authorizations – Action Item

Vendor	Priority Area	Program	Authorization
Encompass Community Services – Head Start	Early Care & Education	Head Start Bridge	\$240,000

What it is: A collective community effort so that Head Start wouldn't close in October, it will stay open until the end of this month. \$140,000 of this comes through the Health Service Agency who transferred funds through First 5 to Encompass. We are essentially asking to approve the movement of these funds. Primarily due to federal shutdown, they cannot operate programs starting on November 1st. This is for authorization of this transfer of funds.

- Commissioner Martinez: Having been CEO of Encompass for a decade, it's important for people to know what's behind this, the federal administration said from the beginning that they wanted to close Headstart. There has been a complete change in the relationship with Headstart, as of 6 months ago seeing a lot of staff released from their contracts. October is a pretty typical renewal month, so all Headstarts are facing this issue of not having a contract starting November 1st. I will be abstaining from this motion and any contracts related to Encompass for the first year of my Commissioner position.
- Commissioner Brown: For this funding, the money had already been committed and they took it away.
- Commissioner Kellison: What are you hearing from families directly affected by this gap?
- Director Brody: We haven't directly dealt with that, it seems like Encompass has enough resources to contact families themselves, but we've offered to help.
- Commissioner Brown: When we met with the team, it did seem like they were able to keep a good handle on communicating with the families.
- Vicki Boriak: There are going to be a lot of teachers laid off on the 29th. I don't know what happens when the gov shutdown ends and Head Start is allowed to continue.
- Commissioner Kellison: It's important for us to find our own datapoints and mark how much this change is impacting the local economy.

Motion for Contract Authorization: Commissioner Petersen//Commissioner Kellison M/S/P: 1

Abstention: Commissioner Martinez, Motion passes with 1 abstention

12. Adjourn – 2:36pm