

October 6, 2021

COMMISSIONERS

Jennifer Barton

Chair

Lisette Estrella-Henderson

Amy Fabi

Erin Hannigan

Gerald Huber

Tiffanee Jones

Nimat Shakoor-Grantham

Marla Stuart

Tyffany Wanberg

STAFF

Michele Harris

Executive Director

Megan Richards

Deputy Director

Juanita Morales

Program Manager

Gene Ibe

Program Manager

Lorraine Fernandez

Program Manager

Kwiana Algeré

Health Education Specialist

Luke Winders

Office Assistant III

Solano County Board of Supervisors
675 Texas St, 6th Floor
Fairfield, CA 94533

Dear Supervisors,

On behalf of the First 5 Solano Children and Families Commission, I urge you to prioritize young children and their families when considering how ARPA resources might be best utilized to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. Children's experiences in their first 5 years have a profound impact on their long-term outcomes. Early care and education programming along with family supports play a key role in ensuring that every child has the opportunity to build a quality foundation that will prepare them to learn, grow and succeed. Additionally, a strong child care system supports families and strengthens communities by allowing parents to participate in the labor force, yet Solano families continue to struggle to find quality, affordable child care in safe, well-designed facilities with trusted child care providers.

The COVID-19 pandemic has put a huge strain on families with young children due to family health concerns, stress, isolation and income loss. Particularly, low-income families and families of color have disproportionately suffered greater economic and health impacts. Most concerning are the proven long-term impacts of childhood poverty and adversity on physical and mental health, brain development, and school readiness. Without intervention, there is a significant risk that the impacts of the pandemic will deepen into disparities in health and education which will in turn have lifelong implications.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) have noted that the COVID-19 pandemic has had the following negative effects on young children and families:

- Break in continuity of care and early learning — child care and school closures have disrupted care routines and early learning. As 90% of the brain develops by age 5, this creates a significant impact on early development.
- Decreased access to preventative healthcare — well-child visits and immunization rates are down nationally and within Solano County — missing vital opportunities for early intervention.
- Loss of security and safety — Lack of family economic security has been linked to adverse childhood experiences which can negatively impact development, learning, and health. These impacts can persist, even after the economic insecurity is resolved.

As children return to child care and school, and parents return to work, experts predict trauma and toxic stress will surface in these group settings. Over the last year, many families have been pushed over the edge, however, there is an opportunity to buffer these impacts on children and families via the American Rescue Plan resources.

The most critical areas to provide support to children and families in this recovery stage of COVID-19 are early learning and family support. The following outlines some ways to provide support under the federal ARPA Expenditure Categories:



- **Expenditure Category 3: Services to Disproportionally Impacted Communities**

Providing concrete supports and services to families in disproportionately impacted communities is a key strategy to mitigate the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, ARPA has the following subsections that are current gaps to be addressed in Solano:

3.1 Education Assistance: Early Learning & 3.6 Healthy Childhood Environments: Child Care – The child care system in Solano County was already fragile prior to the pandemic; only 1 in 4 children that needed care because of working parents had a licensed child care slot. The COVID-19 pandemic further fractured that system, and while the number of providers has rebounded, the number of slots has not kept pace, due to social distancing concerns and increased monitoring to ensure the health and safety of our youngest children. Prior to the pandemic, First 5 Solano studied the child care and early learning systems to understand the barriers to expansion, and identified lack of facilities and lack of qualified staff as the primary barriers to growing the early learning and care field. Prioritization of early learning and care facilities, as well as an increased focus on building the number of qualified child care providers would contribute to a post-pandemic recovery that significantly improved the outlook for disproportionately impacted communities in Solano.

- **Expenditure Category 2: Negative Economic Impacts**

In addition to providing support to young children as we recover from the pandemic, it is important to also address the needs of the whole family to mitigate the negative economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Vallejo (zip codes 94590 and 94589) and Fairfield (parts of the 94533 zip code) have emerged as the communities with the highest risk factors for young children and their families. Support can be provided in a variety of ways, including through ARPA subsection 2.10 Aid to Nonprofit Organizations with a focus on neighborhoods where risk factors are high for young children and families. Family supports can include subsections 2.1 – 2.5 Household Assistance and economic support and can also include subsection 2.13 Other Economic Support to address the critical family functioning factors that make long-term family success more possible.

First 5 Solano has long been the county's partner and proven steward of public funding to ensure resources reach children and families who are most in need. First 5 Solano has also been an active partner during the COVID-19 crisis response, and we remain committed to our county's ongoing recovery efforts. By leveraging existing systems and relationship that are in place, we can go far in meeting needs of our young children and their families. Together, we can meet the current crisis moment, while also building resilience among families and communities for years to come.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Michele Harris".

Michele Harris
Executive Director
First 5 Solano Children & Families Commission