



Imperial County Children and Families First Commission
MINUTES
Meeting of February 1, 2024

I. Call to Order

This Regular Meeting of First 5 Imperial was called to order by the commissioners present at 3:35 p.m. The meeting was held at the First 5 Imperial Training Center, at 1240 State Street, El Centro, CA.

II. Roll Call

Commissioners Present:

Barbara Deol

Becky Green

Paula Llanas

Danila Vargas

Joong Kim

Fred Miramontes

Commissioners Absent:

Yurii Camacho

Michael Kelley

Karla Sigmond

Staff:

Julio C. Rodriguez

Fernando Valenzuela

III. Public Comment

No public comments were noted.

IV. Adoption of Minutes

A motion to approve the Minutes of the Regular Meeting of December 7, 2023 and having noted no further discussion or public comment the motion carried with all in favor.

V. Consent Calendar Items

The consent calendar items consisted of the monthly financial reports from October 1, 2023 through December 30, 2023. A motion to approve the consent calendar items was made and everyone noted no further discussion or public comment the motion carried with all in favor.

VI. Special Presentations

1. Burn Institute – Scald and Burn Prevention Program:

Paola Lucas from the Burn Institute began her presentation by introducing herself and thanking the commissioners for their help in making the program possible, in that it not only provides services to children but for parents as well. The presentation began with Ms. Lucas explaining the Burn Institute is a non-profit organization located in both the San Diego and Imperial areas with the purpose of educating and inspiring communities to reduce burn injuries. Ms. Lucas, with the technical assistance of First 5 Imperial Program Compliance Coordinator, presented an educational video informing viewers of the importance of taking precautions to safeguard children from hot surfaces and substances in any place in order to prevent first-, second-, and third-degree burns. The video also provided descriptive advice on how to prevent such burns from happening to children in a household environment. The essential advice presented in the video included creating “no kid zones” in household areas such as near stoves due to the risk of

children getting burned. The video concluded with contact details for reaching the Burn Institute for further assistance and resources.

After the video ended, Ms. Lucas continued the presentation with informing the commissioners of more advice that the Burn Institute provides to parents of young children between the ages of 0 to 5 years of age, such as limiting the temperature of bath and cooking water to 120 degrees Fahrenheit, and the important of establishing an exit plan in the event of a fire within the household just like schools do. Additionally, Ms. Lucas stated that smoke detectors are provided to parents at no cost upon signing up and requesting one. She also informed the Commission about the Burn Institute's scope of work being aligned with the goal of signing up 500 children under 5 years of age and 500 parents for their services. Mr. Rodriguez, Executive Director for the Commission, expressed amazement of the goal and successful outreach the Burn Institute has done so far in educating many children and parents in many communities throughout Imperial County with a \$30,000 major grant.

2. Imperial County Free Library – Raise A Reader Program: Yolanda Bernal began her presentation by introducing herself as the Administration Coordinator of the Imperial County Free Library program for the last two years and thanking Commissioners for their support. Ms. Bernal provided a presentation with slides containing pictures of children, librarians, and parents engaging in reading activities made possible through the grant the IC Free Library – Raise A Reader Program grant awarded by the Commission. Ms. Bernal also gave a list of cities containing libraries that are active in her program as the result of an expansion made possible this current fiscal year. She also presented the objectives of the program, which consist of the reading programs that are divided based on age ranges:

- Shake, Rattle, and Read: For children between 0 to 18 months of age and pregnant mothers. The program lasts 30 minutes and consists of nursery rhymes to prepare babies and young mothers for fun and engaging reading skills.
- Tales for Tots: For toddlers to emphasize movement and interactive stories of play. The first 15 minutes are for instruction and the other 15 minutes are for play.
- Preschool Power: To prepare older toddlers for kindergarten curriculums such as determining between shapes, colors, and letters. Bigger words with more syllables are introduced and arts and craft sessions take place to get children familiar with using crayons and scissors.
- Ages and Stages: A developmental screening component that is promoted on the IC Free Library website.

While explaining these programs Ms. Bernal made sure to give examples of activities done and expressed joy in encouraging young children and parents to engage in reading activities that they can do in their spare time at home as well. She also noted the schedule for the Raise a Reader Program that takes place in the libraries of most Imperial county cities in the afternoons from Monday to Thursday. Fridays are generally scheduled for parent-to-parent activities that consist of interactive work where special speakers are invited to give presentations to parents of children enrolled in the Raise A Reader program. Ms. Bernal recalled a result guest speaker from the UC Cooperative Extension program attending a Raise A Reader event in Holtville on a Friday to speak about the topic of nutrition.

She emphasized that a website is publicly available for any parents that are interested in registering their children or themselves for the Raise a Reader Program. Backpacks filled with toys associated with careers are also given to children enrolled in the Raise a Reader Program to

inspire them to find a career that interests them and pursue it in the future. She emphasized the importance of the Ages and Stages program's assessment by explaining that finding signs of disability in a child as soon as possible before the age of 3 years is crucial in determining a referral to San Diego Regional Center's screening services. Ms. Bernal also talked about parents who have their children enrolled and participate in Ages and Stages screening, receive support and resources in a variety of ways such as handouts of activities to do at home with their children, newsletters with advice and guidelines, and can issue referrals to the San Diego Regional Center in the event their child scored well below a score of 60 on an assessment.

VII. Administrative Report

1. Request to Approve Release of Community Development Mini-Grant Application FY 2024-2025:

Mr. Rodriguez, the Executive Director from First 5 Imperial, started off his request to approve the release of the Community Development Mini-Grant by reminding everyone of the recommendation of increasing the amount of money issued in a mini-grant that was discussed during the previous regular meeting of the Commission. Mr. Rodriguez proposed to raise the maximum amount of money issued in a mini-grant for the upcoming fiscal year 2024-2025 to the amount of \$30,000 which is an increase of \$5,000 from the previous maximum limit of \$25,000. Mr. Rodriguez noted that the first deadline, Step 1, for grantees interested in applying for the mini-grant for the next fiscal year is set for March 13th, 2024. The first step of the process consists of a one-page Statement of Interest to Apply form. The after the next regular meeting, scheduled for April 4th, 2024, then the final deadline to submit a complete mini-grant application, Step 2, is proposed for May 8th, 2024; grantees will then submit proposals consisting of 6 to 7 pages for up to a \$30,000 mini-grant award. Mr. Rodriguez reminded Commission members that once mini-grant applications are received staff will draft a summary of each of the mini-grants based on their application and add any recommendations. Then on June 6th, 2024, the Commission will meet to determine which applicants will be selected for an award. He announced that the strategy to reach out to potential new grantees for the mini-grant would be by placing advertisements in local newspapers and mailing out invites to about 100 agencies on the Commission's mailing list.

Mr. Rodriguez also asked the commissioners if they were still interested in requiring prospective mini-grant applicants to submit a plan in their applications for addressing the risk of COVID-19. Barbara Deol suggested that the COVID-19 plan no longer needs to be submitted with the application if the applicants already have an infection control protocol in place, and Commissioner Green agreed with the idea of removing the requirement. A motion was made by Commissioner Green to approve the release of the Community Development mini-grant application and remove the COVID-19 plan requirement and seconded by Commissioner Deol. The motion was passed unanimously with no opposition.

Commissioner Green asked if they needed to vote on increasing the amount to \$30,000.00 for the maximum grantees could apply for, and Mr. Rodriguez noted that that was not necessary because that change in the mini-grant was already reflected in the document presented and were asking for approval of the new application that contained the recommended changes that were discussed during the prior meeting. Commissioner Deol confirmed the release and posting of the mini-grant for February 7, 2024.

2. Request to Approve First 5 Imperial Strategic Plan with No Changes:

Ms. Doel noted that the next item was the approval of the First 5 Imperial Strategic Plan. Mr. Rodriguez stated he had provided a copy of the Strategic Plan to commissioners beforehand as a separate item in order to answer any questions they may have about it. It was noted that County

Commissions are required to have Strategic Plans before any funding can be allocated. He further explained a draft of a strategic plan is required to be approved by the Commission on a yearly basis and should have one approved of before any funding is allocated to grantees. The requirement for approval is necessary even if the proposed plan has no changes from the previous year. He went over the outline of the plan and three result areas. Mr. Rodriguez also informed the Commission that the current strategic plan was fairly new, and was drafted prior to the previous funding cycle, and that the proposed plan has no changes from the current one, and therefore was requesting the Commission to approve the strategic plan with no changes.

A motion to approve the First 5 Imperial Strategic Plan with no changes was made by Commissioner Green and it was seconded by Commissioner Kim; having noted no further discussion or public comment, the motion carried with all in favor.

3. Requesting Approval for First 5 Imperial to Engage with Allied Business Services, LLC for Accounting Services:

Commissioner Deol introduced the next item, the request for approval to engage with Allied Business Services, LLC for the Commission's accounting services. The Commission had discussed this recommendation during the February 1, 2024, meeting. Therefore, Commissioner Green made a motion to approve of the request for First 5 Imperial to engage with Allied Business Services, LLC for accounting services, and the motion was seconded by Commissioner Llanas. Commissioner Miramontes asked if the accounting services, Allied Business Services, LLC, was the one run by Humberto Garza, and Mr. Rodriguez confirmed that that was the business. Commissioner Miramontes then noted that they were very good, reasonable and focused, and know what they are doing. Commissioner Green further noted that this is the accounting firm that is already providing payroll services for the Commission, and Commissioner Vargas added that the costs for these services were very reasonable. Mr. Rodriguez reiterated that they were reasonable and added that the original proposal was significantly lower though upon meeting with Allied Business Services, LLC accounting staff he indicated that the process may be more entailed, which will include reconciling the account with the County ledger, providing regular reports for review and updating the Commission QuickBooks account. With no additional discussion the motion was approved with all in favor.

4. Request to Appoint Bylaws Committee to Recommend Changes:

Mr. Rodriguez informed the commission about having worked for a while to update the Commission's bylaws, though due to circumstances and other work priorities of the Commission the document has not been updated, and that it is important for Commissioners to work on this. He noted that he had met with Commissioner Sigmond and agreed that the Commission will want to form a Bylaws Committee, and therefore to put the item back on the agenda so that she can work to appoint two or three Commissioners to the ad hoc Committee. He explained how the Commission had set up the ad hoc Committee in the past, where Commissioner Sigmond is authorized to appoint individuals to the Committee; either Commissioners that may be interested can contact her or she may contact Commissions for appointment. Then he provided an example within the Current bylaws that clearly needed to be updated, in reference to the County Ordinance that was approved of in 2015 and used to solidify the independent status of the Commission as a local entity or instrumentality of the County, and that his and other changes should be reflected in the bylaws and where Commission members would feel that they are consistent with current practices of the Commission.

A motion to approve the appointment of a Bylaws Committee was made by Commissioner Green and it was seconded by Commissioner Miramontes; having noted no further discussion or public comment, the motion carried with all in favor with no opposition.

5. Second Quarter Progress for FY 2023-2024 Funded Projects Update:

Mr. Rodriguez provided a summary of the current second quarter progress reports for funded projects for the second quarter of the fiscal year which ended on December 31, 2023, and were due on January 15th, 2024. He informed the Commission that the major grant projects have expensed about 32% of the funding allocated for the year while mini-grant projects have expensed about 39% of allocated funds for the year. He noted that two grants have not reflected expenses that were significantly proportional to the time elapsed. That one major grant, El Centro Elementary, had reflected only 18% as of the 2nd quarter, though this was due to the fact that they had requested an extension due to staff turnover, and therefore their 2nd quarter report had not been submitted until recently and was not included in this report. Additionally, Mr. Rodriguez explained to the Commission that the Imperial County Sheriff's Activities League has not spent any of the funds they applied for due the fact that the agency had not been able to purchase the equipment and software necessary for implementing the Child ID Project, which would be purchased during the third quarter. He then asked if there were any questions about the summary provided for the 2nd quarter.

Commissioner Green asked if there was any project that he was concerned about? He noted that there may be a concern with the time it has taken for the Sheriff's Activities League to purchase the equipment for the Child ID Project, though further stated that the concern was limited because the investment would be long-term and that the agency would provide their services for a number of years beyond the life of the mini-grant, which is a good investment of Commission funds. He also indicated that one concern was for projects that are involved in parent engagement, as one of the presenters had noted the challenges of recruiting parents, and this is possibly due to the fact that parents are still not as comfortable meeting in person due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the issue may be a result of that, but also indicated that there are more parents that are interested than last year.

Mr. Rodriguez also explained the only other matter was the fact that the El Centro Regional Medical Center's funding was still on the Commission's books, though the transfer to Pioneers Memorial Healthcare District was never realized or approved, namely due to the lack of action or ability from the hospital to move forward with a proposal, and therefore had a lot to do with the Commission approving not to move forward due to the lack of progress with the potential transfer of the grant. He then asked if Mr. Valenzuela, the Compliance Coordinator, if he wanted to add any additional comments, namely due to the regular contact that he has with funding projects. He noted that there were no additional concerns at this time.

6. First 5 Imperial Procedures for Implementation on Internal Controls:

Mr. Rodriguez shared with the Commissioners that First 5 Imperial was not looking into any action at the moment for the implementation of these procedures, and that the information presented was strictly informational, as they move forward to implement new procedures for strengthening internal controls, which were discussed during the previous meeting as a result of audit findings and the need to implement these controls. He provided an overview of the rationale for the procedures, noting that one of the issues from the previous years was when the Commission's payroll account was hacked, or funds erroneously transferred from the account therefore the Commission implemented more security controls to the payroll account. In addition, he noted that payroll entries that were

uploaded into the payroll account were automatically moved into an “unreconciled account” by the software program during that payroll period and staff did not catch that change. He further explained that Commission need to reconcile accounts on a cash bases with the County of Imperial’s ledgers for the Commission, and that staff was reconciling these accounts though when there was an error posted, it was simply corrected versus entering the error and adjusting, the changes once the correction was reflected in the County ledger or debiting the amount then showing the transaction as a credit once it was corrected. He stated that staff had always reconciled by just correcting entries and it had not been a problem, though this time there were a number of errors in the County ledger that made it more difficult for the auditor to follow. Commissioner Green noted that it was important to have that trail, and Commissioner Deol noted that that was the reason for going with Allied Business Services, LLC. Mr. Rodriguez noted this was also the reason for drafting these procedures, and that they may change once the Commission begins working with the accounting service.

7. Form 700 – Statements of Economic Interests:

Mr. Rodriguez stated to the Commission that the county is modernizing the electronic system for filing Form 700. He mentioned he recently attended a training session for the process of entering the names of Commissioner members and staff into the system which resulted in the Commissioners receiving an email shortly afterwards in the form of an email blast. He wanted to ensure that Commissioners were familiar with the new process and if they needed any support or a copy of their previous Form 700 to just contact the Commission office. Commissioner Green noted that if they belong to a number of groups that require this filing, then they can file the form for all at the same time. Mr. Rodriguez agreed and noted that as an example Commissioner Llanas may also have to submit one for the County, and therefore it would make the process easier and should already be in the system. He noted that the deadline was April 2, 2024, and that everyone listed should have received the email from the county and noted that it looks official.

VIII. Commissioner Comments

Commissioner Deol asked members if there were any Commissioner comments. Ms. Green noted that the Imperial Valley Community College District was granted funding to hire another full-time instructor, and this instructor will be set up so that they can be involved in fast-tracking teachers. For example, if there are any elementary school teachers that need to complete their 24 units of child development the college would be able to work with them to fast-tack the process. Therefore, the college will be ready to do this. She noted that courses will be available in-person or online for flexibility to for teachers to complete their units as well. At this moment the college is in the process of hiring the instructor, therefore they are hoping to have the program in place as soon as possible.

Commissioner Deol announced that she had been nominated for teacher of the year for the Nursing Program at Arizona Western College. All present congratulated her on the great accomplishment. She noted that she had to prepare, that there was an interview she would have to participate in. She further noted that there was a significant increase in the number of students that she would be working with this year. She highlighted that there were several students from Imperial County, five or six per semester.

IX. Adjournment

Having no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 5:20 pm. With all in favor.