



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Contact:** Ed Maddox 213-974-2222  
James Bolden 213-200-5314

### **FIRST 5 LA COMMISSION APPROVES SUPERVISORS REQUEST FOR TRANSITIONAL FUNDING FOR BLACK INFANT HEALTH PROGRAM**

**LOS ANGELES** – At the request of Supervisors Mark Ridley-Thomas and Zev Yaroslavsky, the First 5 LA Commission today approved transitional funding for the Black Infant Health Program, which serves at-risk pregnant African American women in the County of Los Angeles.

A recent report from the Inter-Agency on Child Abuse and Neglect (ICAN) found infant mortality increased from 4.9 to 5.3 deaths per 1,000 live births in L.A. County. Prematurity, low birth weight, maternal substance abuse and inadequate prenatal care are believed to be key causes.

“The African American community experiences a much higher rate of infant mortality in comparison to other racial/ethnic groups and African American infants are twice as likely to die in first year of life in Los Angeles County”, the Supervisor Ridley-Thomas told members of the First 5 Commission.

“The quality of life in the County cannot improve unless we address this problem.”

With a room full of community stakeholders and mothers who have benefited from the program, Supervisor Ridley-Thomas urged the Commission to provide another year of transition funding at the current level for three Black Infant Health Programs in the

County, which would coincide with extensions granted for the Healthy Births Initiative grants.

“We know that the Black Infant Health Program works,” the Supervisor said, adding that “Between 2000 and 2004, the percent of low birth-weight babies and rates of infant mortality among clients decreased by approximately 50%.”

Last year’s vote by the First 5 LA Commission was not unprecedented as other counties’ First 5 Commissions voted to support their own Black Infant Health Programs.

For example, the First 5 commission of Kern County granted its Black Infant Health Program three years of funding. Similar investments were made by the First 5 commissions of Solano, San Mateo, Santa Clara, and San Diego counties.

The current funding agreements are scheduled to end on June 30, leaving the County of L.A.’s Department of Public Health (DPH) no choice but to sharply reduce the countywide Black Infant Health Program to as few as one community service provider.

“We did the right thing last year,” the Supervisor said, “using taxpayers dollars entrusted to us at First 5 to ensure that the three Black Infant Health programs – operated by the Cities of Long Beach and Pasadena and L.A. County DPH – survived.”

Supervisor Ridley-Thomas thanked Supervisor Yaroslavsky and his other colleagues on the Board of Supervisors for their leadership in instructing the County’s Chief Executive Office to send letters to each First 5 LA Commissioner asking them to favorably consider continued investment in the Black Infant Health Program.

The Black Infant Health Program currently serves at-risk pregnant African American women in the Antelope Valley, San Fernando Valley, San Gabriel Valley, Downtown Los Angeles, South Los Angeles and the South Bay.

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