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Contact: Lisa Richardson, 213-361-6980
Email: lrichardson@bos.lacounty.gov

Contact: Lorenza Munoz, 213-458-6279
Email:lmunoz@bos.lacounty.gov

First 5 Los Angeles Allocates $10 Million to Aid Homeless Families

First 5 Los Angeles, a nonprofit organization that funds early education programs for children from infancy to the age of five, allocated $10 million to provide rental assistance to homeless families and supportive services to those at risk of becoming homeless.

The nonprofit's board also voted to eliminate a past program requirement that limited eligibility to applicants with an allegation of family abuse or neglect that had been investigated by the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services.

The motion, brought by Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors Chairman and First 5 Commission Chair Mark Ridley-Thomas, guarantees that hundreds of low-income families will receive the support services they need to get back on their feet. The assistance typically lasts six to nine months.

"This motion is intended to keep families together, off the streets and with a roof over their heads," said the supervisor after the vote. "I applaud First 5 in taking these important steps to prevent kids from being homeless and -- even worse -- separated from their families."

Data shows that children in families that become homeless are at a significantly higher risk of being removed from the family.

“A safe, stable home every night plays a critical role in supporting the overall development of L.A. County’s children," said First 5 LA Executive Director Kim Belshé. “The additional funds approved by the First 5 L.A. Commission will help ensure more families with young children are able to secure the housing and supportive services so vital to strengthening families and improving child outcomes.”

At the meeting, Karen Acfalle, director of family programs for Beyond Shelter, publically recalled a family of eight, with six children, ages 2 to 15-years-old who came to her office a year ago for assistance.

The family lost their oldest child who was 21 years old in an accident on the I-5 freeway. They exhausted their savings to pay for the funeral and during the same time the father lost his job. Eviction from their home followed, as did a hardscrabble life: the family, which slept in its minivan, dined by heating frozen burritos on the dashboard, visited the local Laundromat for hot water for their instant noodles and showered at the YMCA. Acfalle, noted that the passage of today’s motion will allow Beyond Shelter to find permanent housing for the family.

“This motion means that there is hope for this family,” said Acfalle. “Housing is a right and the financial support from this motion will help this family regain efficiency and obtain housing.”

Joining Acfalle in testimony at the First 5 L.A. Board meeting were speakers from Upward Bound House, Shelter Partnership, Inc., the Community Development Commission of the County of Los Angeles and L.A. Family Housing who each attested to both the need and the ability to assist more families with the this motion.

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