



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 27, 2015

Contact: Tracy Irwin, First 5 Contra Costa
(925) 771-7313 or cell (925) 381-1860
tirwin@firstfivecc.org

Mark Friedman, Thomas J. Long Foundation,
(925)-944-3804, mark@tjlong.org

Editors: Reporters are welcome to visit and/or film a therapy group for young children with developmental delays on Wednesday, April 29 at 9:00 a.m. in Concord. Contact Tracy Irwin for details.

Thomas J. Long Foundation Awards \$5 Million to Help East Bay Children Reach Their Optimal Development

(Concord, CA) The Thomas J. Long Foundation has awarded a \$5 million grant to First 5 Alameda County and First 5 Contra Costa to ensure that developmental delays are identified and treated early in childhood. The grant will expand *Help Me Grow*, a national model that promotes early detection of development delays in young children, such as speech problems, behavioral challenges and autism, and ensures timely access to needed services. Currently, seventy percent of developmental delays are undetected until children reach kindergarten, resulting in missed opportunities for children to receive intervention services shown to be most effective earlier in life.

“One in four young children is at risk for a developmental delay, yet current systems to identify delays are inadequate. Only 28% of California children receive developmental screening,” said Mark Friedman, CEO of the Thomas J. Long Foundation, about the effective method recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics to flag developmental problems early. “This grant will help more East Bay children get back on track before starting school, which down the road can reduce costs to education and health systems.”

Funds will be used to train more pediatricians and child care providers on a developmental screening tool that checks children’s developmental progress. Screening will be prioritized for low-income children and those in non-English-speaking households. Funds will also be used for an awareness campaign for parents about the importance of early screening and how to access it.

“The optimal time to detect and address concerns is in the first three years, when children’s brains are still forming and are most receptive to intervention,” said Janis Burger, CEO of First 5 Alameda County. “Early detection and treatment services can vastly improve developmental outcomes for children with special needs and prevent further progression of delays. We’re thrilled to expand our services with this grant and make developmental screening a routine part of early childhood.”

As screening services expand, it is anticipated that more children will be identified with moderate delays not serious enough to qualify for state-funded intervention services, yet still in need of help. To fill this gap, funds will also be used to provide one-on-one and group support for these children and to teach parents how to address their child’s needs.

(more)

“Children with moderate delays have the same challenges as children whose difficulties are more severe. The difference is that they don’t have access to free intervention services the state is mandated to provide. Many children thus fall further behind,” said Sean Casey, Executive Director of First 5 Contra Costa. “With the Long Foundation grant, we’ll be able to provide these children with the timely and effective services they need to improve their development.”

About First 5 Alameda County

First 5 Alameda County is an innovative public entity established by passage of Proposition 10 (tobacco tax) by California voters in 1998. First 5 has worked with thousands of providers who have helped support the more than 100,000 children birth to five and their families in Alameda County. Its goal is that every child in Alameda County is safe, healthy, supported and ready to learn. First 5 Alameda County serves as the lead agency for the implementation of the *Help Me Grow* system in Alameda County. Learn more: www.first5alameda.org.

About First 5 Contra Costa

First 5 Contra Costa helps young children start school healthy, nurtured and ready to learn by investing in programs and activities focused on children during their first five years, the most important time in children's development. In the last 15 years, First 5 Contra Costa has invested more than \$120 million in Proposition 10 tobacco tax funds to help Contra Costa’s children get the best possible start in life. Learn more: www.firstfivecc.org.

###