

September 22, 2025

Dear Chair Vixie-Sandy and Members of the Yolo County Board of Supervisors,

I am unable to join you in-person on Tuesday, and I wanted to underscore a few points from the First 5 perspective as you develop plans around Yolo County's mental health systems and MHSA and BHSA funding.

We know the science is clear: the earliest years, from birth to age five, are a critical and unique window for brain development. Experiences in this period—positive or negative—literally shape the architecture of the developing brain and set the foundation for a child's health, learning, and well-being across a lifetime. When trauma or adversity go unaddressed in these years, the consequences reverberate across education, health, justice, and social service systems. When we intervene early, we can change a child's life trajectory, and at the same time, shift the financial trajectory of the system by reducing the compounding growth of the high-acuity population and the escalating costs that follow.

To my knowledge, Help Me Grow is the only MHSA-funded effort in Yolo County dedicated specifically to children ages 0–5. It identifies developmental and behavioral concerns early, links families to appropriate supports, and ensures children have a stronger start before problems escalate. The program has robust and meaningful performance metrics that have been collected over many years. Help Me Grow aligns with MHSA and BHSA's purpose to complete a system of care by funding not only crisis services, but also the early interventions that stop problems from becoming severe and disabling.

At the same time, and in accordance with additional Board of Supervisors and First 5 Yolo investment, First 5 Yolo is transforming Help Me Grow into a CalAIM Enhanced Care Management (ECM) billable model. This is multi-layered, system-level innovation, requiring new infrastructure, staff competencies, and strict accountability measures. For example, this has meant developing a new Electronic Health Record system, training staff as ECM Lead Care Managers, and thoughtful establishment of quality-control procedures. I anticipate that, by next month, First 5 Yolo will begin billing Medi-Cal for these services. This transformation will help offset costs, bring in sustainable new funding, and ensure that Help Me Grow is not only effective but also fiscally sound.

First 5 Yolo is deeply committed to building partnerships across schools, health, childcare, and behavioral health. Help Me Grow is central to that work. It ensures families are not navigating systems alone, and it provides the kind of coordinated, upstream support that both science and state direction expect.

First 5 Yolo recognizes the fiscal challenges facing the County, but cutting early intervention only compounds those challenges in the not-so-distant future. Help Me Grow reduces downstream costs by preventing more expensive interventions later. It is a wise, legally aligned, and fiscally responsible investment in our children and our community.

I ask that you to maintain the MHSA funding required for Help Me Grow this year to allow us to work to fuller sustainability next year and beyond. This will ensure that Yolo County continues to meet its obligation—and its opportunity—to protect and promote the health and well-being of our youngest children.

In partnership,



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