May 14, 2012

The Honorable Alex Padilla
California Senate
State Capitol, Room 4036
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: SB 694 (Padilla) - SUPPORT

Dear Senator Padilla:

On behalf of First 5 LA, I am writing to express our support for SB 694 (Padilla), which would improve children's oral health in California.

First 5 LA, a child advocacy and public grant making organization, was created by California voters to invest Proposition 10 tobacco tax revenues to improve the lives of children from prenatal through age five in Los Angeles County. We recognize the importance of promoting comprehensive and affordable health coverage, including dental care for young children.

SB 694 would help accomplish this goal by authorizing a study to test new workforce models to increase access to dental care for California's children—especially for its most vulnerable children. The bill would also strengthen California's leadership in public oral health by creating the Statewide Office of Oral Health, led by a dental director.

Tooth decay is the most common chronic disease and unmet health care need of children in California. California's current dental workforce does not have the capacity to meet the dental care needs of its children where they live, especially underserved children. While California is home to 14 percent of the nation's dentists, California has 333 federally designated dental health professional shortage areas. Of California's 58 counties, only five do not have dental health professional shortage areas, and nearly one million children live in such areas.
Addressing the dental access problem requires a comprehensive approach. This includes identifying ways to strengthen California’s dental workforce to meet the current and growing demand for dental care for the state’s highest need children and strengthening the state’s oral health leadership. SB 694 is a first step in this comprehensive approach. For these reasons, we support the passage of SB 970.

Sincerely,

Craig A. Steele
Interim Chief Executive Officer
First 5 LA

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cc: Members of the Senate Health Committee
    Members of the Los Angeles County delegation