SUBJECT:
“One Step Ahead” Initiative

RECOMMENDATION:
Establish a five-year program called “One Step Ahead” (OSA) that provides essential child development, safety supplies and resources to families with new babies in low-income communities receiving WIC services in Los Angeles County.

BACKGROUND:
The “One Step Ahead” proposal was originally submitted to the board by Commissioner Fielding for approval at the October 14, 2010 Commission meeting as part of augmenting First 5LA’s Countywide strategies. Upon discussion at that board meeting the Countywide Augmentation proposals that were not eliminated at the October board meeting underwent a consultant summary analysis to prepare the board to discuss all Countywide Augmentation proposals at the November 15, 2010 Special Commission meeting. On November 15, 2010 Commissioners Fielding and Martinez requested that the memo and analysis for the “One Step Ahead” proposal be recalled from the meeting agenda. Subsequent to the meeting, at the request of Commissioner Martinez, this amended summary analysis to the proposal was prepared with the goal of strengthening the literacy component of the proposal.

This proposal is intended to improve long-term health, developmental and safety outcomes for new babies in low-income communities receiving Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) services in Los Angeles County by:

- Increasing the number of low-income families receiving critical developmental, early literacy, safety items and basic necessities other than food, that they might otherwise forgo due to lack of affordability, and
- Reducing the number of families leaving the WIC program so that children, birth to five, continue to reap the health and development benefits of this federally funded program.

The program includes the following key components:

- Distribution of vouchers redeemable for age-appropriate books, toys and child safety items, and other goods at selected vendors/businesses.
- Provision of brief parent education on age-appropriate child development and the related items for which the voucher will be used.
- Provision of information guides with age-appropriate suggestions to facilitate parent interaction with children to support their optimal development.

This proposal is based on the premise that families participating in WIC, which serves approximately 67 percent of all infants and about half of all children, 1 to 5, are struggling to provide the basic necessities for their families, and as a result, are not able to purchase the necessary developmental, educational and safety materials that would put their children on a better trajectory for improved outcomes. The proposal also seeks to address the drop-off in family participation that WIC faces each year by incentivizing families to continue participating in WIC until their children turn five so that they can continue to benefit from the program. As such, receipt of vouchers will be dependent upon WIC certification, thereby incentivizing families to maintain certification for their children as long as they are eligible.

The proposed amendment seeks to modify the original “One Step Ahead” proposal by enhancing the
literacy and including family support components. Three models are proposed as follows:

1. **Model A: Establish Community Family Hubs (CFHs)**

   This model seeks to establish sites other than WIC offices to provide more in-depth and wide-ranging services than envisioned in the original proposal. Key components include:
   - Establish Community Family Hubs (CFHs), run by existing community-based organizations and/or school readiness and family literacy grantees. These CFHs would be located at local schools and/or community-based organizations.
   - CFHs would provide resources, referrals for pre-K options, health, mental health and social services, parenting education, and parent and child literacy activities. Where possible, leadership and advocacy opportunities for families would be made available to establish parent advocates and leaders. CFHs would also distribute vouchers for safety equipment to families in need.
   - On-going technical assistance would be provided to CFH sites, including support for staff in establishing learning environments, identifying and/or creating tools and products, establishing systems for identifying referrals and resources.
   - A public awareness campaign would be developed in collaboration with First 5 LA that promotes awareness of CFH sites and their purpose.

2. **Model B: Technical Assistance to WIC Sites and Support a “Literacy Party” campaign.**

   This model is designed to introduce a specific and tested curriculum into the WIC offices participating in One Step Ahead” and provide additional community-based literacy support through Literacy Parties.
   - Training, technical assistance and materials would be provided to WIC sites on using lesson plans/activities
   - A “Literacy Party” campaign would be run that includes literacy activities for parent leaders and/or paraprofessionals to educate small groups of parents in their homes. Literacy Parties are modeled after the Tupperware Party.

3. **Model C: Establish an Adapted Family Literacy Model**

   This model is designed to provide a modified, scaled-down version of the established Family Literacy Model that would also incorporate family support services.
   - Participating agencies would serve as Family Support Model (FSM) sites that provide age-appropriate, hands-on school readiness activities that promote language and literacy skills to families with children, 0 – 5. Participating sites could include First 5 LA family literacy or SRI sites, WIC sites, local faith-based sites, or as a wraparound to an existing state-funded/Head Start/LAUP or other preschool site. A framework would be identified to guide instruction at all participating agency sites to ensure a uniform, high quality instructional program.
   - Vouchers for safety items would be distributed to encourage families to benefit from this family support model.
   - On-going technical assistance would be provided to FSM sites, including training, professional development, and peer networking support. Staff would also be provided with strategies for documenting their work.
   - A public awareness campaign would be developed in collaboration with First 5 LA that promotes awareness of FSMs.
DISCUSSION:

Feasibility
The initial “One Step Ahead” approach is based on a similar program implemented by WIC Public Health Foundation Enterprises (PHFE) and funded by First 5 LA called Little by Little (LBL) and builds on lessons learned. Given its experience with LBL, WIC currently has the infrastructure, institutional knowledge and curriculum materials in place to support this new program.

The Proposed Amendment includes three models that are also based on existing programs that have been implemented by LAUSD and community partners, including the Engaging Parents as Learning Partners” from LACOE’s federally funded WIC project, Early Advantage and the Family Literacy Model.

The timeline for implementation will be affected by the model selected. The amended approaches will require further development to ensure a clear plan for operation. This research and development phase will range from one to four months. Any approach will require that a funding mechanism (i.e. RFP, RFQ) be developed that provides clear guidelines and criteria for applicants and ensures that the approach is legally and fiscally sound. This phase will take one to two months. Applicant outreach for the WIC-administered approach would be targeted and would therefore be less time-intensive. Standard timeframes for applicant response, external review of applications, contract negotiation and execution will be five to six months. Contracts will begin as soon as September 2011 or as late as January 2012, based on the selected model.

Sustainability
The proposal outlines a five-year program that includes a 20 percent phased implementation of the number of eligible families to be served each year. The plan includes securing a sustainability consultant to obtain private sponsorship to subsidize the cost of the program. As a result, the proposal includes a declining First 5 LA funding contribution, beginning at 100 percent in Year 1 to 28 percent in Year 5. If sponsorship is not obtained at the budgeted levels, either the cost per child or the number of children served will be reduced.

The Proposed Amendment does not provide a sustainability plan beyond First 5 LA funding.

Countywide Impact
“One Step Ahead” is program intended to reach low-income children receiving WIC services countywide. Given that WIC serves 67% of all infants and about half of all children, ages one to five, in Los Angeles County, this proposed model has a significant countywide reach.

The Proposed Amendment includes three models that are intended to reach families through community-based organizations, and secondarily through WIC. It is not clear how large a reach the CBOs would have. As such, models A & C seem well-suited for a place-based initiative.

Dollar amount to be expended by June 30, 2011
The program budget for Year 1 is $3.75M, which includes funding for vouchers ($3.2M) and administration/evaluation ($550K). The amount expended by June 30, 2011 is dependent on several variables, including the date of contract execution and the amount of time needed for planning and to secure agreements for redeeming vouchers with vendors.
The proposed funding for the Amendment is based on estimates and includes:

Model A: Establish Community Family Hubs (CFHs)

- Total cost of $2.5 M - $4.4 M over five years
- Annual costs of $500,000 to $880,000 for
  - Operating costs for 19 sites countywide
  - Training and Technical Assistance

Model B: Technical Assistance to WIC Sites and Support a “Literacy Party” Campaign

- Total cost of $2.25 M - $4.1 M over five years
- Annual costs of $450,000-$820,000 for
  - Training and technical assistance
- The proposal does not include a budget for materials, supplies or salaries/incentives for parent leaders and paraprofessionals conducting the literacy parties.

Model C: Adapted Family Literacy Model

- Total cost of $3.5 M - $5.5M over five years
- Annual costs of $700,000 - $1.1 M for
  - Operating costs for 19 sites countywide
- Training and Technical Assistance

Effectiveness of the approach related to goals identified

A 2008 evaluation of Little by Little (LBL) provided conclusive evidence that children who received LBL services since birth were significantly more ready for school than children who received 2 years of LBL and children who did not receive LBL. Lessons learned from LBL program indicated that families provided access to educational materials were more likely to modify their behavior in the home as it related to literacy and usage of age-appropriate child development activities. While LBL focused on the provision of literacy and educational materials, this program seeks to broaden the approach by providing vouchers for materials that will benefit the health, safety, early literacy and developmental needs of children. (Little by Little Final Report, March 31, 2008) Building on these findings, this project seeks to replicate and expand upon the proven track record of LBL.

The proposed amendment is based on proven curriculum, Engaging Parents as Learning Partners and the First 5 LA supported Family Literacy Program. Both have been extensively field-tested and evaluations have been conducted that show positive outcomes.

Risk/Benefit to the Commission as it relates to First 5 LA’s mission, goals and strategic plan

This initiative most directly supports the Family Strengthening approach included in the Place-Based Approach Plan of the First 5 LA Strategic Implementation Plan by seeking to meet the needs of all newborns and provide interventions for children, birth to five.

The benefits of this program include sustained participation in WIC by more low-income families as their children age and the ability for families struggling economically to obtain quality developmental and safety goods that they would typically forgo. Additionally, given that First 5 LA currently utilizes WIC as a venue for distributing educational materials to families, this effort could potentially be combined with and augment other First 5 LA countywide educational efforts.

Risks associated with this approach include the challenge faced by the project to secure additional sponsorship to support the proposed funding model. The program costs assume that a
sustainability consultant will be secured to obtain private sponsorship, but this may prove too costly. Another risk is that families may not utilize the vouchers provided to them.

The proposed amendments provide an expanded option of the original proposal by strengthening the intervention to include greater early literacy and social supports.

Model A: This proposal seeks to develop Community Family Hubs throughout the County, building on the capacity of existing community-based organizations. This approach has not been tested and the costs are not fully known. It would benefit First 5 LA to explore this option on a smaller scale and within the confines of the target communities.

Model B: This proposal includes a modification of the original proposal and replaces the *Little By Little* curriculum with the *Engaging Parents as Learning Partners* curriculum. Greater analysis needs to be done to determine which curriculum would be best suited for this program. The Literacy Parties are a relatively low cost intervention, although the approach is not evidence-based, and could also be explored within select communities.

Model C: This proposal seeks to adapt the Family Literacy Model and incorporate a Family Support Model into the approach. Given that this will be a modified program, it is unclear what the potential impact will be on families. It would benefit First 5 LA to explore this option on a smaller scale and within the confines of the target communities.