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## **Prop. 1D Called 'Hobson's Choice' for Voters**

by George Lauer

Diana Dooley, president and CEO of the California Children's Hospital Association, sums up Proposition 1D on the May 19 ballot with a musical allusion:

Sancho Panza says to Don Quixote in Man of La Mancha

"But sire, whether the stone hits the pitcher or the pitcher hits the stone, it's very bad for the pitcher."

"That's the situation we're in right now," Dooley said. "It's really a Hobson's choice we're facing for young children in our state, but the fear is if we don't do this now, it could be a lot worse."

Dooley and her organization support Proposition 1D, which would shift money away from the 10-year-old First 5 program and put it into the state's general fund where it would be used to support other health programs for children ages 5 and younger.

Other children's advocates, including Children Now and the Children's Partnership, oppose Proposition 1D, saying it could lead to the unraveling of 30 county-based Children's Health Initiatives and ultimately jeopardize California's participation in the State Children's Health Insurance Program.

"If you start to dismantle the (Children's Health Initiatives), you'll have a ripple effect and it could start to affect whether California will qualify for new federal bonus payments in the new SCHIP," said Wendy Lazarus, founder and co-president of the Children's Partnership, a national, not-for-profit organization headquartered in California and Washington, D.C.

The California Children's Health Initiatives, a collaboration of efforts in 30 counties, has helped more than 88,000 previously uninsured children get coverage through Healthy Kids, California's version of SCHIP.

### **First 5 Cash a Popular Target**

Created in 1998 when voters approved Proposition 10 to increase the state tobacco tax to fund early childhood health care and education efforts, the First 5 program's relatively healthy bank account has become an easy target among legislators in an otherwise cash-strapped state. It's also become a focal point of critics who say the money is not being wisely spent.

In fiscal year 2009-2010, the measure would shift as much as \$608 million in Proposition 10 revenue to the state general fund. The legislature says it will use the money only for other state health and human services programs for children ages 5 and younger, but critics aren't convinced that will hold up if the economy continues to falter. The measure would shift as much as \$268 million to the state general fund in each of the next four fiscal years.

Wilma Chan, vice president of policy at Children Now, said diverting the money to the general fund with good intentions is no guarantee it will still be spent on kids.

"My understanding is the way the ballot initiative is written, it's not written in stone that this money must be spent on children's health and education. There's nothing to stop them from diverting that money in another direction," Chan said.

Former state Assembly majority leader and a long-time Democratic Assembly member from Oakland, Chan

points out that Proposition 1D is the only measure on the ballot specifically targeting children's programs.

"It's very shortsighted to take away the only pot of money in the past 20 years devoted to early care for kids in California. The amount of the cuts would be devastating," Chan said.

"Proponents say 'Oh, we're only borrowing this money for a few years,' but if there are significant cuts in some of these county programs they will be hard to bring back. First 5 in Los Angeles County would really be hit hard and Alameda County where I am is looking at having to cut programs as well. This would have lasting, bad impacts," Chan said.

### **First 5 Critics Say Money Poorly Spent**

The measure also would require First 5 to spend money only on direct health and human services.

Javier Guzman, a consultant who signed the ballot rebuttal to the argument against 1D, said he is disillusioned by the way First 5 has spent its money.

"I think it was a good idea when it passed 10 years ago, but the organization went south somewhere along the way. I mean, they funded a program to do belly dancing. Is that the way we want our tax money spent?" asked Guzman, who is named on the ballot as principal consultant for a Fresno organization called the California Latino Child Development Association.

"I'd love to talk about belly dancing," said Sherry Novick, executive director of the First 5 Association of California. "That's an excellent example of how First 5 can be very effective."

In San Diego's First 5 program, belly dancing is one of several options for at-risk pregnant teens who hope to give birth to healthy, full-term infants, Novick said. The First 5 program offers services to kids "0-5" which includes unborn children.

"This neo-natal program has been highly successful, in particular the portion that focuses on nutrition and physical activity. These girls have several options for getting physical exercise, including a sub-contractor who comes in and teaches belly dancing," Novick said.

So far, Novick said, the program has a 100% success rate. "These have all been full-term healthy, non-toxic-exposed babies."

### **Ballot Language Called Misleading**

Although the headline and language on the May 19 ballot indicate the measure would protect children's funding, opponents, including some high profilers like filmmaker Rob Reiner who has written and spoken against the measure, say the language is misleading.

The ballot language supplied by the Legislature says:

*Proposition 1D PROTECTS CHILDREN'S SERVICES FUNDING. HELPS BALANCE STATE BUDGET.*

- *Provides more than \$600 million to protect children's programs in difficult economic times.*
- *Redirects existing tobacco tax money to protect health and human services for children, including services for at-risk families, services for children with disabilities, and services for foster children.*
- *Temporarily allows the redirection of existing money to fund health and human service programs for children 5 years old and under.*
- *Ensures counties retain funding for local priorities.*
- *Helps balance state budget.*

Opponents argue that only the final assertion -- "Helps balance the state budget" -- is wholly accurate.

"We tried to get that language changed, but the Legislature passed a law allowing them to write it the way they wanted it written," said First 5's Novick.

### **Prop. 1D Trailing in Poll**

In a Field Poll released last week, 49% of voters said they oppose Proposition 1D, 40% support the measure and 11% said they were undecided.

The poll indicates that only 18% of respondents knew that Proposition 1D would reduce the total amount that the state spends on health and human services programs over the next four years.

"Once you explain to people what's really going on, they generally don't like the idea," Novick said. "But we don't have a very big budget to do that explaining and we're expecting to see some pretty heavy advertising on the other side soon.

"We'll have to see what happens with those 11% undecided," Novick said.

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