

Proposition 1D: One big disaster

By Mark Diel

California's budget crisis is a serious problem, but it won't be solved by cutting funding for programs that successfully serve our most vulnerable children and families. However, that's precisely what the California Legislature hopes to do if Proposition 1D passes: take \$1.6 billion in tobacco sales taxes away from critical local health and education programs for young children and give it to Sacramento politicians to help balance the state budget.

That's not what Napa County and other California voters wanted when they passed the California Children and Families Act (Proposition 10) in 1998. The act stipulated that a portion of tobacco sales taxes would be spent only on programs serving critical early development needs of children from birth through age 5 and their families. A statewide First 5 Commission was formed to manage the act's tobacco tax allocations, along with a First 5 Children and Families Commission in every California county to ensure that Proposition 10 funding is directed to the most appropriate and effective local programs.

First 5 works well for programs serving California's neediest children and families. It has been critical to the success of many Napa County organizations serving young children, such as the Children's Health Initiative, American Canyon Family Resource Center, Sister Ann Community Dental Clinic, Healthy Moms & Babies, ParentsCAN, Napa County Health & Human Services and Napa Valley Unified School District, just to name a few. (See <http://www.first5napa.org/reports.aspx> for a complete list of current and past local First 5 grantees.)

These and many other organizations serving young children and families are at risk if 1D passes. Proposition 1D proposes to take \$268 million of First 5 funding annually for five years and "redirect" the money to a newly formed Proposition 10 Health and Human Services Fund. Even though the funding diversion is slated to be limited to five fiscal years, that's more than enough time to cause irreparable harm to our local First 5-funded organizations. And there is nothing in Proposition 1D that would prevent the Legislature from "further redirecting" the funds to the General Fund to be used for any purpose. Even the State's Proposition 10 Health & Human Services Fund could be raided to balance the budget.

The loss of First 5 funding threatens our community's capacity to provide children's health services,

including health insurance, developmental and autism screening, services for children with special needs, immunizations and well-child visits. For the Children's Health Initiative, which has helped provide health care coverage education and enrollment for 20,000 children annually since 2005, a reduction in First 5 funding would take away vital resources.

Proposition 1D also changes what First 5 commissions can fund, such as limiting funding to "direct services." Is subsidizing a child's health insurance premium a "direct service," or, as 1D implies, can the funds be used only if they go directly to a health care provider? This is a change that could undermine the significant progress we have made toward 100 percent health insurance enrollment and 100 percent enrollment retention for all Napa County children.

By diverting First 5 funds, 1D threatens hundreds of successful programs statewide that are improving the health of children, providing quality preschool and increasing child safety. Passage of 1D would:

- Endanger children's access to health insurance and undermine health and other services for up to 65,000 children with special needs
- Jeopardize \$163 million in current preschool investments
- De-fund preventive oral health services and dental treatment that last year served 187,000 children who would otherwise have had no care
- Cripple California's most effective smoking prevention efforts that are reaching more than half a million pregnant women and parents of young children
- Threaten the ability of local communities to set priorities for meeting the needs of their own children and families

For Napa County, passage of 1D would decrease annual tobacco tax revenue for First 5-funded organizations by at least 50 percent, down from \$1.3 million to an estimated \$600,000-\$700,000 annually. It is projected that the decrease could be as much as 70 percent in years four and five of Proposition 1D. That would result in a corresponding reduction in services to our community's most vulnerable children and families. The loss of multi-year funding from First 5 could also fragment or destroy the development of cost-effective organizational service infrastructure, such as outreach programs and consolidated service centers.

Don't let the state Legislature balance the budget on the backs of our most vulnerable children and families. Please vote "No" on Proposition 1D; it would be One (Big) Disaster for Napa County and the

state if it passes.

(Diel is executive director of Children's Health Initiative Napa County.)

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