

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Superior Court Hears Arguments on Legality of AB99

*Approved by the California State Legislature, bill takes \$1 billion from Children and Families
Commissions throughout California*

(AUG. 29, 2011) RIVERSIDE, CA — The Fresno Superior Court will hear arguments Tuesday on the legality of AB 99 in response to a lawsuit filed by 11 county First 5 children and families commissions, including First 5 Riverside, the Riverside County Children & Families Commission.

The bill, enacted in March, requires the transfer of \$1 billion of voter-approved Proposition 10 tobacco tax funds— up to \$30 million in Riverside County—from health and early education programs for young children to a new state fund that was created to fill the state budget gap. County commissions contend that only the voters have the authority to approve a state takeover of funds. Voters rejected the last Legislative attempt to take Proposition 10 funds by a vote of nearly two to one (66% - 34%) in the May 2009 special election.

“We are disappointed that the Legislature passed AB 99 and effectively tied up \$1 billion that could be used now for critical programs and services for young children,” said Harry Freedman, First 5 Riverside’s executive director. “Now county commissions face a costly legal battle to protect funds that support hundreds of local programs that serve local children and families.”

County First 5 Children and Families Commissions base their funding decisions on long-term financial plans that enable them to commit to multi-year programs, even as tobacco tax revenues decline. As a result of AB 99, First 5 Riverside was forced to dramatically reduce funding for Riverside County’s youngest children this fiscal year by about \$23 million. First 5 Riverside allocated \$21 million for health, childcare, and other early care and education programs that help enable children 0-5 to be successful in school and throughout their lives this fiscal year compared to \$44 million last fiscal year.

“It’s never good to cut critical services for children,” said Freedman. “It’s far worse to be making such cuts while families face ongoing economic hardships.”

###

First 5 Riverside, the Riverside County Children & Families Commission, is a division of the Riverside County Department of Public Social Services and is funded by Proposition 10 tobacco tax revenues. Established by the County Board of Supervisors in 1999, First 5 Riverside supports early childhood development through educational outreach, partnerships and funding for early education, health and child care services that benefit children, from prenatal to age 5, and their families. Research shows that support helps children develop a strong foundation for success in school and throughout their lives. For more information about First 5 Riverside programs and other funded services, call 800-266-3880 or visit www.rccfc.org.