



June 01, 2022

RE: City of Oakland Draft Housing Element FY 2023-31

Dear Lakshmi Rajagopalan,

Thank you for the opportunity to help inform the City of Oakland's General Plan Housing Element. **We are writing to highlight the housing needs of families with young children and early care and education professionals living in Oakland and Alameda County.** The City of Oakland can invest in supports for families with young children and the early care and education (ECE) workforce through investments that promote the *structural conditions associated with child wellbeing*, including kindergarten readiness, a predictor of 3rd grade success which is itself a proxy for long term academic, career, and life outcomes.

Healthy, thriving communities are crucial for developing young minds and family well-being. [Science](#) tells us that there is a direct link between early childhood development, community and family conditions, and our city and county's stability and prosperity. Our biennial [Kindergarten Readiness Assessment](#) (KRA) consistently finds that kindergarten readiness is strongly linked to family access to basic needs, with housing at the center. This year, upon surveying over 3,000 people in the county – parents, early childhood educators, TK and kindergarten teachers, and with the guidance of our community-led Research Advisory Group, **housing and basic needs emerged as a top priority.** The study included 475 parents with Oakland addresses, 70 K/TK Oakland Unified School District teachers, and 150 ECE professionals in Oakland. [These findings build on the evidence highlighting that the cost of living in Oakland and Alameda County has far outpaced families' abilities to make ends meet](#), and those structural inequities result in disparate outcomes for families of color and those with low incomes.

We support and encourage the city to prioritize policies, practices, and investments that:

- 1. Increase the supply of affordable housing options for families with young children to support child health and well-being and prevent displacement of Black families and families disproportionately impacted by inequitable policies with racist and classist underpinnings.** Housing costs result in little or no disposable income for many families—putting pressure on families to decide between other basic needs like child care, food, and diapers.
 - 50% of renters in Alameda County pay more than one-third of their income for rent. For families of young children, the cost of child care creates an additional financial burden and contribute to financial instability. See more in our [Data for Action](#) guide.
- 2. Adopt housing policies that support and advance the workforce of professionals who support our families including the ECE workforce, navigators, case workers, and family resource providers.** The high-cost of living in Alameda County also impacts our local community workforce. For example, the ECE workforce has historically earned lower wages than other educators in the public system. Affordable housing is a particularly pressing need for the population of mostly women small business owners who operate local family child cares homes;

without affordable and stable housing, family child care providers who provide home-based care face this risk of losing their business, and our community faces the risk of losing the critical service they provide. In [Alameda County](#):

- Fifty-nine (59%) of family child care providers reported earning less than \$15 per hour and struggle to meet their basic needs including covering the cost of rent or mortgage. In Oakland, approximately 40% of center directors and family child care providers rent their facility/home (192 of 481 child care programs).
- Eighty-seven (87%) of ECE professionals, 79% of whom identify as Black, Indigenous, or other women of color, are considered very low-income for the county.
- In our recent ECE facilities needs assessment survey we found:
 - 87% of Oakland center directors and family child care providers expressed interest in expanding their program to serve more children but have not been able to due to lack of resources and support.
 - 69% of Oakland center directors and family child care providers reported at least one component of their center or home as “inadequate or substandard”

3. Expand and prioritize supports for unhoused pregnant people and families with young children.

The high costs of housing and population growth have made Alameda County a hot spot for housing instability and homelessness in the state of California. According to the [Department of Housing and Urban Development](#), *the first year of life is when people are most likely to enter shelter and transitional housing programs, followed by ages one to five*. Pregnant women and families with young children are particularly at risk when they face housing instability. Currently in our county, families with newborns cannot leave the hospital without a car seat, but they can leave without a home.

- One in five pregnant women who are homeless give birth prematurely, according to research findings cited in the [California Health Report](#).
- In 2018, the homeless management information system showed 969 families with 2,917 members as homeless in Alameda County, including 433 children ages 0-5. We know these numbers do not reflect the true extent of the issue as many families do not come forward to ask for assistance out of fear and live in their vehicles or with friends instead.

4. Support place-based investments to promote family friendly neighborhoods.

As part of the [Neighborhoods Ready for School](#) (NRFS) strategy, First 5 Alameda funds trusted community organizations and family resource centers to build an ecosystem of support for families in the community. Three of our four NRFS grantees are in Oakland - Lincoln, San Antonio Family Resource Center, and Roots Community Health Center are working with partners to promote neighborhood conditions where families can thrive. These grantees quickly pivoted at the start of the pandemic to provide basic needs, health and safety supplies, and other family resources via trusted messengers in community. The city could build upon such place-based investments in a coordinated effort to support family friendly neighborhoods - including access to basic needs, affordable housing, child care, transportation, neighborhood libraries, and safe, green and accessible schools, parks, playgrounds. In our [latest KRA](#) we found that:

- Connection to resources (i.e. family navigation to economic supports and basic needs, including housing) was significantly correlated to higher kindergarten readiness

- Families who resided in a higher-income neighborhoods reported higher readiness, and neighborhood assets (i.e. safety, parks/playgrounds, libraries) were correlated with readiness, regardless of family income
- Families want policies that invest in the local economic development to support job creation and advance living wages particularly for Black and Brown communities

Our mission at First 5 Alameda County is to build an early childhood system of care that cultivates the community and family conditions needed to support children’s kindergarten readiness; as a funder, partner, administrator, and advocate, we prioritize policies, programs, and investments that narrow disparities and improve the lives of children from birth to age five, their families, and their caregivers. We partner with community-based organizations to ensure that families and providers have the resources they need for children to thrive—including basic needs, connections to services and information, and peer support to promote mental health and well-being. Through our work, we seek to improve underlying structural conditions and outcomes.

For these reasons, we urge the City of Oakland to consider the needs of families with young children and the early care and education workforce in the 2023-2031 Housing Element Plan. We look forward to the opportunity to partner with the City of Oakland to advance investments that make Oakland a city where all families and children can thrive.

Sincerely,



Kristin Spanos
Chief Executive Officer
First 5 Alameda County