

First Things First Position Statement Re: Funding Requests in Response to State Budget Cuts

TALKING POINTS

BACKGROUND POINTS

- As a state, we have traditionally failed to give every child the opportunity to arrive at school healthy and ready to succeed.
- Because of this, our kids rank low in virtually every indicator of child well-being.
- In 2006, Arizona voters decided it was time to invest their dollars where it matters most – the early years.
- The voters approved Proposition 203, which created First Things First, so that there would be dedicated funding – separate from the state general fund – that could only be used to fund critical early childhood development and health services for children from birth through age 5.
- There is nothing more critical to our state's future economic vitality than ensuring that our children start school healthy and ready to succeed.

POSITION STATEMENT

Dollars approved by Arizona voters to support the strategic approach of FTF will not be diverted to fund safety net services that historically have been funded by the state because:

- It is the responsibility of the state to fund basic safety net services.
- Doing so goes against the will of the voters who approved FTF.
- There would be no incentive for state elected officials to replace reduced appropriations as tax receipts begin to increase.
- All FTF funds are committed to Arizona communities who – through their FTF regional partnership councils – already have decided what is best for their local children and families.
- FTF annual revenues – currently about 20 percent less than a year ago – are insufficient to replace the safety net responsibilities of the state.

SUPPLEMENTAL TALKING POINTS

1). Funding the safety net to help meet the basic needs of Arizona's most vulnerable children and families is the state's responsibility, not First Things First's.

- Suggesting that FTF should have any responsibility to fund safety net services for children and families is as wrong on the face of it as saying the state retirement fund has the same obligation. It's simply not what the system is designed to do.
- By law, FTF funds cannot be used to replace state funding for early childhood services – including safety net services.
- If the Legislature has decided not to meet their obligation to fund the safety net, it is not the responsibility of FTF to jump in and assume that responsibility.

2). The voters gave us our charge, and we are holding firm to the responsibility they gave us. The legislature needs to do the same.

- Because FTF has a dedicated funding source – an additional \$.80 per pack tobacco tax – we are not the cause of the general fund shortfall.
- The voters purposely gave FTF a dedicated funding source so that FTF monies would not be subject to the bureaucracy and politics that are part of the annual state budget process.
- FTF funds are voter-protected and must not be used to make up shortfalls in the state general fund.

3). All of FTF's funds are already committed to programs and services for children from birth through age five.

- When you get your paycheck, it doesn't mean those dollars are not committed. Just as you have to pay your mortgage, your electric bill and buy groceries, FTF has made commitments to local programs that support all of Arizona's children and families.
- It is inappropriate for us to strip money from communities who have already decided what is best for their children and families. It doesn't matter whether we have \$1 or \$1 billion.

4). There is nothing more critical to our state's future economic vitality than ensuring that our children start school healthy and ready to succeed.

- The programs and services funded by FTF are just as critical as the basic services funded by the state. You don't take money away from police to fund firefighters. They are both critical.
- The state is supposed fund the basic services that ensure that struggling families are able to meet their basic needs for health and safety.
- The critical services funded by FTF ensure that all children will have the opportunity to do better in school. Therefore, they will be more likely to graduate from college and more likely to grow up to be tax-paying productive members of society with stable families, decreasing the need for safety net services.

POTENTIAL FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS:

If there's a suggestion that if FTF funds are not diverted to another issue, harm could come to children:

Harm will come if we divert FTF funds from the critical purpose of helping all Arizona children have the opportunity to be healthy and ready to succeed.

It would be wrong to suggest that the harm that could result from unfunded safety net programs is in any way related to anything that FTF has done, can do or should do.

If there is a question about why vulnerable children and families in Arizona don't have access to the basic safety net services they need, then that's a question for the Legislature and the Governor, since it is their responsibility to fund those basic services.

If there's a question about whether FTF supports a tax increase or any other specific solution outside the purview of FTF:

That's a question for lawmakers, since they were elected to determine how government pays for the basic safety net services our communities need.