

La Paz/Mohave Regional Partnership Council
Statement to Uphold the Voter Protection Act & Protect Funding for First Things First

The La Paz/Mohave Regional Partnership Council is unanimously opposed to any efforts by Governor Jan Brewer or the Arizona State Legislature to claim First Things First funds or relax the provisions of the Voter Protection Act.

We recognize that First Things First funds, including interest earnings, are voter protected. Through this voter approved initiative, these funds are solely intended to supplement rather than supplant early childhood programs and services for all Arizona children. Any method of diverting funds away from First Things First is a violation of the Voter Protection Act and effectively asks young children to bail out the state.

We further recognize that these funds would not be available today if First Things First had not been adopted by Arizona voters. Arizona voters were willing to incur the additional cost of tobacco products in our state in order to improve the health, lives, and outcomes of our youngest citizens. At no time did the voters in Arizona approve an additional revenue stream for the state's general fund. From the outset, the First Things First funds were to be kept separate, and targeted for early childhood.

First Things First dollars are slated to fund critical early childhood services designed for our community, by our community. Arizona voters gave this Regional Council the responsibility to determine how these funds should be spent at the local level. We are volunteers who live and work in this region and we have already identified the needs and assets of this region. Our approved three year strategic funding plan is based on input from local parents and early childhood partners.

Should the proposal to amend voter protections become a reality, the voice of Arizona's citizens will be lost. Additionally, La Paz and Mohave Counties and the entire state of Arizona will lose the ability to utilize First Things First funds to deliver necessary services for our children. Programs that may be jeopardized include quality childcare, preventive health services, and parent education, among others.

The Council calls on partners in early childhood, the public and elected officials to reject any proposal to eliminate voter protections or redirect First Things First dollars.

Quotes:

“Arizona's future rests in the hands of our children; and First Things First is directly involved in laying the groundwork for healthy, successful children. I urge you to contact your elected representatives and impress upon them the negative consequences of this proposal. We must not ask our children to pay for our mistakes,” said William Allsbrooks, Chair of the La Paz/Mohave Regional Partnership Council.”

“We have a responsibility as a Board, to think not only of the children, but the voters. This was a citizen led initiative, not led by any organization or entity with anything to gain,” said Nadine Mathis Basha, First Things First Board Chair, “This is citizen activated – it is the best of all of us. We must continue to engage citizens and speak for the citizens that have entrusted us.”