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California State Senators and San Joaquin Valley Residents Address Opportunities to Improve Children's Health in the Valley

*The Second Hearing of the Senate Select Committee on Social Determinants of Children's Well-Being
Engages Fresno Community on Healthcare Workforce Shortage and Conditions in the Valley that Harm
Children*

Fresno, CA (July 15, 2019) – The bipartisan Senate Select Committee on Social Determinants of Children's Well-Being today held its second of six public hearings on the social determinants of children's health to investigate the conditions that negatively impact California children into adulthood and hear recommendations to improve life outcomes.

The public hearing focused on the Central Valley's healthcare workforce shortage, land use and history of redlining, pollution, pesticide exposure, housing, and racial and ethnic inequalities that continue to persist. Local community leaders and residents joined the Select Committee at Fresno City Hall to make public comments on these and other important issues.

"Righteous work is happening in the Valley but there are incredible challenges too," said Senator Holly J. Mitchell, Select Committee chair. "We are proud to initiate these conversations between elected officials, community leaders, researchers, and the public to collectively impact short-term and long-term goals for local and statewide change."

Hearing speakers included Senator Mitchell – Senate District 30; Senator Melissa Hurtado – Senate District 14; Dr. Mark Ghaly, Health and Human Services Agency Secretary; Dr. Janet Coffman of Healthforce Center at UCSF; Dr. Katharine Flores, of UCSF Fresno Latino Center for Medical Education and Research; Dr. Karla Au Yeung, Director of the Valley Children’s Pediatric Residency Program at Valley Children’s Healthcare; Sandra Celedon, Fresno Building Healthy Communities; Lang Fang, The Fresno Center; Leslie Martinez, Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability; and America Hernandez, Kids in Need of Defense.

“To effectively address the conditions impacting Central Valley health, it is essential to hear directly from the people living, working and raising families in the Valley,” said Senator Melissa Hurtado, Select Committee member. “I’m proud to be with and in my community today, sharing this opportunity to work together for the improved well-being of all of our children.”

The first hearing of the Select Committee took place on March 6 in Sacramento, focused on the barriers and impacts for children with no or inadequate housing. The Select Committee has worked closely with community advocacy groups to ensure local voices are included in the planning and implementation of hearings, including the San Joaquin Valley Health Fund, which is supported by 19 state and national funders and includes nearly 100 community-based organizations working in the San Joaquin Valley.

“The urgency of the issues our children face – especially in the Central Valley – requires a sustained commitment to developing partnerships among trusted community resources, impacted communities, and legislative champions dedicated to change,” said Chet P. Hewitt, president and CEO of Sierra Health Foundation and The Center, which manages the San Joaquin Valley Health Fund. “Today’s hearing brought together exactly this kind of powerful and necessary partnership, built on the shared belief that a successful future for our state requires the health, talents and contributions of all of our young people.”

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The Senate Select Committee on the Social Determinants of Children’s Well-Being was formed in February 2019 and will be active through the two-year legislative session. The committee seeks to understand challenges in the current systems with the various determinants and consider ways to improve outcomes for children. The committee will study and make recommendations promoting the health of children in California. These recommendations will be posted on the Senate website: childwellbeing.senate.ca.gov.

Additional Quotes from Community Partners and Hearing Speakers:

“Research on the geographic distribution of health professionals in California has found that the San Joaquin Valley and the Inland Empire regions have the lowest supplies of nurse practitioners, behavioral health professionals per capita, and physicians, including pediatricians,” said Janet Coffman, Professor of Health Policy and Family and Community Medicine, at the University of California, San Francisco. “The good news is that we actually have lots of people who want to be in the medical field, but our higher education institutions need more resources from government to help cover the cost of educating and training the workforce.”

“Health is so much more than a visit to the doctor, a call with an advice nurse or a trip to the lab. We need to look at the built environment, access to basic needs and services such as food, housing and transportation, economic opportunity and education, especially when it comes to our children,” said Leslie Martinez, policy advocate at Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability.

"Ultimately, every single campaign that we tackle is to provide a better Fresno for all of our children," said Sandra Celedon, president and chief executive officer with Fresno Building Healthy Communities. "Our children are healthier when they grow up in neighborhoods that have quality schools, plenty of places to play, access to safe water and clean air. Where we live has a powerful impact on how we live."

“Unaccompanied minors in the Central Valley face significant barriers in accessing essential services. These barriers include poor access to transportation, long wait lists and a general lack of services in rural communities. These barriers can and often do result in negative health consequences such as elevated levels of stress, depression and anxiety,” said America Hernandez, Social Services Coordinator at Kinds in Need of Defense. “Most unaccompanied immigrant children have endured significant trauma both in their home countries and during their journey to the United States which can impact their well-being and their ability to focus on their legal case. In my role at KIND as a Social Services Coordinator I am tasked with addressing issues that child clients face such as health and mental health problems, emergency food and housing, transportation, and education challenges that if left unaddressed can lead to further trauma and vulnerability for exploitation.”