



AGENDA ITEM: 26-13
DATE OF MEETING: May 13, 2026
ACTION:
INFORMATION:

**THE FIRST 5 RIVERSIDE COUNTY ADVISORY COMMITTEE
RECOMMENDS APPROVAL OF SOPHIA WILLIAMS AND SAMUDRA LEITAN AS
THE 2026 CHAMPION FOR CHILDREN AWARD RECIPIENTS**

SUMMARY OF REQUEST

Approve nominees Sophia Williams and Samudra Leitan as the 2026 First 5 Riverside County Champion for Children award recipients in their respective categories, as recommended by the First 5 Riverside County Advisory Committee.

BACKGROUND

First 5 Riverside County's (F5RC) Champion for Children Award was created to honor and bring awareness to people and organizations whose leadership and advocacy embody the vision of F5RC, where all children in Riverside County are healthy and thrive in supportive, nurturing, and loving environments and enter school ready to learn and embrace lifelong learning.

The Commission approved the establishment of the Champion for Children Award and selection criteria, as recommended by the Advisory Committee, in September 2019. Since then, an annual process has been conducted for the Advisory Committee to receive and review nominations and select their recommendation to forward to the Commission for approval.

In 2025, the Advisory Committee formed a three-member Ad Hoc Committee to evaluate the existing Champion for Children Award Process and Form. Based on their recommendations, the 2026 Champion for Children Award includes the following changes:

- Two Award Tiers: Leading the Way and Making a Difference
- Leading the Way for a Champion in a Leadership Role
 - Must be nominated by another individual
 - \$5,000 sponsorship for a community event

- Making a Difference for a Champion who works directly with young children and families
 - May self-nominate or be nominated by another individual
 - \$1,000 sponsorship for a community event
- Nomination form reformatted and condensed
 - Available via survey format hosted on Survey Monkey instead of a fillable pdf application used in previous years

Upon approval by the Commission, Sophia Williams will be recognized at a subsequent Commission meeting as this year's recipient of the First 5 Riverside County Champion for Children Award in the Leading the Way category, and Samudra Leitan will be recognized in the Making a Difference category.

Ms. Williams is a Regional Manager with DPSS Children and Family Services who leads the Riverside County's Healthy Crownz initiative, a culturally responsive program supporting the hair care, identity, and emotional well-being of Black foster youth. Under her guidance, the Healthy Crownz committee meets weekly and hosts three major annual events serving roughly 300 youth and caregivers each, providing education, resources, and confidence-building support. Ms. Williams also ensured long-term systems change by establishing Healthy Crownz training as a requirement for all DPSS social workers.

Ms. Leitan has supported families as a Montessori-inspired family child care home provider for more than six years with an emphasis on helping hearing-impaired children. ASL is used to deliver all curriculum, and Ms. Leitan has a track record of helping children go on to succeed in elementary school. She also emphasizes health activities outdoors and leads the children in activities that support their physical and emotional well-being.

Selection Process

A call for nominations was released in January 2026 and promoted countywide with news releases, posts on social media, and email messages to First 5 funded agencies, stakeholders, and supporters.

A total of sixteen (16) nominations for thirteen (13) unique candidates were submitted by February 20, 2026. Participating members of the First 5 Riverside County Advisory Committee reviewed the nominees and discussed their recommended Champions at their regular March meeting and concluded collectively to forward Ms. Williams and Ms. Leitan's nominations to the Commission for approval.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

That the Commission:

1. Approve Sophia Williams as the 2026 recipient of the First 5 Riverside County Champion for Children Award in the Leading the Way category, as recommended by the Advisory Committee.
2. Authorize the sponsorship award of \$5,000 to be given in Ms. Williams' name to support a community event of her choosing.
3. Approve Samudra Leitan as the 2026 recipient of the First 5 Riverside County Champion for Children Award in the Making a Difference category, as recommended by the Advisory Committee.
4. Authorize the sponsorship award of \$1,000 to be given in Ms. Leitan's name to support a community event of her choosing.

BUDGET IMPACT

Adequate appropriate funding has been included in the approved FY 25/26 budget to support these sponsorships (527780-25800-938001-92980).

STRATEGIC PLAN RELEVANCE

Countywide Impact (92980)

POTENTIAL CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

None.