

First 5 Fresno County names new executive director

By Marc Benjamin

Emilia Reyes

Emilia Reyes was named executive director of First 5 Fresno County on Wednesday in a decision meant to stabilize the agency at a time of staff and board changes.

Reyes was named after a closed session of the Fresno County Children & Families Commission, which oversees First 5. The decision was unanimous, said Chairman Henry R. Perea.

Reyes, 37, has been serving as the agency's interim director after the resignation of Kendra Rogers in July. Prior to the interim executive post, Reyes was chief business officer for the agency.

Reyes didn't know before Wednesday's meeting that she would be named executive director until she was called into the closed session and asked if she would accept the position.

"It was a nice surprise," she said.

Along with Rogers' departure, the agency is going through a change in governance next month and has lost some employees because of family issues.

"There was some uncertainty about what was going to happen in the future," she said.

Reyes was raised in Mendota and graduated from Firebaugh High School. She got her undergraduate degree in economics and business management from University of California at Santa Cruz and her master's in business administration from California State University, Dominguez Hills.

Perea said under Reyes's leadership "we didn't miss a beat at all in the organization."

"It was the feeling of the commission that the sooner we create the permanency for this organization that's needed on a go-forward basis, the sooner we can keep our mission going," Perea said.

Michael Berg, Central Unified School District superintendent, announced his resignation as a commission member on Wednesday before the closed session.

"I don't want there to be any perception or any discussion about the validity of any action taken by this commission while I'm still on it," he told the commission.

Berg, who supported Kendra Rogers, left the meeting before closed session. He said he has high regard for Reyes.

"She is a very competent leader and a good person," he said. "Given the time frame and the need for leadership at a critical juncture I think Emilia will do a good job."

Berg's position as a commission member was going to end next month because the Fresno County Board of Supervisors shrunk the commission by two members and ensured that members of an agency that get funding through First 5 could not serve on the commission. Other commission members are in a similar position.



The Fresno County Board of Supervisors is expected to name members of the new board Children and Families Commission on Sept. 9. The new board's first meeting is in October.

In the past year, there was friction between supervisors -- who appoint commission members -- and Rogers, who had personal battles with Supervisors Debbie Poochigian and Perea.

A majority of supervisors also opposed First 5's new \$15 million downtown Fresno building, which will house its headquarters and offer other services.

Supervisors Judy Case McNairy and Phil Larson also were critical of First 5 because they didn't think there was enough focus on rural areas they serve.

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