

By Kay Ruhstaller

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February 23, 2016 5:30PM

Guest view: Bill of Rights needed for local children

The San Joaquin Children's Alliance is a collaboration of community members, including local representatives from the city and county government, nonprofits, San Joaquin County Office of Education, San Joaquin Community Data Co-op, Community Foundation of San Joaquin, University of the Pacific and various other community advocates.

The Children's Alliance collected and reviewed data over the past year to gain a greater understanding of the crisis facing children and youth in San Joaquin County. Key findings were presented to the San Joaquin County Board of Supervisors at its Dec. 15 meeting.

One of those key findings is the fact 1 in 3 children birth to 5 years old in San Joaquin County lives in poverty. According to the recently released 2015 Child Care Portfolio produced by the California Child Care Resource & Referral Network, the number of children birth to 5 living in poverty increased by 5 percent in San Joaquin County between 2012 and 2014 while the number of birth to 5 living in poverty decreased statewide by 10 percent during the same period.

One in 3 children living in poverty is not a future the Children's Alliance accepts for our local children. As the economy has begun to recover, children are not recovering at the same pace. The San Joaquin County Children and Youth Bill of Rights is a strong start to prioritizing the youngest people of San Joaquin County and to addressing the issues they face.

The SJ Children's Alliance believes that public agreement on the Children's and Youth Bill of Rights provides us with a way to develop and maximize partnerships, attract resources and implement policies that will lead to positive change for children and youth. The bill of rights defines what we want for our children; it's a value statement. It will help the Children's Alliance expand the coalition and bring people together to work toward common goals and inspire action for better outcomes for children.

The supervisors should be congratulated for unanimously supporting the creation of the San Joaquin County Children's (and Youth) Bill of Rights. A draft has been created by county staff along with significant youth and community input which will be presented for adoption to the Supervisors at its March 15 meeting at 9 a.m. at 44 N. San Joaquin St., the sixth floor chambers. The supervisors' leadership in the creation of such a document and future endorsement of it will demonstrate that our policymakers believe children and youth play a vital role in shaping the future and economic development and growth of our communities.

To show your support of the Children and Youth Bill of Rights, use this link: <http://sjchildren.org/sign-on/> to sign the on-line petition or go to Sjchildren.org for more information. There is a Chinese Proverb that says, "The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second best time is now."

— *Kay Ruhstaller is executive director of the Family Resource and Referral Center.*



Kay Ruhstaller, executive director of the Family Resource and Referral Center, addresses the San Joaquin County Board of Supervisors. RECORD FILE

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