

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5437

As of February 7, 2019

Title: An act relating to expanding eligibility to the early childhood education and assistance program.

Brief Description: Expanding eligibility to the early childhood education and assistance program.

Sponsors: Senators Wilson, C., Palumbo, Wellman, Hunt, Saldaña, Nguyen, Randall, Das, Billig, Mullet, Darneille, Dhingra, Hasegawa, Kuderer and Takko; by request of Office of the Governor.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Early Learning & K-12 Education: 2/04/19.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Adds requirements for children included in the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) who have families with an income over 110 percent of the federal poverty level.
- Establishes a three-year pilot project to provide ECEAP to infants and toddlers under the age of three and who have families with an income at or below 110 percent of the federal poverty level.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

Staff: Ailey Kato (786-7434)

Background: Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP). This voluntary preschool program serves eligible three and four year olds. The Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) administers ECEAP to assist eligible children with educational, social, health, nutritional, and cultural development to enhance their opportunity for success in the common school system. Current law provides for this program to become an entitlement in the 2022-23 school year for eligible children. "Eligible children" means a child not eligible for kindergarten and:

- whose family income is at or below 110 percent of the federal poverty level;
- a child eligible for special education preschool due to disability; and

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- may include children who are eligible under rules adopted by DCYF if the number of such children equals not more than 10 percent of the total enrollment.

DCYF rules provide that children must be at least three years old, but not yet five years old, by August 31st of the school year to enroll in ECEAP.

State law requires DCYF to adopt rules allowing inclusion of children in ECEAP whose family income is above 110 percent of the federal poverty level if the number of such children equals not more than 25 percent of total statewide enrollment. ECEAP may allow enrollment for these children on a space available basis. Children who are over income must be homeless or impacted by specific developmental or environmental risk factors that are linked by research to school performance. Children who are over income are not to be considered eligible children for ECEAP and are not considered to be part of the state-funded entitlement.

Early Head Start Programs. These federally funded programs serve low-income pregnant women and infants and toddlers under the age of three. Early Head Start programs are designed to promote the development of the children and enable their parents to fulfill their roles as parents and to move toward self-sufficiency. Program options include home-based, center-based, and family child care services.

Summary of Bill: Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program. Children who are included in ECEAP but are not eligible children for the purposes of the entitlement must have a family income from 111 to 200 percent of the federal poverty level. These families may be required to make a tuition payment directly to the provider. The provider must conduct a family assessment to determine which, if any, ECEAP wraparound services are needed for the child and family. DCYF must adopt rules to implement these requirements. In an annual report, DCYF must describe family and children outcomes included in ECEAP.

Birth-to-Three Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program Pilot. Subject to appropriations, DCYF must establish a pilot project to provide birth-to-three ECEAP to eligible children. An eligible child means a child's family income is at or below 110 percent of the federal poverty level and under thirty-six months old.

DCYF must consider Early Head Start rules and regulations when developing requirements. Any deviations must be identified and explained in an annual report. DCYF may adopt rules to implement the pilot project.

The pilot project must start July 1, 2019 and conclude June 30, 2022. During the first year, DCYF must select up to 10 pilot project locations. DCYF must attempt to select a combination of rural, urban, and suburban locations and prioritize locations currently operating Early Head Start, Head Start, or ECEAP programs.

The pilot project programs must meet minimum licensing standards, be enrolled in Early Achievers, have at least a Level 4 rating, and provide a minimum of 1,380 hours of classroom operations per year. A pilot project class must have at least three teachers serving no more than nine children at a time, or at least two teachers serving no more than eight

children at a time. DCFY must offer home visiting services that the child or family are eligible for under the particular home visiting service's statutory eligibility requirements.

During the pilot project, DCFY must analyze quality, performance measures, and child and parent outcomes. Beginning November 1, 2019, DCYF must submit an annual report. A final report is due November 1, 2023 with findings and recommendations.

Appropriation: The bill contains a section or sections to limit implementation to the availability of amounts appropriated for that specific purpose.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 19, 2019.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: ECEAP helps children of color and low-income children access a critical early learning program to keep up with the more advantaged peers and help close the opportunity gap. Many parts of the state have limited access to high quality center-based care for infants and toddlers. Native children and children who are homeless are among the least ready for kindergarten. ECEAP helps children prepare for kindergarten. ECEAP eligibility should line up with federal Head Start and the free lunch program, which is 130 percent of the federal poverty level. Adequacy of compensation of ECEAP teachers is a concern.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Claire Wilson, Prime Sponsor; Dana Anderson, Association of Educational Service Districts; Melissa Johnson, Washington State Association of Head Start and ECEAP; Kevin Rutherford, citizen; Teela Lanchester, citizen; Deborah Sioux Lee, Nisqually Tribal Head Start; Katy Warren, Washington State Association of Head Start and ECEAP.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.