

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6351

As of February 11, 2020

Title: An act relating to working connections child care eligibility.

Brief Description: Concerning working connections child care eligibility.

Sponsors: Senators Nguyen, Hasegawa, Kuderer, Lovelett, Wilson, C., Darneille, Frockt and Saldaña; by request of Office of the Governor.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Early Learning & K-12 Education: 1/20/20, 1/27/20 [DP-WM, w/oRec].

Ways & Means: 2/04/20.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Directs the Department of Children, Youth, and Families to extend a homeless grace period in the Working Connections Child Care program, which would provide families 12 months instead of 4 months to provide verification of participation in approved activities and other information.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Wellman, Chair; Wilson, C., Vice Chair; Hawkins, Ranking Member; Hunt, McCoy, Mullet, Pedersen, Salomon and Wagoner.

Minority Report: That it be referred without recommendation.

Signed by Senators Holy and Padden.

Staff: Ailey Kato (786-7434)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Staff: Sarah Emmans (786-7478)

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Background: Working Connections Child Care. This federally and state-funded program provides child care subsidies to families with an income at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level—\$52,400 for a family of four. The state pays part of the cost of childcare when a parent is employed, self-employed, or in approved work activities except in certain circumstances. The family is responsible for making a copayment to the child care provider based on the family's countable income.

Authorizations for a Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) subsidy are effective for 12 months. The Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) must manage the program, so the average monthly caseload does not exceed 33,000 households and must give access to the program based on priorities specified in the operating budget.

Under DCYF rules, WCCC benefits for an eligible consumer begin when the consumer has completed the application and verification process within 30 days of the application and the consumer is working or participating in an approved activity.

Homeless Grace Period. A current WCCC rule provides eligibility to a homeless grace period for families experiencing homelessness if:

- homelessness is verified within 30 days of application;
- the family has not received a homeless grace period in the previous 12 months; and
- the family meets all eligibility requirements except that families have four months to provide: (1) verification of participation in approved work activities; (2) required third-party verification of employment; and (3) verification of payment or payment plan arrangements for an outstanding payment.

Families remain eligible for the homeless grace period through the end of the fourth month even if their homeless status changes.

McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. This federal law provides funding to states to support programs serving students experiencing homelessness. Under the act, "homeless" means being without a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.

Summary of Bill: DCYF must extend the homeless grace period from a 4-month grace period to a 12-month grace period. "Homeless" means without a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence as defined by McKinney-Vento.

Existing statutory language is moved into a new section.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Early Learning & K-12 Education): PRO: It is difficult for many families to find child care, and it is much more difficult if a family is

experiencing homelessness. Child care for a family experiencing homelessness can provide a safe, stable, and nurturing environment for a child and allows parents to focus on finding work and housing. In Washington, child care openings and affordable housing are scarce. This is a crisis. Four months is not enough time to find child care, housing, and employment.

Persons Testifying (Early Learning & K-12 Education): PRO: Senator Joe Nguyen, Prime Sponsor; Kelly Blucher, Goodwill Industries; Katie Kaiser, Child Care Resources; Bevette Irvis, Wellspring Family Services; Pam Crone, Building Changes; Melissa Johnson, Washington State Association of Head Start and ECEAP; Sarah Reyneveld, King County Women's Advisory Board; Sydney Forrester, Governor's Policy Office.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Early Learning & K-12 Education): PRO: Emily Murphy, Early Learning Action Alliance; Sarah Brady, Child Care Resources.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Ways & Means): PRO: Causes of adult homelessness are complex and reach back into adverse childhood experience, including having been homeless as a child. The current grace period is too short to be meaningful for families, especially families who have barriers to employment. Families experiencing homelessness have weak social support systems and chaotic lives, and do not have somebody who can safely and reliably care for their children while they look for a job or attend medical appointments. The state invests significantly in services to end homelessness, but in order to extract value from these investments, we need to give families this support in accessing them. Many homeless families struggle to gain proof of participation in approved activities and other verification during the four months. Additional time would help them get together the verification they need. The Working Connections subsidy is critical for homeless families. A childcare provider was an important source of nurturing and stability for a family, providing peace of mind while the parent attended appointments, but the four months was barely enough time for the parent to gather documents needed to remain in the program. Four months is not enough time for a family to seek jobs or remove other barriers to improving their lives. This is a strategic way to close the opportunity gap so that children experiencing homelessness do not start kindergarten behind their peers.

Persons Testifying (Ways & Means): PRO: Kara Tolentino-Schluter, citizen; Norma Lobo, Child Care Resources; Sydney Forrester, Governor's Policy Office; Jason Bragg, Washington State Parent Ally Committee.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Ways & Means): No one.