
Early Learning & Human Services Committee

HB 2659

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

Sponsors: Representatives Goodman, Kagi, Lovick, Kilduff, Appleton, Valdez, Ortiz-Self, Wylie, Hudgins, Senn, McBride, Doglio, Pettigrew and Frame.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Modifies the family income limit for Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) eligibility from 110 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) to 185 percent of FPL.
- Adds prioritization criteria for ECEAP enrollment.
- Phases in biennial funding and extends the date for full statewide implementation of ECEAP from the 2022-23 school year to the 2028-29 school year.

Hearing Date: 1/26/18

Staff: Dawn Eychaner (786-7135).

Background:

The Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) is the state's voluntary preschool program. Three and four year-olds from families with incomes at or below 110 percent of the federal poverty level are eligible for the ECEAP. Children with special needs or certain risk factors are also eligible to enroll, regardless of income. Up to 10 percent of enrollment can be children who do not meet income requirements but are experiencing other risk factors that could interfere with school success.

The Department of Early Learning (DEL) administers the ECEAP through contracts with local organizations. The DEL must prioritize children from families with the lowest incomes, in

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foster care, or with multiple needs for enrollment. Effective July 1, 2018, all powers, functions, and duties of the DEL will be transferred to the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF).

The Caseload Forecast Council (CFC) prepares the official state caseload forecasts for a number of public assistance programs, including the ECEAP. The ECEAP caseload includes the number of children who are eligible for the ECEAP and the number actually served.

Funding for the ECEAP is phased in yearly. Full statewide implementation is required by the 2022-23 school year when any eligible child will be entitled to enroll in the ECEAP.

Summary of Bill:

Effective July 1, 2018, the income limit for a family's eligibility for the ECEAP is changed from 110 percent of the FPL to 185 percent of the FPL.

The date by which statewide implementation of the ECEAP must be achieved is extended from the 2022-23 school year to the 2028-29 school year. Beginning in the 2019-20 school year, funding for the ECEAP must be phased in based on the forecasted caseload of children eligible for and projected to participate in the ECEAP according to the following schedule:

- at least 40 percent of the caseload in the 2019-2021 biennium;
- at least 50 percent of the caseload in the 2021-2023 biennium;
- at least 65 percent of the caseload in the 2023-2025 biennium;
- at least 80 percent of the caseload in the 2025-2027 biennium; and
- one hundred percent of the caseload in the 2027-2029 biennium.

The DCYF must prioritize eligible children for enrollment according to a system of risk factors and priority points adopted by the department in rule. The system must prioritize children who are: from families with the lowest incomes; in foster care; members of a federally recognized tribe; or from families with multiple needs. The following risk factors must also be included in the priority system:

- child welfare system involvement;
- developmental delay or disability;
- domestic violence;
- English as a second language;
- expulsion from an early learning setting;
- homelessness;
- a parent who is or has been incarcerated; and
- a parent with a substance abuse or mental health treatment need.

A technical correction is made in the CFC chapter to update a reference to the DCYF.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 16, 2018.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect on July 1, 2018.