

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 6419

As Reported by House Committee On:
Early Learning & Human Services

Title: An act relating to promoting access to the Washington early childhood education and assistance program.

Brief Description: Concerning access to the Washington early childhood education and assistance program.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Early Learning & K-12 Education (originally sponsored by Senators Rolfes, Zeiger, Billig, Wellman, Conway, Darneille, Kuderer, Palumbo and Walsh).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Early Learning & Human Services: 2/15/18, 2/20/18 [DPA].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill
(As Amended by Committee)

- Allows up to 25 percent of the statewide enrollment in the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) to include children whose family incomes exceed program limits but who are homeless or experiencing other risk factors.
- Excludes children enrolled under the 25 percent allowance from the state-funded ECEAP entitlement.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & HUMAN SERVICES

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 10 members: Representatives Kagi, Chair; Senn, Vice Chair; Frame, Goodman, Griffey, Kilduff, Klippert, Lovick, Muri and Ortiz-Self.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 2 members: Representatives Dent, Ranking Minority Member; Eslick.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 1 member: Representative McCaslin, Assistant Ranking Minority Member.

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.

Staff: Dawn Eychaner (786-7135).

Background:

The Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) is the state's voluntary preschool program for 3 and 4 year olds. The ECEAP provides education, health and nutrition, and family support services.

Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program Eligibility.

Children are eligible for the state-supported ECEAP who are from families with incomes at or below 110 percent of the federal poverty level or who are eligible for special education due to a disability. Up to 10 percent of the total enrollment in the state-supported program may consist of children who are eligible based on other criteria adopted in rule by the Department of Early Learning (DEL). Rules adopted by the DEL include children as eligible who are returning to the same ECEAP contractor from the previous school year, who are receiving child protective services (CPS) or family assessment response (FAR) services, or who are impacted by specific developmental or environmental risk factors that are linked by research to school performance.

Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program Prioritization.

The DEL must prioritize enrollment for children from families with the lowest income, in foster care, or from families with multiple needs. Rules adopted by the DEL require ECEAP contractors to include as priority populations of children who will be 4 years old by August 31 of the school year, are homeless, or are receiving CPS or FAR services.

When awarding ECEAP contracts, the DEL must prioritize programs located in low-income neighborhoods within high-need geographical areas. Within this priority, the DEL must give preference to programs offering extended-day programs, services to children diagnosed with a special need, or services to children involved in the child welfare system.

State funding for the ECEAP is phased in yearly, and children may be admitted to the extent the state provides funds for the program. Full statewide implementation is required by the 2022-23 school year when any eligible child will be entitled to enroll in the state-supported ECEAP. Additional eligible children may be admitted to the ECEAP to the extent that grants and community sources provide sufficient funds for a program equivalent to that supported by state funds.

Other.

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 McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (McKinney-Vento) requires states and public school districts to ensure that children and youth experiencing homelessness have equal access to public education. The McKinney-Vento defines a homeless child or youth as one lacking a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.

Summary of Amended Bill:

The DCYF must adopt rules to allow, as space is available, a child whose family income is higher than 110 percent of the federal poverty level to be included in the ECEAP if the child is either homeless, as defined by McKinney-Vento, or impacted by specific developmental or environmental risk factors that are linked by research to school performance. Enrollment of these children may not exceed 25 percent of the total statewide ECEAP enrollment and within this group, priority for enrollment must be given to children who are experiencing homelessness, who have child welfare system involvement, or have developmental delay or disability that does not meet the eligibility criteria for special education that are adopted in rule by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). These children are not considered eligible for the state-supported ECEAP and are not considered part of the state-funded entitlement. Children who are eligible for the state-supported ECEAP must receive first priority for enrollment.

Technical corrections are made to update references from the DEL to the DCYF.

Amended Bill Compared to Substitute Bill:

The amended bill provides that children eligible for the state-supported ECEAP must receive first priority for enrollment. For children who are over-income, priority must be given to children who are homeless, who are involved in the child welfare system, or who have a developmental delay or disability that does not meet the eligibility criteria for special education adopted in rule by the OSPI.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) This bill is about giving local ECEAP programs the flexibility to reach out to the families in their communities who are over income eligibility limits but whose children have other risk factors impacting school performance. The DEL uses a priority point system to assign points to various risk factors so that a family with more risk factors is prioritized for enrollment. Many classrooms in rural areas cannot be filled, so many children in those communities go unserved. There are safeguards built in for this over-income group so that families with higher risk factors are included and served. Being limited as a provider and unable to serve children who are slightly over-income but have significant risk factors is extremely frustrating. These children will lose out on the comprehensive services of the ECEAP and many of these children will lose out on preschool entirely.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Senator Rolfes, prime sponsor; Melissa Johnson, Washington State Association of Head Start and Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program; Jeanne Holdal, Skagit Valley College Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program; and Kevin Rutherford.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.