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**Human Services, Youth, & Early  
Learning Committee**

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**HB 2124**

**Brief Description:** Supporting and expanding access to child care and early learning programs.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Eslick, Senn and Leavitt.

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Makes an exception to the work requirement for Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) when the family is participating in the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP), Head Start, Birth to Three ECEAP, or Early Head Start.
- Includes all ECEAP and Birth to Three ECEAP providers in the expanded WCCC eligibility provisions that are currently applicable to licensed child care providers.
- Requires inflationary adjustments to the dual language designation subsidy rate enhancements, rather than allowing those adjustments to be subject to appropriations.

**Hearing Date:** 1/9/24

**Staff:** Omeara Harrington (786-7136).

**Background:**

Working Connections Child Care.

Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) is a federally and state-funded program administered by the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) that provides subsidies for child care while a parent is working or participating in approved work-related activities. The WCCC

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program is available to families who meet certain eligibility requirements and have a household income at or below 60 percent of the state median income (SMI), adjusted for family size. Beginning July 1, 2025, a family is eligible for WCCC program benefits when the household's annual income is above 60 percent and at or below 75 percent of the SMI, adjusted for family size, and beginning July 1, 2027, if funds are appropriated, when the household's annual income is up to 85 percent of the SMI, adjusted for family size. Depending on income, families may be required to pay a monthly copayment to their provider.

*Approved Activities for Working Connections Child Care.*

To be eligible for WCCC benefits, an applicant or consumer must be engaged in an approved activity. Approved activities include employment, self-employment, certain educational and training programs, and other identified activities.

The DCYF may not require an applicant or consumer to meet work requirements as a condition of receiving WCCC program benefits when the recipient is enrolled in a state registered apprenticeship or is a full-time student of a community, technical, or tribal college, and is enrolled in a vocational education program that leads to a degree or certificate in a specific occupation or an associate degree program. Subject to appropriations, the DCYF may waive work requirements for full-time students who are enrolled in a bachelor's degree or applied baccalaureate degree program.

*Working Connections Child Care Eligibility for Child Care Employees.*

Employees of licensed child care centers and family home providers are eligible for WCCC benefits when:

- the employee's household income is at or below 85 percent of the SMI level, adjusted for family size;
- the child receiving care is younger than 13 years old, or younger than 19 years old and has a verified special need or is under court supervision; and
- the employee's household meets all other program eligibility requirements.

To the extent allowable under federal law, the DCYF must waive the copayment for qualifying employees of licensed child care centers and family home providers, and otherwise must apply a maximum copay of \$15.

The Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program and the Head Start Program.

The Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) is the state's no-cost voluntary preschool program, and Head Start is a federally funded no-cost voluntary preschool program. Children are eligible for the ECEAP and Head Start when they are between the ages of 3 and 5 and meet certain household income requirements or have experienced specified risk factors. Both ECEAP and Head Start provide free early learning child care or preschool, family support, child health coordination and nutrition, and other responsive services.

In addition, there is a Birth to Three ECEAP program, as well as an Early Head Start Program, for children who are not yet age eligible for ECEAP or Head Start.

Dual Language Provider Supports.

The DCYF is required to maintain a dual language designation and provide subsidy rate enhancements or site-specific grants for qualifying licensed or certified child care providers and ECEAP or Birth to Three ECEAP contractors. Rate enhancements and site-specific grants are intended to be used for increased wages for individual staff who provide bilingual instruction, professional development training, the purchase of dual language and culturally appropriate curricula and accompanying training programs, instructional materials, or other related expenses. Subject to the availability of appropriated funds, dual language rate enhancements must be adjusted every two years for inflation.

**Summary of Bill:**

A family's participation in the ECEAP, Head Start, Birth to Three ECEAP, or Early Head Start satisfies the work requirement for purposes of the WCCC program, beginning July 1, 2024.

All ECEAP and Birth to Three ECEAP providers are included in the expanded WCCC eligibility provisions that are currently applicable to licensed child care providers.

Inflationary adjustments to the dual language designation subsidy rate enhancements are required, rather than being subject to appropriation.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Requested on January 4, 2024.

**Effective Date:** The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.