
Capital Budget Committee

HB 1314

Brief Description: Concerning the early learning facilities grant and loan program.

Sponsors: Representatives Callan, Abbarno, Fosse, Davis, Waters, Reed, Salahuddin, Tharinger, Nance, Eslick and Doglio.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Amends competitive criteria for project selection for Early Learning Facilities Program funding.
- Establishes emergency grants to be awarded on an ongoing basis from the Early Learning Facilities Revolving Account.

Hearing Date: 1/30/25

Staff: Dawn Eychaner (786-7135).

Background:

The Department of Commerce (Commerce) administers the Early Learning Facilities (ELF) program, which provides grants and loans to eligible organizations to plan, renovate, purchase, and construct early learning facilities. Eligible organizations include providers of Working Connections Child Care (WCCC), Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) contractors, developers of housing and community facilities, community and technical colleges, educational service districts, local governments, federally recognized tribes, and religiously affiliated entities. School districts may also receive grants or loans to purchase, construct, or renovate early learning classrooms.

Generally, state funding for capital projects is to be disbursed in proportion to nonstate matching funds. However, early learning facilities collocated with affordable or supporting housing

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developments may receive state funding for up to 90 percent of the project cost, regardless of the proportionate match amount.

Projects are selected for funding according to prioritization criteria established by a committee of early learning experts. Included among the competitive criteria are projects that add part-day, full-day, or extended day ECEAP slots with the highest unmet need. The amount of resources matched by a project is also a competitive criterion.

Accounts.

The ELF program is funded from the Ruth LeCocq Kagi Early Learning Facilities Revolving Account (Revolving Account) and the Ruth LeCocq Kagi Early Learning Facilities Development (Development Account). Commerce contracts with a nongovernmental private-public partnership (PPP) certified by the community development financial institutions to administer grants and loans through the Revolving Account. The PPP must demonstrate an ability to raise funding from private and other public entities for early learning facilities construction projects.

Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program.

The Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) is a voluntary preschool program administered by the Department of Children, Youth, and Families serving eligible 3 to 5-year-old children who are not age-eligible for kindergarten. The program must offer a comprehensive program that includes education, health, and family support services. ECEAP offers part-day, full-day, and extended day programming. Current law provides for ECEAP to become an entitlement in the 2026-27 school year for eligible children.

Tribal Compact Schools.

State-tribal education compact schools are public schools that are governed and operated according to the terms of a compact negotiated between the tribal governing body and the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Summary of Bill:

Commerce is encouraged to leverage matching funds when feasible, and may not require match from an applicant experiencing financial hardship. Commerce may not consider the level of project match as a competitive criterion for selecting or recommending projects for funding.

Early Learning Facilities (ELF) funding eligibility is expanded to include:

- tribal compact schools;
- projects that increase ECEAP capacity by converting slots from part day to full day or extended day, or converting full day to extended day; and
- emergency project grants.

Commerce is directed to contract with one or more nongovernmental private-public partnership (PPP) to award and administer emergency project grants on an ongoing basis, subject to funding appropriated for this purpose. An emergency project is defined as a project made necessary by a

natural disaster or another immediate health or safety threat resulting from unforeseen circumstances. Emergency projects may include improvements to early learning facilities that are necessary to restore a safe and healthy learning environment, preserve existing capacity, or to mitigate situations that obstruct children's access to early learning. The PPP must ensure emergency grants do not duplicate payment from insurance proceeds or any other source and may receive administrative funding for program management and technical assistance.

Commerce is authorized to adopt rules to implement the ELF program.

Technical changes are made to reorganize content and update statutory references.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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