
Early Learning & Human Services Committee

HB 1351

Brief Description: Adjusting age requirements for accessing the early childhood education and assistance program.

Sponsors: Representatives Bernbaum, Eslick, Springer, Ormsby, Salahuddin, Parshley, Hill, Doglio, Hunt, Pollet, Cortes and Nance.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Allows children who will turn 3 during the school year to enroll in the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP), subject to available space and funding, when they meet all ECEAP eligibility criteria other than age.

Hearing Date: 1/22/25

Staff: Omeara Harrington (786-7136).

Background:

The Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program.

The Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) is a no-cost preschool and family support program administered by the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF).

Standard Eligibility Criteria for the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program.

Children are eligible for the ECEAP when they are between the ages of 3 and 5 and are from families with incomes at or below 110 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL), are eligible for special education due to disability, or meet other criteria under rules adopted by the department.

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

Beginning July 1, 2026, eligibility will expand to include any child who:

- has a family with financial need;
- is experiencing homelessness;
- has participated in Early Head Start or a successor federal program, the Early Support for Infants and Toddlers program or received class C developmental services, the Birth to Three ECEAP, or the Early Childhood Intervention and Prevention Services program; or
- is Indian as defined in DCYF rule and has a household income at or below 100 percent of the state median income (SMI).

"Family with financial need" means families with incomes at or below 36 percent of the SMI until the 2030-31 school year. Beginning in the 2030-31 school year, it includes families with incomes at or below 50 percent of the SMI.

Eligibility will again expand on August 1, 2030, to include children who are part of an assistance unit receiving basic food benefits under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or the Sate Food Assistance Program.

Starting in the 2026-27 school year, ECEAP will become an entitlement for eligible children meeting the standard eligibility criteria.

Additional Allowed Enrollment for the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program.

The DCYF is authorized to enroll additional children in the ECEAP who do not meet standard eligibility criteria, as space is available, if their family income is:

- above 110 percent of the FPL but no more than 130 percent of the FPL; or
- above 130 percent of the FPL but no more than 200 percent of the FPL if the child meets at least one specified risk factor.

Beginning July 1, 2026, children may be allowed to enroll in ECEAP, subject to capacity, if their family income level is above 36 percent of the SMI, but at or below 50 percent of the SMI, and the child meets at least one specified risk factor.

The DCYF may also allow certain children to enroll in the ECEAP, as space is available, when they will turn age 3 during the school year and:

- have a family income below 200 percent of the FPL (or 50 percent of the SMI starting on July 1, 2026) or meet one or more risk factors as identified by the DCYF; and
- have participated in the Early Support for Infants and Toddlers program, the Early Head Start program or the Birth to Three ECEAP, or the Early Childhood Intervention Prevention Services program.

Children enrolled in the ECEAP under allowed enrollment criteria are not included in the upcoming entitlement.

Summary of Bill:

Subject to the availability of program space and funding, the Department of Children, Youth, and Families may allow children who will turn 3 during the school year to enroll in the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) when they meet all eligibility criteria other than age. Children enrolled under this authorization are not included in the population who will be entitled to ECEAP enrollment.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Preliminary fiscal note available.

Effective Date: The bill contains multiple effective dates. Please see the bill.