
Early Learning & Human Services Committee

HB 1919

Brief Description: Modifying access to the working connections child care program.

Sponsors: Representatives Bergquist, Couture, Schmidt and Pollet; by request of Governor Ferguson.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Provides that, beginning July 1, 2025, Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) benefits are available to employees of small businesses with a household income of up to 75 percent of the state median income.
- Delays the implementation dates by four years for the upcoming expansions to income-based eligibility for the WCCC.

Hearing Date: 2/12/25

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 program is available to families who meet certain eligibility and household income requirements.

Eligibility for Working Connections Child Care.

Eligibility requirements for WCCC are found in both statute and DCYF rules.

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.

In general, to qualify for the WCCC program, a family must 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 the 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.

Examples of other eligibility requirements include that the child is age-eligible, that the parent and child reside in Washington, that the parent has parental control of the child, and that the parent does not have assets exceeding a certain threshold. Additionally, to be eligible for WCCC benefits, the parent must be engaged in an approved activity as defined in agency rules.

Approved activities include employment, self-employment, certain educational and training programs, and other identified activities.

Special Eligibility Rules.

Categorical Eligibility.

The DCYF is required to maintain policies to allow WCCC eligibility for families in these categories:

- families who in the last six months have received certain child welfare services; and
- families that include a parent or guardian who, in the last six months, was a participant in a specialty or therapeutic court or who was a listed victim in a case before a specialty or therapeutic court, and have been referred for child care as part of the court's proceedings.

Families meeting these criteria are not required to meet most other eligibility requirements or pay a copay to the provider.

Expanded Eligibility.

There are also several categories of expanded eligibility for the WCCC. These categories include:

- child care and early-learning providers with a household income at or below 85 percent of the SMI level;
- persons in their first 12 months of a state registered apprenticeship when the person has a household income that does not exceed 75 percent of the SMI at the time of application; and
- parents who are high school students or are 21 years old or younger and working toward completing a high school equivalency certificate, and whose household income does not exceed 85 percent of the SMI.

Persons in these categories must otherwise meet program eligibility requirements in order to qualify for the WCCC program. Copays are waived in some, but not all circumstances.

Summary of Bill:

Implementation dates are delayed by four years for the upcoming expansions to income eligibility for the Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) program. A family is eligible for the WCCC program benefits when the household's annual income is above 60 percent and at or below 75 percent of the SMI beginning July 1, 2029. If funds are appropriated, beginning July 1, 2031, a family is eligible for WCCC when the household's annual income is up to 85 percent of the SMI.

Beginning July 1, 2025, an applicant or consumer is eligible to receive WCCC benefits for the care of one or more eligible children when the applicant or consumer is employed by a small business and has an annual household income not exceeding 75 percent of the SMI and the household otherwise meets eligibility requirements. The applicant or consumer must pay a copay equivalent to copays applicable to households with the same income level. A "small business" is a business entity that is owned and operated independently from all other businesses and has 50 or fewer employees.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 7, 2025.

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect on July 1, 2025.