
Early Learning & Human Services Committee

HB 2099

Brief Description: Expanding access to the early childhood education and assistance program for military families.

Sponsors: Representatives Leavitt, Penner, Barnard, Timmons, Reed, Kloba, Ryu, Parshley, Zahn, Richards, Schmidt, Doglio, Simmons, Berry, Eslick, Obras, Paul, Nance, Scott, Callan, Goodman, Reeves, Shavers, Fosse, Bergquist, Salahuddin and Bernbaum.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Allows children who would not otherwise qualify for the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) to enroll in the program when they have a parent who is a military member and are from a household meeting certain financial eligibility criteria.
- Includes factors affecting households with a military member parent in the prioritization system for enrollment in available funded ECEAP slots.

Hearing Date: 1/16/26

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).

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.

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

A child is eligible for the ECEAP when they are between the ages of 3 and 5 and:

- have a family with financial need;
- are experiencing homelessness;
- have participated in Early Head Start or a successor federal program, the Early Support for Infants and Toddlers (ESIT) program or received class C developmental services, the Birth to Three ECEAP, or the Early Childhood Intervention and Prevention Services (ECLIPSE) program;
- are eligible for special education due to disability; or
- are Indian as defined in DCYF rule and have 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.

Starting in the 2030-31 school year, the ECEAP will become an entitlement for eligible children meeting the standard eligibility criteria.

Additional Allowed Enrollment in 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 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 three year olds who do not meet standard eligibility criteria to enroll in the ECEAP, as space is available, when they are only ineligible because they did not turn three before the start of the school year, or when they:

- have a family income at or below 50 percent of the SMI or meet one or more risk factors as identified by the DCYF; and
- have participated in the ESIT program, the Early Head Start program or the Birth to Three ECEAP, or the ECLIPSE program.

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

Prioritization for Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program Slots.

Children who qualify for the ECEAP under standard eligibility criteria are prioritized for enrollment in the program. Children eligible under the allowed enrollment criteria are prioritized for available funded slots according to a DCYF prioritization system that considers risk factors that have a disproportionate effect on kindergarten readiness and school performance, including:

- family income as a percent of the state median income;
- child welfare system involvement;
- domestic violence;
- English as a second language;

- expulsion from an early learning setting;
- a parent who is incarcerated;
- a parent with a behavioral health treatment need; and
- other risk factors linked to school performance.

Working Connections Child Care Income Eligibility.

Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) is a program that provides subsidies for child care while a parent is working or participating in approved work-related activities. Families are eligible for WCCC benefits when they have a household income at or below 60 percent of the SMI, adjusted for family size. Beginning July 1, 2029, eligibility will expand to include households with an annual income at or below 75 percent of the SMI, adjusted for family size, and again July 1, 2031, if funds are appropriated, to households with an annual income of up to 85 percent of the SMI, adjusted for family size.

Summary of Bill:

The ECEAP allowed enrollment categories are expanded to include children who have a parent who is a military member and also have a household income that is at or below the maximum household income for WCCC eligibility. Military members include active members of the United States armed forces, members of military reserve components, and members of the National Guard, who are either stationed in or a resident of Washington.

The DCYF prioritization system for enrollment in available funded slots must take into account factors affecting households with a military member parent. These additional factors include having a current deployment or an upcoming deployment scheduled within the current school year, and circumstances in which the military member parent is a single custodial parent.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 7, 2026.

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