

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## ESB 5872

---

---

**As Passed House:**

March 4, 2026

**Title:** An act relating to establishing the preK promise account.

**Brief Description:** Establishing the preK promise account.

**Sponsors:** Senators Wilson, C., Bateman, Conway, Dhingra, Liias, Nobles, Pedersen, Riccelli, Robinson, Shewmake and Wellman; by request of Governor Ferguson.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

Appropriations: 2/18/26, 2/27/26 [DP].

**Floor Activity:**

Passed House: 3/4/26, 97-0.

**Brief Summary of Engrossed Bill**

- Establishes the PreK Promise Account to be used for the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program.

---

### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

**Majority Report:** Do pass. Signed by 30 members: Representatives Ormsby, Chair; Gregerson, Vice Chair; Macri, Vice Chair; Couture, Ranking Minority Member; Connors, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Penner, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Schmick, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Berg, Bergquist, Burnett, Callan, Corry, Cortes, Doglio, Dye, Fitzgibbon, Keaton, Leavitt, Lekanoff, Manjarrez, Marshall, Peterson, Pollet, Rude, Ryu, Springer, Stonier, Street, Thai and Valdez.

**Staff:** Jordan Clarke (786-7123).

**Background:**

---

*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.*

## Accounts.

In addition to the State General Fund, which may be expended for any lawful purpose, the state maintains several hundred accounts that are dedicated to particular statutory purposes. These accounts generally fall into one of three categories: (1) accounts located in the State Treasury, which always require appropriation by the Legislature; (2) accounts held in the custody of the State Treasurer, which may or may not require legislative appropriation; and (3) accounts located in state agencies and institutions of higher education, known as local accounts.

## 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.*

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 program or received class C developmental services, the Birth to 3 ECEAP, or the Early Childhood Intervention and Prevention Services 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 3-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 age 3 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 Early Support for Infants and Toddlers program, the Early Head Start program or the Birth to 3 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:**

The PreK Promise Account (Account) is created in the custody of the State Treasurer to be used solely and exclusively for the ECEAP. All receipts from any gifts, grants, or donations received by the Secretary of the DCYF (Secretary) for the Account must be deposited into the Account, and only the Secretary may authorize expenditures from the Account.

The Account is nonappropriated but is subject to allotment procedures. Any residue in the Account at the end of each biennium may not revert to the State General Fund.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Effective Date:** Sections 1 and 2 of the bill contain an emergency clause and take effect immediately. The remainder of the bill contains multiple effective dates. Please see the bill.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:**

(In support) The ECEAP is proven and research-based. Decades of research have shown that quality early learning is incredibly important for children and communities. Access to ECEAP helps students later on in the K-12 system, as they are better prepared for kindergarten and often need fewer services. However, the demand for the program exceeds supply and access to ECEAP is not equal across the state. Lack of child care and early learning creates a big barrier for working families and employers. Without sufficient child care supply for their employees, businesses struggle.

The Ballmer Group's role is to help bring the promise of pre-k to more children faster through a public-private partnership. The Ballmer Group shares this goal with the state, and additional investment will help the state achieve that goal. The Ballmer Group has committed to providing funding for up to 10,000 new school day seats per year for the next 10 years, and the account created in Senate Bill 5872 will help the Ballmer Group do that.

This bill will help increase access to ECEAP for many more children and families. It will

help ECEAP expand to more schools, nonprofits, and child care programs. It will also help expand the number of school day slots for ECEAP, which are popular with families.

(Opposed) None.

**Persons Testifying:** Leslie Dozono, Ballmer Group; Karen Matson, Snohomish County Human Services; Jess Russell, Okanogan Coalition for Health Improvement; and Andrea Carrillo, Grant County Coalition for Health Improvement.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** None.