

FINAL BILL REPORT

SSB 5149

C 120 L 25
Synopsis as Enacted

Brief Description: Expanding the early childhood court program.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Human Services (originally sponsored by Senators Cortes, Hasegawa, Krishnadasan, Lias, Nobles, Saldaña, Salomon, Shewmake and Wilson, C.).

Senate Committee on Human Services
House Committee on Early Learning & Human Services

Background: In 2021, the Legislature created the Early Childhood Courts (ECCs) which is a voluntary therapeutic court program to serve families with children under the age of three who are involved in a dependency pursuant to state law. There are five ECCs located in Clark, Kitsap, Pierce, Spokane, and Thurston counties. A case may remain in the ECC after the child is age three or older if the child is still dependent.

Early Childhood Court Program. A superior court may establish an ECC program to serve the needs of families with infants and toddlers under the age of three, who are dependents. If a child turns three while in the program, the child and their family continue to participate in the program. If a superior court creates an ECC program, it is to incorporate the following core components into the program:

- local community coordinators;
- community teams, which are stakeholders to the ECCs that serve as an advisory body to the court ECCs and implement the ECC program;
- more frequent review hearings;
- family teams which may include all parties to the case and other people or other service providers identified by the parent to be part of the support system for the parent involved;
- fostering an environment where all professionals involved in the ECC program increase their awareness of different forms of bias, trauma, and adversity that often accompanies poverty, mental health, and substance abuse;
- striving to ensure that families receive early, consistent, and frequent visitation that is developmentally appropriate for infants and toddlers; and

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- individualized case plans for parents should address protective factors that mitigate or eliminate safety risks to the child.

Each ECC program must review its data to assess its effectiveness and participate in a statewide group of ECCs. The statewide group is to share its data findings and hold statewide meetings to support alignment to the core components and statewide consistency. Judicial officers who preside over ECC hearings are to participate in required trainings.

The Administrative Office of the Courts. The Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) is to administer the certification of training requirements and evaluate the ECCs to ensure the quality, accountability, and fidelity of the programs' evidence-based treatment. Evaluations are to be posted on AOC's website. AOC may provide, or contract for the provision of, training and technical assistance related to program services, consultation and guidance for difficult cases, and ongoing training for court teams.

Summary: An ECC program may serve families with children who are under the age of six at the time the case enters the program.

Votes on Final Passage:

Senate	48	0
House	95	0

Effective: July 27, 2025