

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5297

As of January 30, 2025

Title: An act relating to the early learning facilities grant and loan program.

Brief Description: Concerning the early learning facilities grant and loan program.

Sponsors: Senators Trudeau, Torres, Dozier, Frame, Nobles and Riccelli.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Ways & Means: 2/06/25.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Removes the match requirement for applicants experiencing financial hardship.
- Removes the level of project matching funds as a competitive criterion when selecting or recommending projects for funding.
- Expands eligibility to projects that convert part day slots to full day or extended day or convert full day slots to extended day and to emergency grants.
- Adds tribal compact schools as eligible for early learning grants and loans for school districts.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Staff: Wendy Brown (786-7359)

Background: The Department of Commerce (Commerce) administers the Early Learning Facilities (ELF) Program, which provides grants and loans to eligible organizations to plan, renovate, purchase, and construct early learning facilities. Eligible organizations include providers of Working Connections Child Care (WCCC), Early Childhood Education and

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Assistance Program (ECEAP) contractors, developers of housing and community facilities, community and technical colleges, educational service districts, local governments, federally recognized tribes, and religiously affiliated entities.

Projects eligible for funding through the ELF Grant and Loan Program include facility predesign and predevelopment activities, renovations or repairs of existing early learning facilities, and major construction and renovation projects to create or expand early learning capacity.

School districts may also receive grants or loans to purchase, construct, or renovate early learning classrooms.

For grants and loans under the program, state law stipulates that state funds may be given only after private or public match funds are committed. In determining the level of match required, Commerce may consider the financial need of the applicant and the economic conditions of the location of the proposed facility. When developing a methodology to prioritize projects for funding, Commerce may consider projects that maximize resources from the state with funding from other public or private organizations.

The ELF Program is funded from the Ruth LeCocq Kagi Early Learning Facilities Revolving Account and the Ruth LeCocq Kagi Early Learning Facilities Development Account.

Summary of Bill: Match requirements in the Early Learning Facilities Grant and Loan Program are removed for applicants experiencing financial hardship. For all other applicants, Commerce is encouraged to leverage private and public matching funds when feasible and may not consider the level of a project match funds as a competitive criterion when selecting or recommending projects for funding.

Projects that convert slots from part day to full day or extended day or convert full day slots to extended day are added as an eligible activity. Emergency projects funded out of the Early Learning Facilities Revolving Account are similarly added as an eligible activity, subject to appropriations. Tribal compact schools are added as eligible for ELF grants and loans for school districts. Commerce may adopt rules to implement the entire program, rather than rules only pertaining to eligible organizations requirements.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 16, 2025.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.