
HOUSE BILL 2689

State of Washington

69th Legislature

2026 Regular Session

By Representatives Gregerson, Ormsby, and Macri; by request of Office of Financial Management

Read first time 01/28/26. Referred to Committee on Appropriations.

1 AN ACT Relating to the working connections child care program;
2 amending RCW 43.216.802 and 43.216.828; and repealing RCW 43.216.827.

3 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

4 **Sec. 1.** RCW 43.216.802 and 2025 c 412 s 5 are each amended to
5 read as follows:

6 (1) It is the intent of the legislature to increase working
7 families' access to affordable, high quality child care and to
8 support the expansion of the workforce to support businesses and the
9 statewide economy.

10 (2) A family is eligible for working connections child care when
11 the household's annual income is at or below 60 percent of the state
12 median income adjusted for family size and:

13 (a) The child receiving care is: (i) Less than 13 years of age;
14 or (ii) less than 19 years of age and has a verified special need
15 according to department rule or is under court supervision; and

16 (b) The household meets all other program eligibility
17 requirements established in this chapter or in rule by the department
18 as authorized by RCW 43.216.055 or 43.216.065 or any other authority
19 granted by this chapter.

20 (3) Beginning July 1, 2029, a family is eligible for working
21 connections child care when the household's annual income is above 60

1 percent and at or below 75 percent of the state median income
2 adjusted for family size and:

3 (a) The child receiving care is: (i) Less than 13 years of age;
4 or (ii) less than 19 years of age and has a verified special need
5 according to department rule or is under court supervision; and

6 (b) The household meets all other program eligibility
7 requirements established in this chapter or in rule by the department
8 as authorized by RCW 43.216.055 or 43.216.065 or any other authority
9 granted by this chapter.

10 (4) Beginning July 1, 2031, and subject to the availability of
11 amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, a family is eligible
12 for working connections child care when the household's annual income
13 is above 75 percent of the state median income and is at or below 85
14 percent of the state median income adjusted for family size and:

15 (a) The child receiving care is: (i) Less than 13 years of age;
16 or (ii) less than 19 years of age and has a verified special need
17 according to department rule or is under court supervision; and

18 (b) The household meets all other program eligibility
19 requirements established in this chapter or in rule by the department
20 as authorized by RCW 43.216.055 or 43.216.065 or any other authority
21 granted by this chapter.

22 (5) Beginning November 1, 2024, when an applicant or consumer is
23 a member of an assistance unit that is eligible for or receiving
24 basic food benefits under the federal supplemental nutrition
25 assistance program or the state food assistance program the
26 department must determine that the household income eligibility
27 requirements in this section are met.

28 (6) The department must adopt rules to implement this section,
29 including an income phase-out eligibility period.

30 (7) The department may not consider the citizenship status of an
31 applicant or consumer's child when determining eligibility for
32 working connections child care benefits.

33 (8) The income eligibility requirements in subsections (2)
34 through (4) of this section do not apply to households eligible for
35 the working connections child care program under RCW 43.216.808 and
36 43.216.814.

37 (9) From July 1, 2026, to December 31, 2026, the department must
38 stop accepting new entries to the working connections child care
39 program with exception to families as outlined in RCW 43.216.808.
40 Beginning January 1, 2027, the department may accept new entries to

1 the working connections child care program if the department is not
2 exceeding the average monthly caseload outlined in subsection (10) of
3 this section.

4 (10) Beginning January 1, 2027, the department must manage the
5 program so that the average monthly caseload does not exceed 33,000
6 households, except that families subject to the categorical
7 eligibility provisions in RCW 43.216.808 must always be allowed
8 access. For all other families, the department must give prioritized
9 access to the program according to the following order:

10 (a) Families applying for or receiving temporary assistance for
11 needy families;

12 (b) Families who are curing a sanction pursuant to temporary
13 assistance for needy families;

14 (c) Families that include a child with special needs;

15 (d) Families in which a parent of a child in care is a minor who
16 is not living with a parent or guardian and who is a full-time
17 student in a high school that has a school-sponsored on-site child
18 care center;

19 (e) Families that received subsidies in the last 30 days and: (i)
20 Have reapplied for subsidies; and (ii) have household income of 60
21 percent of the state median income or below; and

22 (f) All other eligible families.

23 **Sec. 2.** RCW 43.216.828 and 2025 c 424 s 957 are each amended to
24 read as follows:

25 (1) It is the intent of the legislature to systemically increase
26 child care subsidy rates over time until rates are equal to the full
27 cost of providing high quality child care.

28 (2) ~~(a) Beginning July 1, 2026, ((child care subsidy base rates~~
29 ~~must achieve the 85th percentile of market, as established by the~~
30 ~~most recent market rate survey published before May 20, 2025, for~~
31 ~~licensed or certified child care providers.))~~ the department must pay
32 the child care subsidy base rate that achieves the 75th percentile of
33 market, as established by the most recent market rate survey
34 published before the effective date of this section, for licensed or
35 certified child care providers, with exception to family child care
36 providers who will continue to be paid the subsidy base rate that was
37 bargained in the 2025-27 enacted collective bargaining agreement
38 until a new market rate survey is available to inform future rate
39 increases at the 75th percentile of market.

1 **(b)** The state and the exclusive representative for family child
2 care providers must enter into bargaining over the implementation of
3 the subsidy rate increases under this subsection.

4 (3) (a) The department shall build upon the work of the child care
5 collaborative task force to develop and implement a child care cost
6 estimate model and use the completed child care cost model to
7 recommend subsidy rates at levels that are sufficient to compensate
8 licensed or certified child care providers for the full costs of
9 providing high quality child care. The department shall consider:

10 (i) Adjusting rates to reflect cost of living such as area median
11 income, cost of living by zip code, and grouping by categories such
12 as rural, suburban, or urban; and

13 (ii) Incorporating the rate model for nonstandard child care
14 hours developed under section 306, chapter 199, Laws of 2021.

15 (b) The department shall build upon the work of the child care
16 collaborative task force to evaluate options to support access to
17 affordable health care insurance coverage for licensed or certified
18 child care providers.

19 (4) This section does not interfere with, impede, or in any way
20 diminish the right of family child care providers to bargain
21 collectively with the state through the exclusive bargaining
22 representatives as provided for under RCW 41.56.153.

23 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 3.** RCW 43.216.827 (Prospective payments) and
24 2025 c 412 s 13 are each repealed.

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