

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1935

As Reported By House Committee On:

Appropriations

Title: An act relating to eligibility for early childhood assistance programs.

Brief Description: Adjusting eligibility for early childhood assistance programs.

Sponsors: Representatives Tokuda, Boldt, Ogden, Schual-Berke, Lovick, Kessler, Kenney, Rockefeller, Murray, Scott, Edmonds, Conway, Kagi, Santos, Poulsen, Veloria and Lantz.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Appropriations: 3/4/99, 3/7/99 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Eligibility for the Early Childhood Education Assistance Program is expanded to families with incomes up to 110 percent of the federally defined poverty level.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 31 members: Representatives Huff, Republican Co-Chair; H. Sommers, Democratic Co-Chair; Alexander, Republican Vice Chair; Doumit, Democratic Vice Chair; D. Schmidt, Republican Vice Chair; Barlean; Benson; Boldt; Carlson; Clements; Cody; Crouse; Gombosky; Grant; Kagi; Keiser; Kenney; Lambert; Linville; Lisk; Mastin; McIntire; McMorris; Mulliken; Parlette; Regala; Rockefeller; Ruderman; Sullivan; Tokuda and Wensman.

Staff: Mark Matteson (786-7145).

Background:

The Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) is a voluntary preschool program designed to assist eligible children with educational, social, health,

nutritional, and cultural development to enhance their opportunity for success in the common school system. The target ECEAP population is four-year-old children whose family incomes are at or below 100 percent of the federal poverty level.

The Department of Community, Trade, and Economic Development (DCTED) administers the ECEAP program through grants to local contractors, including school districts, educational service districts, local governments, nonprofit organizations, child-care providers, community colleges, and tribal programs. There are 292 program sites statewide.

Eligible children may be admitted to approved ECEAP programs only to the extent that the Legislature provides funds. For the current biennium, the Legislature appropriated approximately \$60 million from the general fund for ECEAP purposes, supporting 7,032 openings for eligible children.

In the last year, DCTED contractors turned away 1,396 ECEAP applicants for income-related reasons. Currently 8 percent of available slots in ECEAP programs are unfilled.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The bill changes the family income eligibility requirement for the target ECEAP population to 110 percent of the federal poverty level.

The number of ECEAP slots funded continues to be determined by legislative appropriation.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: Reduces the change in the family income eligibility requirement for ECEAP from 130 to 110 percent of the federal poverty level.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available on the original bill.

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

Testimony For: (Original Bill) This bill does not have a fiscal impact and is not expected to increase demand for the program. There has been an increase in working families as a result of the Workfirst program. A good number of the families that have been served by the ECEAP program in the past are now just above the federal

poverty level and therefore ineligible for services. Out of the available 7,032 slots, a number are currently vacant, the percentage of which reached 12 percent in recent weeks. The estimated number of families that have been turned away for income eligibility reasons in the past year is actually closer to 3,000.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Dana Brenner, Washington State Association of Headstart and ECEAP; and Mercedes Hedden, Educational School Districts and ECEAP Pierce County.