

2SHB 1152 - H AMD 84

By Representative Kagi

WITHDRAWN 03/10/2005

1 Strike everything after the enacting clause and insert the
2 following:

3 "NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** The legislature finds that parents are
4 their children's first and most important teachers, caregivers, and
5 decision makers. The legislature also recognizes that many parents are
6 employed or in school and must seek services in their communities to
7 assist with the care and support of their children. Welfare reform
8 requires parents with low incomes to enter the work force while their
9 children are young, increasing parents' need for the support of such
10 resources. In seeking out resources in their communities to provide
11 care and support for their children, parents throughout the state need
12 and deserve to have the best possible information to help inform their
13 choices about the care and education of their children.

14 The legislature also finds that research on brain development in
15 young children establishes that early experiences are important to
16 children's emotional, social, physical, and cognitive development.
17 Research also shows a clear and compelling connection between the
18 quality of children's early childhood care and education experiences
19 and later success in school and in life.

20 The legislature intends to build on the efforts of communities
21 across the state to improve the quality of early learning environments
22 available to children and their families, as well as the information
23 available to families relating to those early learning environments.
24 The legislature recognizes that efforts to improve early learning must
25 build upon existing partnerships between the public and private
26 sectors. The experiences and resources of both public and private
27 entities are essential to making meaningful and lasting improvements in
28 the quality of early learning environments across the state. Statewide
29 leadership is needed to guide and support the efforts of the private

1 and public sectors working together to make systemwide improvements in
2 the quality, affordability, and accessibility of early learning
3 opportunities.

4 The legislature intends to establish an effective oversight body,
5 composed of representation from the public and private sectors, to
6 provide leadership and vision to strengthen the quality of early
7 learning services and programs for all children and families in the
8 state and to ensure that children enter school ready to succeed.

9 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** The definitions in this section apply
10 throughout sections 1 through 6 of this act unless the context clearly
11 requires otherwise.

12 (1) "Early learning programs and services" include the following:
13 Child care; state, private, and nonprofit preschool programs; child
14 care subsidy programs; and training and professional development
15 programs for early learning professionals.

16 (2) "Council" means the Washington early learning council.

17 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 3.** (1) The Washington early learning council is
18 established in the governor's office. The purpose of the council is to
19 provide vision, leadership, and direction to the improvement,
20 realignment, and expansion of early learning programs and services for
21 children birth to five years of age in order to better meet the early
22 learning needs of children and their families. The goal of the council
23 is to build upon existing efforts and recommend new initiatives, as
24 necessary, to create an adequately financed, high-quality, accessible,
25 and comprehensive early learning system that benefits all young
26 children whose parents choose it.

27 (2) The council shall develop an early learning plan to improve the
28 organization of early learning programs and services at the state
29 level, and to improve the accessibility and quality of early learning
30 programs and services throughout the state.

31 (a) By December 30, 2005, the council shall make recommendations to
32 the governor and the appropriate committees of the legislature
33 concerning statewide organization of early learning.

34 (b) The council shall also make recommendations to the governor and
35 the appropriate committees of the legislature concerning the following:

1 (i) Identification of current populations being served and
2 potential populations to be served by early learning programs and
3 services;

4 (ii) The state's role in supporting quality early learning programs
5 and services;

6 (iii) Appropriate levels and sources of stable and sustainable
7 funding to meet statewide and local need for early learning programs
8 and services, including public-private partnerships;

9 (iv) Changes in existing early learning programs and services,
10 including the administration of those programs and services, to improve
11 their efficiency, effectiveness, and quality;

12 (v) Changes in existing early learning programs and services to
13 ensure that the content is aligned with what children need to know and
14 be able to do upon entering school;

15 (vi) How to maximize available early learning resources to ensure
16 children are receiving continuity of care; and

17 (vii) Providing for smooth transitions from early learning programs
18 and services to K-12 programs.

19 (c) As provided in sections 5 and 6 of this act, the council shall
20 focus on quality improvements to licensed child care through the
21 following mechanisms:

22 (i) A voluntary, quality-based, graduated rating system to provide
23 information to parents on the quality of child care programs and to
24 provide resources and incentives for quality improvements; and

25 (ii) A tiered-reimbursement system for state-subsidized child care
26 to improve the quality of care for children participating in state-
27 funded care.

28 (d) The council shall make recommendations to the governor and the
29 appropriate committees of the legislature concerning the regulation of
30 child care, including child care that is exempt from regulation and
31 unlicensed child care that is subject to regulation, in order to ensure
32 the safety, health, quality, and accessibility of child care services
33 throughout the state.

34 (3) The council shall serve as the advisory committee on early
35 learning to the comprehensive education study steering committee,
36 created in Substitute House Bill No. 1380. The nongovernmental cochair
37 of the council shall serve as the chair of the advisory committee on

1 early learning. The council shall have input on the recommendations
2 developed by the comprehensive education study steering committee.

3 (4) The council shall make use of existing reports, research,
4 planning efforts, and programs, including, but not limited to, the
5 following: The federal early head start program, the federal head
6 start program, the state early childhood education and assistance
7 program, the state's essential academic learning requirements and K-3
8 grade level expectations, the Washington state early learning and
9 development benchmarks, existing tiered-reimbursement initiatives, the
10 state's early childhood comprehensive systems plan, and the work of the
11 child care coordinating committee established pursuant to RCW
12 74.13.090.

13 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 4.** (1) The council shall include representation
14 from public, nonprofit, and for-profit entities, and its membership
15 shall reflect regional, racial, and cultural diversity to ensure
16 representation of the needs of all children and families in the state.

17 (2) The council shall consist of seventeen members, as follows:

18 (a) One representative each of the governor's office, the
19 department of social and health services, the department of health, and
20 the state board for community and technical colleges, appointed by the
21 governor;

22 (b) One representative of the office of superintendent of public
23 instruction, appointed by the superintendent of public instruction;

24 (c) Two representatives of private business and two representatives
25 of philanthropy, appointed by the governor;

26 (d) Four individuals who have demonstrated leadership and
27 engagement in the field of early learning, appointed by the governor;
28 and

29 (e) Two members of the house of representatives appointed by the
30 speaker of the house of representatives, one of whom shall be a member
31 of the majority caucus and one of whom shall be a member of the
32 minority caucus, and two members of the senate appointed by the
33 president of the senate, one of whom shall be a member of the majority
34 caucus and one of whom shall be a member of the minority caucus.

35 (3) The members of the council shall serve three-year terms. Of
36 the initial members, six shall be appointed for one-year terms, six

1 shall be appointed for two-year terms, and five shall be appointed for
2 three-year terms. Thereafter, members shall be appointed for three-
3 year terms.

4 (4) The council shall be cochaired by the representative of the
5 governor's office and a nongovernmental member designated by the
6 governor.

7 (5) Members of the council shall be compensated in accordance with
8 RCW 43.03.240 and shall be reimbursed for travel expenses as provided
9 in RCW 43.03.050 and 43.03.060.

10 (6) The governor may employ an executive director, who is exempt
11 from the provisions of chapter 41.06 RCW, and such other staff as is
12 necessary to carry out the purposes of sections 1 through 6 of this
13 act. The governor pursuant to RCW 43.03.040 shall fix the salary of
14 the executive director.

15 (7) The council shall monitor and measure its progress and annually
16 report to the governor and the appropriate committees of the
17 legislature on the progress, findings, and recommendations of the
18 council.

19 (8) The council shall establish one or more technical advisory
20 committees, as needed. Membership of such advisory committees may
21 include the following: Representatives of any state agency the council
22 deems appropriate, including the higher education coordinating board
23 and the state board for community and technical colleges; family home
24 child care providers, child care center providers, and college or
25 university child care providers; parents; early childhood development
26 experts; representatives of school districts and teachers involved in
27 the provision of child care and preschool programs; representatives of
28 resource and referral programs; parent education specialists; pediatric
29 or other health professionals; representatives of citizen groups
30 concerned with child care and early learning; representatives of labor
31 organizations; representatives of private business; and representatives
32 of head start and early childhood education assistance program
33 agencies.

34 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 5.** (1) The council shall develop a voluntary,
35 quality-based, graduated rating system consisting of levels of quality
36 to be achieved by licensed child care providers serving children and
37 families in the state. The purpose of the rating system is to provide

1 families with vital information about the quality of early learning
2 programs available to them and to increase the quality of early
3 learning programs operating throughout the state. In developing the
4 voluntary rating system, the council shall seek to build upon existing
5 partnerships and initiate new partnerships between the public and
6 private sectors.

7 (2) In developing the voluntary rating system, the council shall
8 establish a system of tiers as the basis for the rating system's levels
9 of quality. In developing the system of tiers, the council shall take
10 into consideration the following quality criteria:

- 11 (a) Child-to-staff ratios;
- 12 (b) Group size;
- 13 (c) Learning environment, including staff and child interactions;
- 14 (d) Curriculum;
- 15 (e) Parent and family involvement and support;
- 16 (f) Staff qualifications and training;
- 17 (g) Staff professional development;
- 18 (h) Staff compensation;
- 19 (i) Staff stability;
- 20 (j) Accreditation;
- 21 (k) Program evaluation; and
- 22 (l) Program administrative policies and procedures.

23 (3) In developing the voluntary rating system, the council shall
24 establish quality assurance measures as well as a mechanism for system
25 evaluation.

26 (4) In developing the voluntary rating system, the council shall
27 make recommendations concerning both initial and subsequent statewide
28 implementation of the rating system, including the following:

- 29 (a) Potential implementing entities;
- 30 (b) Sources of funding for implementation;
- 31 (c) Necessary infrastructure for facilitating and supporting
32 participation in the rating system, including assistance necessary to
33 help providers progress up the tiers; and
- 34 (d) Strategies for raising public awareness of the rating system.

35 (5) The council shall complete initial development of the voluntary
36 rating system by December 1, 2005, and complete development by December
37 1, 2006.

1 (6) The council shall submit the voluntary rating system to the
2 governor and the appropriate fiscal and policy committees of the
3 legislature by January 1, 2007. If no action is taken by the
4 legislature by the end of the 2007 regular legislative session, the
5 council may begin initial implementation of the voluntary rating
6 system, subject to available funding.

7 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 6.** (1) The council shall develop a tiered-
8 reimbursement system that provides higher rates of reimbursement for
9 state-subsidized child care for licensed child care providers that
10 achieve one or more levels of quality above basic licensing
11 requirements in accordance with the voluntary quality-based graduated
12 rating system developed pursuant to section 5 of this act.

13 (2) In developing the tiered-reimbursement system, the council
14 shall review existing tiered-reimbursement initiatives in the state and
15 integrate those initiatives into the tiered-reimbursement system.

16 (3) The council shall complete initial development of the tiered-
17 reimbursement system by December 1, 2005, to be implemented in two
18 pilot sites in different geographic regions of the state with
19 demonstrated public-private partnerships. The council shall complete
20 development of the tiered-reimbursement system by December 1, 2006, to
21 be implemented statewide.

22 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 7.** A new section is added to chapter 74.15 RCW
23 to read as follows:

24 (1) Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this
25 specific purpose, the department of social and health services shall
26 implement the tiered-reimbursement system developed pursuant to section
27 6 of this act. Implementation of the tiered-reimbursement system shall
28 initially consist of two pilot sites in different geographic regions of
29 the state with demonstrated public-private partnerships, with statewide
30 implementation to follow.

31 (2) In implementing the tiered-reimbursement system, consideration
32 shall be given to child care providers who provide staff wage
33 progression.

34 (3) The department shall begin implementation of the two pilot
35 sites by March 30, 2006.

1 **Sec. 8.** RCW 28B.135.030 and 1999 c 375 s 3 are each amended to
2 read as follows:

3 The higher education coordinating board shall administer the
4 program for four-year institutions of higher education. The state
5 board for community and technical colleges shall administer the program
6 for community and technical colleges. The higher education
7 coordinating board and the state board for community and technical
8 colleges shall have the following powers and duties in administering
9 each program:

10 (1) To adopt rules necessary to carry out the program;

11 (2) To establish one or more review committees to assist in the
12 evaluation of proposals for funding. The review committee shall
13 include but not be limited to individuals from the Washington
14 association for the education of young children(~~(, the child care~~
15 ~~coordinating committee,)) and the child care resource and referral
16 network;~~

17 (3) To establish each biennium specific guidelines for submitting
18 grant proposals consistent with the overall goals of the program.
19 During the 1999-2001 biennium the guidelines shall be consistent with
20 the following desired outcomes of increasing access to child care for
21 students, addressing the demand for infant and toddler care, providing
22 affordable child care alternatives, creating more cooperative preschool
23 programs, creating models that can be replicated at other institutions,
24 creating a partnership between university or college administrations
25 and student government, or its equivalent and increasing efficiency and
26 innovation at campus child care centers;

27 (4) To establish guidelines for an allocation system based on
28 factors that include but are not limited to: The amount of money
29 available in the trust fund; characteristics of the institutions
30 including the size of the faculty and student body; and the number of
31 child care grants received;

32 (5) To solicit grant proposals and provide information to the
33 institutions of higher education about the program; and

34 (6) To establish reporting, evaluation, accountability, monitoring,
35 and dissemination requirements for the recipients of the grants.

36 **Sec. 9.** RCW 41.04.385 and 2002 c 354 s 236 are each amended to
37 read as follows:

1 The legislature finds that (1) demographic, economic, and social
2 trends underlie a critical and increasing demand for child care in the
3 state of Washington; (2) working parents and their children benefit
4 when the employees' child care needs have been resolved; (3) the state
5 of Washington should serve as a model employer by creating a supportive
6 atmosphere, to the extent feasible, in which its employees may meet
7 their child care needs; and (4) the state of Washington should
8 encourage the development of partnerships between state agencies, state
9 employees, state employee labor organizations, and private employers to
10 expand the availability of affordable quality child care. The
11 legislature finds further that resolving employee child care concerns
12 not only benefits the employees and their children, but may benefit the
13 employer by reducing absenteeism, increasing employee productivity,
14 improving morale, and enhancing the employer's position in recruiting
15 and retaining employees. Therefore, the legislature declares that it
16 is the policy of the state of Washington to assist state employees by
17 creating a supportive atmosphere in which they may meet their child
18 care needs. Policies and procedures for state agencies to address
19 employee child care needs will be the responsibility of the director of
20 personnel in consultation with (~~the child care coordinating committee,~~
21 ~~as provided in RCW 74.13.090, and~~) state employee representatives.

22 **Sec. 10.** RCW 74.13.0903 and 1997 c 58 s 404 are each amended to
23 read as follows:

24 The office of child care policy is established to operate under the
25 authority of the department of social and health services. The duties
26 and responsibilities of the office include, but are not limited to, the
27 following, within appropriated funds:

28 (1) (~~Staff and assist the child care coordinating committee in the~~
29 ~~implementation of its duties under RCW 74.13.090;~~

30 ~~(2)~~) Work in conjunction with the statewide child care resource
31 and referral network as well as local governments, nonprofit
32 organizations, businesses, and community child care advocates to create
33 local child care resource and referral organizations. These
34 organizations may carry out needs assessments, resource development,
35 provider training, technical assistance, and parent information and
36 training;

1 ~~((3))~~ (2) Actively seek public and private money for distribution
2 as grants to the statewide child care resource and referral network and
3 to existing or potential local child care resource and referral
4 organizations;

5 ~~((4))~~ (3) Adopt rules regarding the application for and
6 distribution of grants to local child care resource and referral
7 organizations. The rules shall, at a minimum, require an applicant to
8 submit a plan for achieving the following objectives:

9 (a) Provide parents with information about child care resources,
10 including location of services and subsidies;

11 (b) Carry out child care provider recruitment and training
12 programs, including training under RCW 74.25.040;

13 (c) Offer support services, such as parent and provider seminars,
14 toy-lending libraries, and substitute banks;

15 (d) Provide information for businesses regarding child care supply
16 and demand;

17 (e) Advocate for increased public and private sector resources
18 devoted to child care;

19 (f) Provide technical assistance to employers regarding employee
20 child care services; and

21 (g) Serve recipients of temporary assistance for needy families and
22 working parents with incomes at or below household incomes of one
23 hundred seventy-five percent of the federal poverty line;

24 ~~((5))~~ (4) Provide staff support and technical assistance to the
25 statewide child care resource and referral network and local child care
26 resource and referral organizations;

27 ~~((6))~~ (5) Maintain a statewide child care licensing data bank and
28 work with department of social and health services licensors to provide
29 information to local child care resource and referral organizations
30 about licensed child care providers in the state;

31 ~~((7))~~ (6) Through the statewide child care resource and referral
32 network and local resource and referral organizations, compile data
33 about local child care needs and availability for future planning and
34 development;

35 ~~((8))~~ (7) Coordinate with the statewide child care resource and
36 referral network and local child care resource and referral
37 organizations for the provision of training and technical assistance to
38 child care providers; and

1 ~~((9))~~ (8) Collect and assemble information regarding the
2 availability of insurance and of federal and other child care funding
3 to assist state and local agencies, businesses, and other child care
4 providers in offering child care services.

5 **Sec. 11.** RCW 74.15.030 and 2000 c 162 s 20 and 2000 c 122 s 40 are
6 each reenacted and amended to read as follows:

7 The secretary shall have the power and it shall be the secretary's
8 duty:

9 (1) In consultation with the children's services advisory
10 committee, and with the advice and assistance of persons representative
11 of the various type agencies to be licensed, to designate categories of
12 facilities for which separate or different requirements shall be
13 developed as may be appropriate whether because of variations in the
14 ages, sex and other characteristics of persons served, variations in
15 the purposes and services offered or size or structure of the agencies
16 to be licensed hereunder, or because of any other factor relevant
17 thereto;

18 (2) In consultation with the children's services advisory
19 committee, and with the advice and assistance of persons representative
20 of the various type agencies to be licensed, to adopt and publish
21 minimum requirements for licensing applicable to each of the various
22 categories of agencies to be licensed.

23 The minimum requirements shall be limited to:

24 (a) The size and suitability of a facility and the plan of
25 operation for carrying out the purpose for which an applicant seeks a
26 license;

27 (b) The character, suitability and competence of an agency and
28 other persons associated with an agency directly responsible for the
29 care and treatment of children, expectant mothers or developmentally
30 disabled persons. In consultation with law enforcement personnel, the
31 secretary shall investigate the conviction record or pending charges
32 and dependency record information under chapter 43.43 RCW of each
33 agency and its staff seeking licensure or relicensure. No unfounded
34 allegation of child abuse or neglect as defined in RCW 26.44.020 may be
35 disclosed to a child-placing agency, private adoption agency, or any
36 other provider licensed under this chapter. In order to determine the
37 suitability of applicants for an agency license, licensees, their

1 employees, and other persons who have unsupervised access to children
2 in care, and who have not resided in the state of Washington during the
3 three-year period before being authorized to care for children shall be
4 fingerprinted. The fingerprints shall be forwarded to the Washington
5 state patrol and federal bureau of investigation for a criminal history
6 records check. The fingerprint criminal history records checks will be
7 at the expense of the licensee except that in the case of a foster
8 family home, if this expense would work a hardship on the licensee, the
9 department shall pay the expense. The licensee may not pass this cost
10 on to the employee or prospective employee, unless the employee is
11 determined to be unsuitable due to his or her criminal history record.
12 The secretary shall use the information solely for the purpose of
13 determining eligibility for a license and for determining the
14 character, suitability, and competence of those persons or agencies,
15 excluding parents, not required to be licensed who are authorized to
16 care for children, expectant mothers, and developmentally disabled
17 persons. Criminal justice agencies shall provide the secretary such
18 information as they may have and that the secretary may require for
19 such purpose;

20 (c) The number of qualified persons required to render the type of
21 care and treatment for which an agency seeks a license;

22 (d) The safety, cleanliness, and general adequacy of the premises
23 to provide for the comfort, care and well-being of children, expectant
24 mothers or developmentally disabled persons;

25 (e) The provision of necessary care, including food, clothing,
26 supervision and discipline; physical, mental and social well-being; and
27 educational, recreational and spiritual opportunities for those served;

28 (f) The financial ability of an agency to comply with minimum
29 requirements established pursuant to chapter 74.15 RCW and RCW
30 74.13.031; and

31 (g) The maintenance of records pertaining to the admission,
32 progress, health and discharge of persons served;

33 (3) To investigate any person, including relatives by blood or
34 marriage except for parents, for character, suitability, and competence
35 in the care and treatment of children, expectant mothers, and
36 developmentally disabled persons prior to authorizing that person to
37 care for children, expectant mothers, and developmentally disabled
38 persons. However, if a child is placed with a relative under RCW

1 13.34.065 or 13.34.130, and if such relative appears otherwise suitable
2 and competent to provide care and treatment the criminal history
3 background check required by this section need not be completed before
4 placement, but shall be completed as soon as possible after placement;

5 (4) On reports of alleged child abuse and neglect, to investigate
6 agencies in accordance with chapter 26.44 RCW, including child day-care
7 centers and family day-care homes, to determine whether the alleged
8 abuse or neglect has occurred, and whether child protective services or
9 referral to a law enforcement agency is appropriate;

10 (5) To issue, revoke, or deny licenses to agencies pursuant to
11 chapter 74.15 RCW and RCW 74.13.031. Licenses shall specify the
12 category of care which an agency is authorized to render and the ages,
13 sex and number of persons to be served;

14 (6) To prescribe the procedures and the form and contents of
15 reports necessary for the administration of chapter 74.15 RCW and RCW
16 74.13.031 and to require regular reports from each licensee;

17 (7) To inspect agencies periodically to determine whether or not
18 there is compliance with chapter 74.15 RCW and RCW 74.13.031 and the
19 requirements adopted hereunder;

20 (8) To review requirements adopted hereunder at least every two
21 years and to adopt appropriate changes after consultation with ((~~the~~
22 ~~child care coordinating committee and other~~)) affected groups for child
23 day-care requirements and with the children's services advisory
24 committee for requirements for other agencies; and

25 (9) To consult with public and private agencies in order to help
26 them improve their methods and facilities for the care of children,
27 expectant mothers and developmentally disabled persons.

28 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 12.** If specific funding for the purposes of
29 this act, referencing this act by bill or chapter number, is not
30 provided by June 30, 2005, in the omnibus appropriations act, this act
31 is null and void.

32 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 13.** The following acts or parts of acts are
33 each repealed:

34 (1) RCW 74.13.090 (Child care coordinating committee) and 1995 c
35 399 s 204, 1993 c 194 s 7, 1989 c 381 s 3, & 1988 c 213 s 2; and

36 (2) RCW 74.13.0901 (Child care partnership) and 1989 c 381 s 4.

1 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 14.** Sections 1 through 6 of this act expire
2 July 1, 2007."

3 Correct the title.

EFFECT: Requires the Washington Early Learning Council (Council) to make recommendations to the Governor and the appropriate committees of the Legislature concerning statewide organization of early learning by December 30, 2005.

Requires the Council to also make recommendations to the Governor and the appropriate committees of the Legislature concerning the following:

- (1) Identification of current populations being served and potential populations to be served by early learning programs and services;
- (2) The state's role in supporting quality early learning programs and services;
- (3) Appropriate levels and sources of stable and sustainable funding to meet statewide and local need for early learning programs and services, including public-private partnerships;
- (4) Changes in existing early learning programs and services, including the administration of those programs and services, to improve their efficiency, effectiveness, and quality;
- (5) Changes in existing early learning programs and services to ensure that the content is aligned with what children need to know and be able to do upon entering school;
- (6) How to maximize available early learning resources to ensure children are receiving continuity of care; and
- (7) Providing for smooth transitions from early learning programs and services to K-12 programs.

Requires the Council to make recommendations to the Governor and the appropriate committees of the Legislature concerning the regulation of child care, including child care that is exempt from regulation and unlicensed child care that is subject to regulation, in order to ensure the safety, health, quality, and accessibility of child care services throughout the state.

Provides that the Council is to serve as the Advisory Committee on Early Learning (Advisory Committee) to the Comprehensive Education Study Steering Committee (Steering Committee). The nongovernmental cochair of the Council is to serve as the chair of the Advisory Committee. The Council must have input on the recommendations developed by the Steering Committee.

Eliminates the inclusion of "wage progression based on formal education" in the criterion of staff compensation within the identified criteria that the Council is required to take into consideration in developing the voluntary rating system.

Requires the Council to complete development of the voluntary rating system by December 1, 2006.

Requires the Council to submit the voluntary rating system to the Governor and the appropriate fiscal and policy committees of the

Legislature by January 1, 2007. If no action is taken by the Legislature by the end of the 2007 regular legislative session, the Council may begin initial implementation of the voluntary rating system, subject to available funding.

Requires the Council to complete initial development of the tiered-reimbursement system by December 1, 2005, to be implemented in two pilot sites in different geographic regions of the state with demonstrated public-private partnerships, and complete development of the tiered-reimbursement system by December 1, 2006, to be implemented statewide.

Revises the definition of "early learning programs and services" to include child care, rather than the regulation of child care, and state, private, and nonprofit preschool programs, rather than the regulation of those programs.

Provides that the sections of the bill relating to the Council expire July 1, 2007.

--- END ---