

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1152

As Reported by House Committee On:
Children & Family Services

Title: An act relating to early learning.

Brief Description: Creating a Washington early learning council.

Sponsors: Representatives Kagi, Fromhold, Jarrett, Schual-Berke, Walsh, Quall, B. Sullivan, Grant, Ormsby, Kessler, Simpson, Moeller, Lovick, Roberts, Chase, Williams, P. Sullivan, Tom, Morrell, McIntire, Kenney, Haigh, McDermott, Dickerson, Santos and Linville.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Children & Family Services: 1/27/05, 2/2/05 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Establishes the Washington Early Learning Council (Council).
- Requires the Council to develop an early learning plan.
- Requires the Council to develop a voluntary, quality-based, graduated rating system and a tiered-reimbursement system for licensed child care.
- Requires the Department of Social and Health Services to implement the tiered-reimbursement system.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Kagi, Chair; Roberts, Vice Chair; Hinkle, Ranking Minority Member; Walsh, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Darneille, Dickerson, Dunn, Haler and Pettigrew.

Staff: Cynthia Forland (786-7152).

Background:

In 2000, the Legislature directed the Office of Financial Management (OFM) to conduct a study of the best method for coordinating and consolidating child care and early education

programs funded by the state. The Child Care and Early Learning Organizational Study, which the OFM produced in response, provided the following recommendations:

- adopt an umbrella mission statement that captures all child care and early learning programs;
- combine programs with similar or duplicate functions and missions;
- streamline the current configuration by reducing the number of state agencies involved in the child care licensing process;
- assign an interagency task force to examine and reduce the differences in program service standards; and
- coordinate training for providers regarding state agency rules by all programs.

In response to this report, the Office of the Governor undertook administrative action to consolidate child care and early learning programs in the state, the primary component of which was the creation of the Division of Child Care and Early Learning (DCCEL) within the Economic Services Administration in the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS).

Currently, child care and early learning programs in the state are administered through three state agencies: the DSHS, the Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development (CTED), and the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). The DCCEL within the DSHS licenses child care homes and centers, develops policy and procedures for the state's child care subsidy program, and directs the Head Start-State Collaboration Project. The CTED administers the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP), which is the state's preschool program. The OSPI administers services and programs relating to child care and early learning including family literacy programs, special education for children three years of age and older, and the nutrition assistance program for child care. Training and professional development programs for early learning professionals are available through such sources as the State Training and Registry System and the state's higher education institutions.

The Child Care Coordinating Committee was established in state law in order to provide coordination and communication among state agencies responsible for child care and early childhood education services, serve as an advisory coordinator for all state agencies responsible for early childhood or child care programs, and annually review state programs and make recommendations to state agencies and the Legislature to maximize funding and promote furtherance of the state's child care services policy.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The Washington Early Learning Council (Council) is established in the Office of the Governor for the purpose of providing vision, leadership, and direction to the improvement, realignment, and expansion of early learning programs and services for children birth to five years of age in order to better meet the early learning needs of children and their families. "Early learning programs and services" are defined to include the following: regulation of child care; regulation of state, private, and nonprofit preschool programs; child care subsidy

programs; and training and professional development programs for early learning professionals. The goal of the Council is to build upon existing efforts and recommend new initiatives, as necessary, to create an adequately financed high-quality, accessible, and comprehensive early learning system that benefits all young children whose parents choose it.

Early Learning Plan

The Council is required to develop an early learning plan to improve the accessibility and quality of early learning programs and services throughout the state. The initial focus must be on developing and implementing quality improvements through the following mechanisms, which must initially be implemented in two pilot sites:

- voluntary, quality-based, graduated rating system to provide information to parents on the quality of child care programs and to provide resources and incentives for quality improvements; and
- tiered-reimbursement system for state-subsidized child care to improve the quality of care for children participating in state-funded care.

The Council is required to make recommendations to the Governor and the appropriate committees of the Legislature, to include the following:

- changes in existing early learning programs and services, including the administration of those programs and services, to improve their efficiency, effectiveness, and quality;
- development of new early learning programs and services, as necessary, that build upon or replace existing programs and services;
- 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; and
- how to maximize available early learning resources to ensure children are receiving continuity of care.

The Council is required to make use of existing reports, research, planning efforts, and programs, including, but not limited to, the following: the federal Early Head Start program, the federal Head Start program, the state Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program, the state's Essential Academic Learning Requirements and K-3 Grade Level Expectations, the Washington State Early Learning and Development Benchmarks, existing tiered-reimbursement initiatives, the state's Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Plan, and the work of the Child Care Coordinating Committee.

Quality Rating System

The Council is required to develop a voluntary, quality-based, graduated rating system consisting of levels of quality to be achieved by licensed child care providers. In developing the voluntary rating system, the Council must seek to build upon existing partnerships and initiate new partnerships between the public and private sectors.

In developing the voluntary rating system, the Council must establish a system of tiers as the basis for the rating system's levels of quality. In developing the system of tiers, the Council must take into consideration the following quality criteria:

- child-to-staff ratios;
- group size;
- learning environment, including staff and child interactions;
- curriculum;
- parent and family involvement and support;
- staff qualifications and training;
- staff professional development;
- staff compensation, including wage progression based on formal education;
- staff stability;
- accreditation;
- program evaluation; and
- program administrative policies and procedures.

In developing the voluntary rating system, the Council is also required to establish quality assurance measures as well as a mechanism for system evaluation.

Implementation of the voluntary rating system will initially consist of two pilot sites in different geographic regions of the state with demonstrated public-private partnerships to support implementation. In developing the voluntary rating system, the Council is required to make recommendations concerning both initial and subsequent statewide implementation of the rating system, including the following:

- potential implementing entities;
- sources of funding for implementation;
- necessary infrastructure for facilitating and supporting participation in the rating system, including assistance necessary to help providers progress up the tiers; and
- strategies for raising public awareness of the rating system.

The Council is required to complete initial development of the voluntary rating system by December 1, 2005, and begin initial implementation of the two pilot sites by March 30, 2006.

Tiered-Reimbursement System

The Council is required to develop a tiered-reimbursement system that provides higher rates of reimbursement for state-subsidized child care for licensed child care providers that achieve one or more levels of quality above basic licensing requirements in accordance with the voluntary quality-based graduated rating system developed by the Council.

In developing the tiered-reimbursement system, the Council must review existing tiered-reimbursement initiatives in the state and integrate those initiatives into the tiered-reimbursement system.

The Council is required to complete development of the tiered-reimbursement system by December 1, 2005.

The DSHS is required to implement the tiered-reimbursement system developed by the Council. Implementation will initially consist of the two pilot sites in which the voluntary quality rating system is initially implemented, with statewide implementation to follow.

In implementing the tiered-reimbursement system, consideration must be given to child care providers who provide staff wage progression.

The DSHS is required to begin implementation of the two pilot sites by March 30, 2006.

Membership of the Washington Early Learning Council

The Council must include representation from public, nonprofit, and for-profit entities, and its membership must reflect regional, racial, and cultural diversity to ensure representation of the needs of all children and families in the state. The Council will consist of 17 members, as follows:

- one representative each of the Office of the Governor, the DSHS, the Department of Health, and the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, appointed by the Governor;
- one representative of the OSPI, appointed by the Superintendent of Public Instruction;
- two representatives of private business and two representatives of philanthropy, appointed by the Governor;
- four individuals who have demonstrated leadership and engagement in the field of early learning, appointed by the Governor; and
- two members of the House of Representatives appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives, one of whom must be a member of the majority caucus and one of whom must be a member of the minority caucus, and two members of the Senate appointed by the President of the Senate, one of whom must be a member of the majority caucus and one of whom must be a member of the minority caucus.

The members of the Council will serve three-year terms. Of the initial members, six will be appointed for one-year terms, six will be appointed for two-year terms, and five will be appointed for three-year terms. Thereafter, members will be appointed for three-year terms.

The Council will be co-chaired by the representative of the Office of the Governor and a non-governmental member designated by the Governor.

Members of the Council must be compensated as a class three group and reimbursed for travel expenses in accordance with state law.

The Governor may employ an executive director, who is exempt from the provisions of the state Civil Service law, and such other staff as is necessary to carry out the purposes of this chapter. The Governor will fix the salary of the executive director in accordance with state law.

The Council is required to monitor and measure its progress and annually report to the Governor and the appropriate committees of the Legislature on the progress, findings, and recommendations of the Council.

The Council is required to establish one or more technical advisory committees, as needed. Membership of such advisory committees may include the following: representatives of any state agency the Council deems appropriate, including the Higher Education Coordinating

Board and the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges; family home child care providers, child care center providers, and college or university child care providers; parents; early childhood development experts; representatives of school districts and teachers involved in the provision of child care and preschool programs; representatives of Resource and Referral programs; parent education specialists; pediatric or other health professionals; representatives of citizen groups concerned with child care and early learning; representatives of labor organizations; representatives of private business; and representatives of Head Start and ECEAP agencies.

Child Care Coordinating Committee

The Child Care Coordinating Committee is removed from state law.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The Council is required to recommend new initiatives and the development of new programs and services *as necessary*. It is provided that the early learning system to be created by the Council should be an *adequately financed* system, and that the Council's recommendations concerning funding to meet statewide and local need for early learning programs and services must address *stable and sustainable* funding.

It is provided that the voluntary rating system is to provide both *resources* and incentives for quality improvements, and that the Council's recommendations concerning implementation of the system must include *assistance necessary to help providers move up the tiers*. Of the quality criteria that the Council must take into consideration in developing the system of tiers within the voluntary rating system, it is provided that the learning environment criterion is to include *staff and child interactions* and that the criterion of parent and family involvement is expanded to parent and family involvement *and support*. It is provided that the deadlines for development and implementation of the voluntary rating system apply to *initial* development and implementation, respectively.

In implementing the tiered-reimbursement system, consideration must be given to child care providers who provide staff wage progression. However, eligibility for participation in the tiered-reimbursement system is not limited to child care providers who provide staff wage progression.

The state's Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Plan is included in the list of resources that the Council is required to make use of. It is provided that the technical advisory committee or committees that the Council is required to establish, as needed, *may* include the identified individuals, and the following are added to that list: representatives of the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges and private business; and parents.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: (In support) A lot of good work is going on related to early learning in communities across the state, almost in spite of the state, which has not provided leadership in this area. We need to focus our efforts on improving the quality of care, providing better support for parents and providers, and building on the partnerships that have already been formed in communities between the public and private sectors. This bill is the next step in investing in early learning, building upon the groundwork that has already been laid in the state. Important elements of the bill include establishing a governance structure, including a public-private partnership, and establishing a quality rating system. This bill takes the essential first step by establishing a unifying, statewide council to bring the necessary focus and illumination to these issues. The bill hits three sane and sound themes: building on the existing public-private partnerships in this state; building on the local work of communities; and rooting the development of options in what parents need.

(With comments) Investment in the early years, in terms of high-quality care, play out in educational attainment, less criminality, and greater lifelong success in employment and personal relationships. This should also be seen as an opportunity to strengthen parenting as well as building partnerships between parents and child care providers. The bill has the right focus, on access for low-income children, quality, high standards, and professional development. The bill identifies the right mix of participants across sectors. The bill recognizes the importance of increased community engagement. The quality rating and tiered-reimbursement systems are essential to what we are trying to do, but reimbursement rates need to be raised. They should be closer to the 75th percentile. The two most attractive elements of the bill are the quality rating and tiered-reimbursement systems. Putting a rating system in the hands of parents, caretakers, and providers will enable individuals to make informed decisions about early learning. A tiered-reimbursement system will give incentives to providers to increase quality. However, the tools provided in the bill are moot if we do not look at the basic subsidy rate. The key components that support better quality are support of education of the providers, provision of financial support directly to the provider, community support through an advisory council, and evaluation. It is about time that early learning becomes a priority in the state. The base subsidy rates need to be raised. They should be at the 75th percentile. The top two indicators of quality are staff education and staff longevity, which current funding levels do not support. This bill addresses quality and the resources available to parents concerning the quality of providers, which is important. The current subsidy rate is lacking, and funding must be provided to retain staff.

(With amendments) The early learning programs and services in the bill should not be limited to children from birth to five years of age, but should be identified as for children "beginning at birth" so that the Council may address issues related to programs and services for children up to 13 years of age. Language should be added to the bill concerning resources for providers and adequate financing in order to be able to implement quality improvements. The newly revised Child Care Coordinating Committee (Coordinating Committee) should not be eliminated. It should be allowed to continue to play its valuable role as a ground-level,

grassroots, public-private partnership, and serve as the technical advisory committee to the Council with staff shared between the Council and the Coordinating Committee. Individuals across the state see the Coordinating Committee as their voice on these issues. Family support is missing from the quality criteria in the bill. Membership of the technical advisory committee should include parents. The Division of Child Care and Early Learning (DCCEL) should be placed under the Governor's watch. Parents should be included in the membership of the Council. There should be outside audits of the DCCEL.

(Neutral) Our current system is perilously underfunded and undervalued. Both tiered reimbursement and ratings systems appear to be effective ways to incentivize quality improvements in the child care system, particularly for child care facilities that serve low-income children. However, the base child care subsidy rates need to be raised, and funding and technical assistance will be needed as part of the rating system. This is an opportune time to advance these issues in this state. There are three key factors in creating early learning governance structures and plans: establishing a high-level, visible, public-private body with sufficient power; making a commitment to build on what is already working and then add new initiatives; and creating public-private partnerships. State and local roles must be defined and effectively balanced. There must be mechanisms for local input in the work of the Council. We need to look to developing a continuum of education including early learning, K-12, and higher education.

Testimony Against: None.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Kagi, prime sponsor; Joyce Walters, Boeing; Mark Usdane, League of Education Voters; and Lynn B. Wirta, Small Faces Child Development Center.

(With comments): Bridgett Chandler, Talaris; Garman Lutz, Spokane County United Way; Kip Tokuda, City of Seattle; Kathy Thamm, Family Care Resources and HIP Spokane; Nancy Gerber, Spokane Family Child Care Provider and SEIU; Steve Olson, Olympia Child Care Center; and Colleen Hill, Childcare Workforce Alliance of Washington and American Federation of Teachers.

(With amendments): Agda Burchard, Washington Association for the Education of Young Children/Collaborative; Robin Boehler, Child Care Coordinating Committee and National Council of Jewish Women; and Margo Logan, private citizen.

(Neutral): Greg Shaw, Gates Foundation; and Bea Kelleigh, Early Care and Education Coalition.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: Elizabeth Bonbright Thompson, Washington State Child Care Resource and Referral Network; Rachael Langen, Division of Child Care and Early Learning; Esther Ames, YWCA of Seattle, King County, and Snohomish County; Greg Williamson, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction; *Stu Jacobson, Washington Parents for Safe Child Care*; and Jada Rupley, ESD 112.