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**Children & Family Services  
Committee**

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**HB 2964**

**Brief Description:** Creating the department of early learning.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Kagi, Talcott, Walsh, Quall, Haler, Shabro, Fromhold, Kessler, Hunt, Appleton, Lantz, Darneille, Kenney, Chase, Hasegawa, Sells, Roberts, Hunter, Moeller, McCoy, Santos, Green and Simpson; by request of Governor Gregoire.

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Establishes the Department of Early Learning as an executive branch agency.

**Hearing Date:** 1/23/06

**Staff:** Sydney Forrester (786-7120).

**Background:**

Early learning and child-care programs in Washington are administered or regulated by three state agencies. The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) Division of Child Care and Early Learning (DCCEL) licenses child-care homes and centers, develops policy and procedures for the Working Connections Child Care program, and administers the Head Start program. The Department of Community Trade and Economic Development (CTED) administers Washington's Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program. The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) oversees child-care and early learning programs, including special education for three and four-year olds, programs promoting family literacy, and nutrition assistance for child care.

The Washington Early Learning Council (Council) was established by HB 1152 in the 2005 Legislative session 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. The goal of the Council has been to build upon existing efforts and recommend new initiatives in order to better meet the early learning needs of children and their families. The Council also serves as the advisory committee for early learning under Washington Learns, Governor Gregoire's initiative to comprehensively examine all sectors of the state's education system. In December 2005, Washington Learns issued its first set of recommendations, including a recommendation for the creation of a cabinet-level department of early learning.

## **Summary of Bill:**

The Department of Early Learning (Department) is established as an executive branch agency whose director is appointed by, and serves at the pleasure of, the Governor. The Department's primary duties are to set early learning policy, and coordinate, consolidate, and integrate child-care and early learning programs to promote an efficient use of funds. The director of the Department will provide leadership and actively participate in the creation and governance of a non-governmental public-private partnership focused on supporting government's investments in early learning and promoting school readiness and success.

### *Transfer of Programs and Functions*

The following programs and functions currently within the DSHS, OSPI, and CTED are transferred to the Department:

- child-care licensing and quality;
- child-care tiered reimbursement system;
- child-care career and wage ladder;
- Child Care Partnership employer liaison;
- Child Care Resource and Referral Network;
- Early Childhood Education Assistance Program;
- Head Start collaboration;
- Early Learning Reading Initiative; and
- Working Connections Child Care program.

The income eligibility determination and provider payment functions for the Working Connections Child Care program are not transferred to the Department and remain with the Economic Services Administration within the DSHS. Appropriations and staff associated with the programs listed, except appropriations for DSHS, are transferred to the Department. Appropriations for the programs transferred from DSHS to the Department will be transferred through an interagency agreement.

### *Department's Future Recommendations*

By November 15, 2006, in collaboration with the Early Learning Council, the Department will make recommendations regarding:

- 1) Coordination and collaboration with K-12 and other programs at state and local levels;
- 2) Practices to encourage local and community public-private partnerships;
- 3) The Department's relationship with the statewide public-private partnership;
- 4) The Department's internal governance; and
- 5) Transition of any additional programs and responsibilities.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

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