
Early Learning & Human Services Committee

SSB 6226

Brief Description: Concerning authorization periods for subsidized child care.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Human Services & Corrections (originally sponsored by Senators Frockt, Harper, Regala, Zarelli, Fain, Hargrove, Kohl-Welles and Keiser).

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Changes the eligibility period for Working Connections Child Care from six months to 12 months, but only if enrollments are capped.
- Requires applicants and recipients to report specific changes.

Hearing Date: 2/16/12

Staff: Megan Palchak (786-7120).

Background:

Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) is a subsidized child care program designed to promote stability and quality care for children from low-income households while their parents are at work or engaged in WorkFirst participation requirements. The Department of Early Learning (DEL) sets WCCC policy and the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) provides WCCC eligibility determinations.

In 2010 the Legislature passed Engrossed Second Substitute House Bill 3141 (E2SHB 3141), an act relating to redesigning the delivery of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), which involved reforming components of the WCCC. Under E2SHB 3141, beginning in fiscal year 2011, families with children enrolled in the Early Childhood Education Assistance Program (ECEAP), Head Start, or Early Head Start were authorized for a 12-month period unless a change in circumstances required an eligibility to end earlier than 12 months. Working

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Connections Child Care applicants and recipients are required, by administrative rules, to notify WCCC staff about specific changes in circumstances that may impact WCCC eligibility.

The E2SHB 3141 also required the DEL and the DSHS to issue a report to the Legislature by September 2011 that would include: (a) an analysis of the impact of the 12-month authorization on the stability of child care, program costs, and administrative savings, and (b) recommendations for expanding the application of the 12-month authorization period to additional populations of families that receive WCCC.

In 2011 the Legislature passed Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 5921 (ESSB 5921), requiring a six-month eligibility period for WCCC applicants other than families enrolled in ECEAP, Head Start, or Early Head Start. This population of applicants is currently required to recertify income eligibility every six months. However, the six-month certification provision applies only if enrollments are capped. The ESSB 5921 also required WCCC applicants to seek child support enforcement services from the DSHS, Division of Child Support as a condition of receiving subsidized child care. However, if the DSHS finds an applicant has good cause to not cooperate, then he or she is exempt from the child support requirement.

In August 2011 the legislative report required under E2SHB 3141 concluded that the 12-month eligibility period:

- increased the stability of child care;
- either had no impact on program costs or had a role in reducing program costs per family and per child; and
- there is little difference between the costs for administering the six-month program versus the 12-month program, except that six-month authorizations require additional staff time to reprocess applications.

The report included recommendations to:

- continue to offer the 12-month extended eligibility WCCC program to eligible families;
- increase awareness of the 12-month extended eligibility WCCC program among families and child care programs;
- find ways to reduce the burden of the application process; and
- find ways to do more to help families and child care programs with the eligibility process.

Summary of Bill:

Beginning in fiscal year 2013, authorizations for the WCCC subsidy are effective for a 12-month period, unless a change in circumstances necessitates reauthorization sooner. However, the 12-month authorization applies only if the enrollments in the child care subsidy or working connections child care program are capped.

When an applicant or recipient applies for or receives WCCC, he or she must:

- notify the DEL within 5 days of any change in providers;
- notify the applicant or recipient's provider within 10 days regarding:
 - number of child care hours the applicant/recipient needs;
 - countable income, including TANF or child support changes;
 - household size;
 - changes in employment, school activity, or TANF;

- address and phone number of applicant or recipients in-home relative provider;
- legal obligation to pay child support; and
- report to the DSHS within 24 hours any pending charges or conviction information the applicant or recipient learns about: (a) his or her or in home provider, or (b) any 16 year-old or older who lives with the provider when the provider is providing care outside the child's home.

Provisions regarding the 6-month certification period and the 2011 legislative report studying the 12-month eligibility are repealed.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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