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## Early Learning & Human Services Committee

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### HB 2519

**Brief Description:** Concerning early education for children involved in the child welfare system.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Senn, Walsh, Kagi, Hunter, Roberts, Tharinger, Haigh, Goodman and Freeman.

#### Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the Family Assessment Response (FAR) worker to assess for child well-being when collaborating with a family to determine the need for child care.
- Specifies that the FAR program can only subsidize child care and early learning programs that are enrolled in the Early Achievers program and rate at level three, four, or five unless certain conditions occur.
- Prioritizes certain child care and early learning programs that are to be utilized for the FAR services.
- Requires the FAR to meet with the family at a specific time to discuss and secure child care or early learning services.
- Requires the Children's Administration to collaborate with the Department of Early Learning to complete two reports that examine child care and early learning services provided during FAR cases.
- Specifies that children who received FAR services are eligible for the Working Connections Child Care for a twelve-month enrollment period and may not be deemed ineligible due to any change in circumstance.
- Specifies that children whose parents or caregivers have completed FAR services are eligible for Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP).
- Prioritizes children involved in the child welfare system for ECEAP.

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*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.*

**Hearing Date:** 1/27/14

**Staff:** Lindsay Lanham (786-7120).

**Background:**

Family Assessment Response.

In 2012 the Legislature passed Senate Bill 6555 (SB 6555), which requires the Children's Administration (CA) to implement a differential response system, called the Family Assessment Response (FAR). Among its many provisions, SB 6555 outlines specific implementation procedures for FAR and requirements for evaluation processes.

Theoretically, a differential response system differs from a child protective services' investigation. Investigations are often considered forensic in nature and involve conducting a series of interviews that have a specific objective, which is to identify child maltreatment or risk of child maltreatment. A differential response system, however, emphasizes family engagement, family assessment, and the well-being of the family unit. Additionally, parents receiving supportive services through a differential response system are not considered perpetrators of abuse or neglect and parents do not receive a disposition or legal finding.

In September 2012 the federal government approved the CA's Title IV-E waiver application. Although the Title IV-E waiver does not provide access to new funding sources, the waiver does offer child welfare systems the opportunity to utilize federal dollars for services that were traditionally prohibited by certain provisions of Title IV-E legislation. The Title IV-E waiver requires the CA to conduct and study a demonstration project. The demonstration project for Washington's Title IV-E waiver is FAR.

January 1, 2014, the CA implemented FAR in three offices: Aberdeen, Lynwood, and Spokane (two zip codes: 99201 & 99207). In July 2014, CA will implement FAR in five additional offices. Pending funding, the target for statewide implementation is July 2016. Under the family assessment response, families may receive an array of supportive services depending on the needs of the family. If required for child safety, some families may have access to child care services.

Early Achievers and Early Care and Education.

In 2007, the Legislature enacted Engrossed Second Substitute Senate Bill 5828, which created the quality rating and improvement system for the early care and education system in Washington, called Early Achievers. The Early Achievers program establishes a common set of expectations and standards that define, measure, and improve the quality of early learning and care settings. There are five levels in the Early Achievers program. All licensed or certified child care programs enter the program at level one. Participants advance to level two when they officially enroll in the Early Achievers program. At level two, participants are required to complete several activities such as a self-assessment and trainings. At levels three, four, and five Early Achievers participants are evaluated and assigned a rating.

The Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) is the Washington State Preschool Program. The Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program serves families at or below 110 percent of the federal poverty level. Although ECEAP prioritizes children who are four years old by August 31, children who are three years old are also eligible for the program. In addition to preschool programming, ECEAP also provides family support and health services. The stated goal of the ECEAP program is to help ensure children enter kindergarten ready to succeed.

The Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) program offers subsidies to child care providers serving families at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. The state pays part of the cost of child care. The parents or caregivers are responsible for making a copayment to the child care provider. Both child care centers and family home providers are able to receive working connections child care subsidy payments. Children of families receiving the WCCC benefits are required to be less than 13 years of age or less than 19 years of age and have a verified special need or be under court supervision. The Department of Early Learning (DEL) sets child care subsidy policy and provides WCCC oversight for child care licensing. The Department of Social Health Services helps families apply for WCCC, determines eligibility and parent or caregiver copayments, authorizes child care, and issues payment to providers.

### **Summary of Bill:**

House Bill 2519 requires the family assessment response worker to assess for child safety and child well-being when collaborating with a family to determine the need for child care or early learning services. Additionally, HB 2519 specifies that the family assessment response program shall only subsidize child care and early learning programs enrolled in the early achievers program and rate at level three, four, or five unless one of the following conditions is met:

- The family lives in an area with no local programs that rate at level three, four, or five in the early achievers program; or
- The local child care and early learning programs that rate at level three, four, or five in the Early Achievers program are not able to the needs of the child.

House Bill 2519 also specifies that child care and early learning referrals provided by the family assessment response worker shall prioritize the following programs: programs located in close proximity to the child's home of origin; licensed child programs that receive state subsidy; early childhood education and assistance programs; head start and early head start programs; programs that offer full workday child care and early learning opportunities; programs with existing relationships with local child welfare offices; and programs with the capacity to provide child care or early learning services to the child after the closure of the family assessment response case. House Bill 2519 further requires the family assessment response worker to document when a referral is made to a child care or early learning program that does not meet the characteristics of a prioritized program.

House Bill 2519 requires the family assessment response worker to meet with the family at least 15 days prior to a family's case to discuss child care and early learning services. If the family elects to use child care or early learning services, the FAR worker is required to work with the family to secure a child care or early learning provider, complete eligibility processes, and confirm that the child was deemed eligible for the program.

House Bill 2519 also requires the Children's Administration to collaborate with the DEL to complete two reports that examine child care and early learning services. Data collection is required to include the first cohort of children receiving child care services. The first report is due to the appropriate committees of the legislature by January 2, 2015 and the final report is due by January 2, 2016.

Additionally, HB 2519 specifies that children who receive family assessment response services are eligible for the working connections child care program for a twelve-month enrollment period and may not be deemed ineligible due to any change in circumstance. Eligibility for the working connections child care program begins the day the FAR case is closed. After twelve months, parents and caregivers must re-determine eligibility.

House Bill 2519 concludes by specifying that children whose parents or caregivers have completed family assessment response services are eligible for ECEAP and priorities children involved in the child welfare system for ECEAP.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Requested on January 20, 2014.

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