

SENATE BILL REPORT

ESHB 2519

As of February 19, 2014

Title: An act relating to connecting children involved in the child welfare system to quality early care and education programming.

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

Sponsors: House Committee on Early Learning & Human Services (originally sponsored by Representatives Senn, Walsh, Kagi, Hunter, Roberts, Tharinger, Haigh, Goodman and Freeman).

Brief History: Passed House: 2/13/14, 90-8.

Committee Activity: Early Learning & K-12 Education: 2/19/14.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

Staff: Katherine Taylor (786-7434)

Background: Family Assessment Response (FAR). 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 FAR. Among its many provisions, SB 6555 outlines specific implementation procedures for FAR and requirements for evaluation processes.

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 wellbeing 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.

On January 1, 2014, CA implemented FAR in three offices: Aberdeen, Lynwood, and Spokane. In July 2014, CA will implement FAR in five additional offices. Pending funding, the target for statewide implementation is July 2016. Under the FAR, 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.

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.

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 must 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. ECEAP 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 ECEAP 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 WCCC subsidy payments. Children of families receiving the WCCC benefits must 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 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: FAR workers must assess for child safety and child wellbeing when collaborating with a family to determine the need for child care, preschool, or home visiting services.

Effective July 1, 2015, FAR workers may only refer children to preschool programs that are enrolled in the Early Achievers program and rate at a level three, four, or five unless one of the following conditions applies:

- the family lives in an area with no local programs that rate at level three, four, or five in the Early Achievers program;
- 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; or
- the child is attending a preschool program prior to the FAR case and the parent or caregiver does not want the child to change programs.

Effective July 1, 2019, FAR workers may only refer non-school age children to child care programs that are enrolled in the Early Achievers program and rate at a level three, four, or five unless one of the following conditions applies:

- the family lives in an area with no local programs that rate at level three, four, or five in the Early Achievers program;

- 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 meet the needs of the child; or
- the child is attending a preschool program prior to the FAR case and the parent or caregiver does not want the child to change programs.

FAR workers must make every effort to provide referrals to state and federally subsidized programs. FAR workers must also make every effort to provide referrals to high quality child care and early learning programs.

Prior to closing the FAR case, an FAR worker must meet with the family to discuss child care and early learning services. If the family plans to use child care and early learning services, the FAR worker must work with the family to facilitate successful enrollment.

Children involved in the child welfare system are identified as eligible and prioritized for ECEAP.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 13, 2014.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: We want to ensure young children in the welfare system are getting the care they need. Foster kids take up very few of the ECEAP slots. These kids need these services. These programs work. The birth to age three program has helped my child a lot. My experience in the child welfare system was very chaotic. Early learning programs have helped my child. We want to bring these systems together. We encourage your support.

OTHER: We support access. We want to make some more tweaks to the language.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Laurie Lippold, Partners for Our Children; Nancy Ashley, Children's Home Society of WA; Terri Williams, Parents for Parents; Lynda Popplewell, Parent Ambassador, WA State Assn. of Head Start & ECEAP.

OTHER: David Del Villar Fox, Dept. of Social and Health Services CA.