

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1777

As Reported by House Committee On:
Early Learning & Human Services

Title: An act relating to financing early learning facilities to support the needed expansion of early learning classrooms across Washington.

Brief Description: Concerning the financing of early learning facilities.

Sponsors: Representatives Kagi, Johnson, Doglio, Dent, Ryu, MacEwen, Senn, Farrell, Nealey, Ortiz-Self, McBride, Macri, Fey, Slatter and Jinkins.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Early Learning & Human Services: 2/7/17, 2/8/17 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Creates the Early Learning Facilities Revolving Account (ELFRA) to provide grants and loans for the planning, renovation, purchase, and construction of early learning facilities.
- Establishes prioritized criteria for ELFRA awards to school districts and other eligible organizations.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & HUMAN SERVICES

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 12 members: Representatives Kagi, Chair; Senn, Vice Chair; Dent, Ranking Minority Member; McDonald, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Frame, Goodman, Griffey, Kilduff, Klippert, Lovick, Muri and Ortiz-Self.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 1 member: Representative McCaslin.

Staff: Dawn Eychaner (786-7135).

Background:

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.

Department of Commerce.

The Department of Commerce (COM) administers programs intended to promote community and economic development. For example, the COM manages the Community Development Block Grant program, which provides federal grant funds to small counties, cities and towns for public facilities, community facilities, microenterprise, and affordable housing projects.

Department of Early Learning.

The Department of Early Learning (DEL) implements state early learning policy and oversees various programs serving young children, including the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) and the Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) program. The Early Start Act of 2015 established an entitlement for ECEAP for all eligible children starting in the 2020-21 academic year.

Licensed ECEAP and WCCC providers are required to participate in the DEL's Early Achievers quality rating and improvement system. Early Achievers is a common set of standards to measure and improve the quality of early learning and child care. Participants advance through program levels based on criteria including child outcomes, facility curriculum and learning environment, professional development, and family engagement and partnership.

Community Development Financial Institutions Fund.

The Community Development Financial Institutions Fund (CDFI fund) is a program of the United States Department of the Treasury. The CDFI fund certifies nongovernmental entities and tribal governments who operate banks, credit unions, loan funds, and venture capital funds to provide underserved communities with access to affordable financial services.

Certified organizations are eligible to apply for technical assistance, training, and financial assistance awards from the CDFI fund. Organizations must have a primary mission of promoting community development, provide both financial and educational services, and serve and maintain accountability to one or more defined target markets. Many CDFI fund-certified organizations offer financing with terms more favorable than financing available through traditional lenders.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

Early Learning Facilities Revolving Account.

The Early Learning Facilities Revolving Account (ELFRA) is established and is overseen by the COM. The ELFRA funds must be distributed as state grants or loans to match private and other public funding. Eligible projects include the planning, renovation, purchase, and construction of early learning facilities to provide classroom space for the ECEAP and the WCCC. The account may receive revenues from appropriations, grant and loan repayments, and any other source.

Any recipient of a grant or loan must own or secure a long-term lease for the project site and commit to using the funded facility for preschool or childcare for 10 or 20 years, depending on the amount of funding received.

Recipients must commit to being an active participant in good standing with Early Achievers. If the recipient ceases to be in good standing with Early Achievers, the grant or loan must be repaid to the ELFRA.

Project Prioritization.

The COM must convene a committee of early learning facilities experts to develop a prioritization methodology for project selection. When developing the prioritization methodology, the committee must consider projects that:

- add ECEAP slots in areas with the highest unmet need;
- benefit low-income children;
- are located in low-income neighborhoods;
- provide more access to ECEAP as a ratio of children eligible to participate;
- are geographically disbursed relative to statewide need;
- balance mixed-use development and rural locations; and
- maximize resources available from the state with funding from other public and private organizations, including the use of state lands or facilities.

Grants and Loans to Eligible Organizations.

Beginning August 1, 2017, the COM must contract with at least one nongovernmental private-public partnership certified by the CDFI fund to award funds from the ELFRA to eligible organizations. The private-public partnership must demonstrate an ability to raise funds for early learning construction projects and must report annually to the COM on projects funded through the ELFRA.

The term "eligible organizations" include nonprofit ECEAP and WCCC providers, licensed early learning centers not currently participating in ECEAP but intending to participate, nonprofit developers of housing and community facilities, community and technical colleges, educational service districts, local governments, and federally recognized tribes.

Eligible organizations may receive grants or loans in amounts up to:

- \$10,000 for facility predesign and feasibility planning;
- \$100,000 for minor renovation or repairs; and
- \$800,000 to create, purchase, or expand early learning facilities.

Grants and Loans to School Districts.

Beginning August 1, 2017, the COM must implement and administer grants or loans from the ELFRA to school districts. School districts may receive grants or loans in amounts up to \$800,000 to purchase, construct, or expand early learning facilities.

The COM must submit a ranked and prioritized list of early learning facilities projects and proposed purchases for school districts to the Office of Financial Management and the Legislature by September 15, 2017.

Licensing Standards Review.

The DEL must consult with stakeholders to review existing facility licensing standards to eliminate potential licensing barriers while ensuring the health and safety of children in early learning programs.

If funding is not appropriated by June 30, 2017, all provisions except the licensing standards review by the DEL are null and void.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill add the purchase of early learning facilities as an eligible use of ELFRA funds. Local governments are added as eligible organizations to receive ELFRA funding.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) There is tremendous interest in the private philanthropic world to bring together private and public financing to ensure we have the 400 classrooms we need for required ECEAP slots by the year 2020. The CDFI funds are nimble and have experience helping entities put together financing packages for facilities. The ECEAP has a profound need for facility space and is dependent on expansion of that space. Current investments for all-day kindergarten and reducing K-3 class sizes is impacting available space in school buildings for the ECEAP. About 60 percent of ECEAP space is in public schools and about 40 percent of providers are public school employees. The technical assistance component will assist small providers in putting together financing packages. The CDFI funds are in the best position to leverage available resources to maximize funding. Providers are focused on providing high quality education and don't have expertise in real estate or financing. Consider having funds for school districts go through the school assistance program instead of being administered by the COM. Some communities may not have the capacity to secure the matching funds required.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Kagi, prime sponsor; Mari Taylor, Lake Stevens School Board; David Webster, Opportunity Council; Frank Ordway, Department of Early Learning; Patty Hayes, Seattle & King County Public Health; Robert Butts, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction; Melissa Johnson, Washington State Association of Headstart and Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program; Emily Murphy, Children's Alliance; Charlie Brown, Franklin Pierce School District; and Marie Sullivan, Pasco School District.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.