

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## HB 2659

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

**Title:** An act relating to expanding eligibility for the early childhood education and assistance program.

**Brief Description:** Expanding eligibility for the early childhood education and assistance program.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Goodman, Kagi, Lovick, Kilduff, Appleton, Valdez, Ortiz-Self, Wylie, Hudgins, Senn, McBride, Doglio, Pettigrew and Frame.

#### **Brief History:**

##### **Committee Activity:**

Early Learning & Human Services: 1/26/18, 1/31/18 [DP].

#### **Brief Summary of Bill**

- Modifies the family income limit for Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) eligibility from 110 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) to 185 percent of the FPL.
- Adds prioritization criteria for ECEAP enrollment.
- Phases in biennial funding and extends the date for full statewide implementation of the ECEAP from the 2022-23 school year to the 2028-29 school year.

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### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & HUMAN SERVICES

**Majority Report:** Do pass. Signed by 8 members: Representatives Kagi, Chair; Senn, Vice Chair; Dent, Ranking Minority Member; Frame, Goodman, Lovick, Muri and Ortiz-Self.

**Minority Report:** Do not pass. Signed by 4 members: Representatives McCaslin, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Eslick, Griffey and Klippert.

**Staff:** Dawn Eychaner (786-7135).

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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.*

**Background:**

The Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) is the state's voluntary preschool program. Three- and four-year-olds from families with incomes at or below 110 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) are eligible for the ECEAP. Children with special needs or certain risk factors are also eligible to enroll, regardless of income. Up to 10 percent of enrollment can be children who do not meet income requirements but are experiencing other risk factors that could interfere with school success.

The Department of Early Learning (DEL) administers the ECEAP through contracts with local organizations. The DEL must prioritize children from families with the lowest incomes, in foster care, or with multiple needs for enrollment. Effective July 1, 2018, all powers, functions, and duties of the DEL will be transferred to the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF).

The Caseload Forecast Council (CFC) prepares the official state caseload forecasts for a number of public assistance programs, including the ECEAP. The ECEAP caseload includes the number of children who are eligible for the ECEAP and the number actually served.

Funding for the ECEAP is phased in yearly. Full statewide implementation is required by the 2022-23 school year when any eligible child will be entitled to enroll in the ECEAP.

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**Summary of Bill:**

Effective July 1, 2018, the income limit for a family's eligibility for the ECEAP is changed from 110 percent of the FPL to 185 percent of the FPL.

The date by which statewide implementation of the ECEAP must be achieved is extended from the 2022-23 school year to the 2028-29 school year. Beginning in the 2019-20 school year, funding for the ECEAP must be phased in based on the forecasted caseload of children eligible for and projected to participate in the ECEAP according to the following schedule:

- at least 40 percent of the caseload in the 2019-2021 biennium;
- at least 50 percent of the caseload in the 2021-2023 biennium;
- at least 65 percent of the caseload in the 2023-2025 biennium;
- at least 80 percent of the caseload in the 2025-2027 biennium; and
- 100 percent of the caseload in the 2027-2029 biennium.

The DCYF must prioritize eligible children for enrollment according to a system of risk factors and priority points adopted by the department in rule. The system must prioritize children who are: from families with the lowest incomes; in foster care; members of a federally recognized tribe; or from families with multiple needs. The following risk factors must also be included in the priority system:

- child welfare system involvement;
- developmental delay or disability;
- domestic violence;
- English as a second language;

- expulsion from an early learning setting;
- homelessness;
- a parent who is or has been incarcerated; and
- a parent with a substance abuse or mental health treatment need.

A technical correction is made in the CFC chapter to update a reference to the DCYF.

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**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Requested on January 16, 2018.

**Effective Date:** The bill takes effect on July 1, 2018.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:**

(In support) The evidence is clear that if kids go to preschool, their chances of going into the criminal justice system are greatly reduced. The ECEAP entitlement was a huge achievement, but the program still serves only a small percentage of the children who deserve it. The 185 percent FPL threshold is the same for other public assistance programs, such as free and reduced lunch. Poverty is not the only factor that influences risk, and this bill includes other risk factors for the DCYF to prioritize which kids get in first. The time to expand early learning is now. The entitlement has been pushed out due to budget reasons. This proposal establishes benchmarking to phase in additional eligibility. Ninety-eight percent of education funding is spent on kindergarten through twelfth grade, but we should spend more on these early years. Children who need the ECEAP are sitting on the sidelines and cannot access the program. A homeless family of four recently had an income too high to qualify. With the current eligibility requirement of 110 percent of the FPL, many rural school districts qualify fewer than 20 children per classroom, and employing adequate staff is a challenge. Kindergarten teachers can immediately identify which children have attended preschool and which students have not. There is a gap in kindergarten readiness that particularly hurts children of color and children from low income families. The gaps that students coming into kindergarten have are not stagnant. Third grade students who are not performing at grade level are consistent with issues identified in the Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills program when those students entered kindergarten. This takes a toll on children, and they either retreat inwards or lash out, exhibiting behaviors that further set these students apart. Inequitable access to quality early education hurts all kids and the state's education system.

(Opposed) None.

**Persons Testifying:** Representative Goodman, prime sponsor; Alicia Brender, Bellevue School District; Matt Bona, Educational Service District 123; Robin Tzucker; Melissa Johnson, Washington State Association of Head Start and Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program; and Kristy Hermann, Seattle School District.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** None.