

HOUSE BILL REPORT

2SSB 5107

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

Title: An act relating to creating a local pathway for local governments, school districts, institutions of higher education, and nonprofit organizations to provide more high quality early learning opportunities by reducing barriers and increasing efficiency.

Brief Description: Facilitating local funding and involvement in expanding early childhood education and assistance program eligibility.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senators Billig, Fain, Rolfes, Wellman, Walsh, Zeiger, Liias, Cleveland, Hunt, Conway, Saldaña, Kuderer and Mullet).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Early Learning & Human Services: 3/15/17, 3/28/17 [DP].

Brief Summary of Second Substitute Bill

- Adds school districts, institutions of higher education, and nonprofits as organizations that may contribute funds to the Early Start Account in order to expand access and eligibility in the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP).
- Provides that children enrolled in the ECEAP with funds contributed by community sources do not have to meet state ECEAP eligibility requirements and are not considered eligible for, or part of, the state-funded entitlement.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & HUMAN SERVICES

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 10 members: Representatives Kagi, Chair; Senn, Vice Chair; Frame, Goodman, Griffey, Kilduff, Klippert, Lovick, Muri and Ortiz-Self.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 2 members: Representatives Dent, Ranking Minority Member; McCaslin.

Staff: Dawn Eychaner (786-7135).

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:

Early Start Account and Local Early Learning Programs.

The Early Start Account (ESA) was established through the Early Start Act in 2015. Funds in the ESA are subject to appropriation and must be used to improve the quality of early care and education programming. Local governments are encouraged to collaborate with the Department of Early Learning (DEL) when establishing local early learning programs and may contribute funds to the ESA for initial investments to build capacity and quality in local early care and education programming, and to reduce copayments charged to parents and caregivers.

Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program.

The Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) is Washington's state-funded preschool program for 3 and 4 year olds. The stated goal of the ECEAP is to assist eligible children with educational, social, health, nutritional, and cultural development to enhance their opportunities for success in the common school system. Children are eligible for the ECEAP if they have a family income at or below 110 percent of the federal poverty level, qualify for school district special education services, are receiving child protective services or family assessment response services, or have developmental or environmental risk factors that could affect school success. Priority for available ECEAP slots goes to children who are 4 years old, from families with the lowest income levels, are homeless, are receiving child protective services or family assessment response services, or are from families with multiple needs.

Eligible children are admitted to the ECEAP to the extent that the Legislature provides funds for the state-supported ECEAP program. Additional eligible children may be admitted to the extent that grants and contributions from community sources provide sufficient funds for a program equivalent to that supported by state funds. State funding for the ECEAP must be phased in yearly until full statewide implementation is achieved in the 2020-21 school year, when any eligible child will be entitled to be enrolled in the ECEAP.

Public and private organizations, including school districts, educational service districts, community and technical colleges, local governments, and nonprofit organizations, are eligible to participate as ECEAP providers.

Summary of Bill:

In addition to receiving funds from local governments, the ESA may receive funds from other community sources, including school districts, institutions of higher education, and nonprofit organizations. An appropriation is not required for expenditures from the ESA, and expenditures may be authorized by the Director of the DEL or the Director's designee. The ESA is placed in the custody of the State Treasurer.

The DEL must separately track funds received from each community source. Funds must be used for specified purposes identified in writing by the contributor. The purposes must:

- build capacity and quality in local early care and education programming;

- reduce copayments charged to parents and caregivers; or
- expand access and eligibility in the ECEAP.

Grants and contributions from community sources may not supplant state funding required for full statewide implementation of the ECEAP for eligible children by the 2020-21 school year. Additional children may be admitted to the ECEAP to the extent that grants and contributions from community sources provide sufficient funds for a program equivalent to the state-funded program. These children do not have to meet state ECEAP eligibility requirements and are not considered eligible for, or part of, the state-funded entitlement.

To the greatest extent possible, the DEL must reduce barriers and increase efficiency for using local or private funds, or both, to provide for more high quality early learning opportunities.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) This bill came out of a conversation with a city that wanted to invest in early learning and the resulting concept of "buying up" eligibility for the ECEAP in order to expand the program to other children who might not meet the current income eligibility requirements. There is a huge gap in need for kids who don't meet the current income eligibility requirements. Seattle was big enough to create a whole new system of their own, but smaller cities may not want to create a whole new program and spend money on setting up a new administrative system. The bill directs the DEL to knock down barriers and make it as easy as possible for local programs to be established, and this is a great opportunity for local communities. There is precedent for doing this with the Home Visiting Services Account. When there is talk about high demand for the ECEAP and the number of kids unserved, it's clear that action is now needed to prepare for the desired results. This opportunity will empower local business leaders, and the ECEAP is a powerful solution to increase kindergarten readiness.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Senator Billig, prime sponsor; Erica Hallock, Fight Crime: Invest in Kids; and Kristin Wiggins, ReadyNation.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.