
**Human Services, Youth, & Early
Learning Committee**

HB 1945

Brief Description: Streamlining and enhancing program access for persons eligible for food assistance.

Sponsors: Representatives Alvarado, Gregerson, Ryu, Ortiz-Self, Leavitt, Senn, Berry, Ramel, Slatter, Cortes and Morgan.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Provides that children meeting age criteria for the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) and Birth to Three ECEAP are categorically eligible for those programs if they are eligible for or receiving federal or state Basic Food benefits.
- Provides that the income eligibility requirements for the Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) program are satisfied if the WCCC applicant or consumer is eligible for or receiving federal or state Basic Food benefits.

Hearing Date: 1/9/24

Staff: Omeara Harrington (786-7136).

Background:

The Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program.

The Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) is the state's no-cost voluntary preschool program administered by the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF). Children are eligible for the ECEAP when they are between the ages of 3 and 5 and are

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from families with incomes at or below 110 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL).

Beginning July 1, 2026, eligibility will expand to include any child who:

- has a family with financial need;
- is experiencing homelessness;
- has participated in Early Head Start or a successor federal program, the Early Support for Infants and Toddlers (ESIT) program or received class C developmental services, the Birth to Three ECEAP, or the Early Childhood Intervention and Prevention Services (ECLIPSE) program; or
- is Indian as defined in DCYF rule and has a household income at or below 100 percent of the state median income (SMI).

"Family with financial need" means families with incomes at or below 36 percent of the SMI until the 2030-31 school year. Beginning in the 2030-31 school year, it includes families with incomes at or below 50 percent of the SMI.

The ECEAP will become an entitlement for eligible children starting in the 2026-27 school year.

Additional Enrollment and Early Entry.

The DCYF rules allow children who do not meet standard eligibility criteria to enroll in the ECEAP, as space is available, if the family income is:

- above 110 percent of the FPL but no more than 130 percent of the FPL; or
- above 130 percent of the FPL but no more than 200 percent of the FPL if the child meets at least one specified risk factor.

Beginning July 1, 2026, expanded enrollment will be available, subject to capacity, if the family income level is above 36 percent of the SMI, but at or below 50 percent of the SMI and the child meets at least one specified risk factor.

The DCYF rules also allow children to enroll early in the ECEAP, as space is available, when the child will turn age 3 during the school year and meets other criteria.

The Birth to Three Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program.

The Birth to Three ECEAP serves children under 36 months old with a family income at or below 130 percent of the FPL. On or after July 1, 2026, to be eligible, the child must be from a household with income at or below 50 percent of the SMI.

Working Connections Child Care.

Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) is a federally and state-funded program administered by the DCYF that provides subsidies for child care while a parent is working or participating in approved work-related activities. The WCCC program is available to families who meet certain eligibility requirements and have a household income at or below 60 percent of the SMI.

Beginning July 1, 2025, a family is eligible for WCCC program benefits when the household's annual income is above 60 percent and at or below 75 percent of the SMI, and beginning July 1,

2027, if funds are appropriated, when the household's annual income is up to 85 percent of the SMI. Depending on income, families may be required to pay a monthly copayment to their provider.

Federal and State Basic Food Programs.

Washington's Basic Food Program is administered by the Department of Social and Health Services and provides food assistance to eligible low-income individuals and families. Basic Food includes both the federally funded Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the state-funded Food Assistance Program (FAP). The FAP is for individuals who are legal immigrants and meet all eligibility requirements for SNAP except for citizenship and immigration status.

An assistance unit is considered eligible for Basic Food when all members of the assistance unit receive, or are authorized to receive, payments or services from certain programs, or the assistance unit's income is at or below 200 percent of FPL. An assistance unit includes persons living in the same home who regularly buy food or prepare meals together.

Head Start Eligibility for Families Eligible for or Receiving SNAP Benefits.

In 2022, the federal government issued guidance regarding eligibility for the Head Start and Early Head Start programs, which are federally funded programs that are similar to ECEAP and Birth to Three ECEAP. The guidance stated that children from families that are eligible for or participating in the SNAP program are categorically eligible for Head Start and Early Head Start. This means that, for SNAP-eligible families, no additional proof of income or other eligibility factors is necessary to enroll in Head Start or Early Head Start.

Summary of Bill:

A child who meets age requirements for the ECEAP or the Birth to Three ECEAP is categorically eligible for the program if they are a member of an assistance unit that is eligible for or receiving Basic Food benefits under either the federal SNAP program or the state FAP program.

For purposes of eligibility for the WCCC program, household income eligibility requirements are satisfied if the applicant or consumer is a member of an assistance unit that is eligible for or receiving Basic Food benefits under either the federal SNAP program or the state FAP program.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 4, 2024.

Effective Date: The bill contains multiple effective dates. Please see the bill.