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

2SSB 5225

Brief Description: Increasing access to the working connections child care program.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senators Wilson, C., Conway, Frame, Hasegawa, Hunt, Keiser, Lovelett, Nguyen, Salomon, Shewmake, Stanford and Valdez).

Brief Summary of Second Substitute Bill

- Expands Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) eligibility to include child care employees with income up to 85 percent of the state median income, and waives the associated copayment to the extent allowable.
- Directs the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) to establish and implement policies to allow WCCC eligibility for families with children whose parent or guardian was a party or victim in a specialty or therapeutic court case within the last six months.
- Prohibits the DCYF from considering the immigration status of a WCCC applicant or consumer's child when determining eligibility.

Hearing Date: 3/14/23

Staff: Omeara Harrington (786-7136).

Background:

Working Connections Child Care.

Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) is a federally and state-funded program administered by the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) that provides subsidies for child

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care to families with incomes at or below 60 percent of the state median income (SMI), adjusted for family size, and when the household meets other eligibility requirements. 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, adjusted for family size, and beginning July 1, 2027, if funds are appropriated, when the household's annual income is up to 85 percent of the SMI, adjusted for family size.

Through the WCCC program, the state pays part of the cost of child care when a parent is working or participating in approved work-related activities. Depending on income, families may be required to pay a monthly copayment to their provider. Copayments are currently calculated as follows:

Household income:	Maximum copayment:
At or below 20 percent of the SMI	Waived to the extent allowable under federal law; otherwise, a maximum of \$15
Above 20 percent and at or below 36 percent of the SMI	\$65
Above 36 percent and at or below 50 percent of the SMI	\$90
Above 50 percent and at or below 60 percent of the SMI	\$115 (\$165 beginning July 1, 2023)

In addition to income eligibility, a family must meet certain additional criteria in order to qualify for the WCCC program. Among other factors, an applicant or consumer must be participating in qualifying employment or another approved activity, and must have parental control of one or more eligible children. To be eligible, a child must be: younger than 13 years old, or younger than 19 years old and have a verified special need or be under court supervision; and a United States citizen or national, a qualified alien, or a nonqualified alien who meets state residency requirements.

The DCYF is required to maintain policies to allow WCCC eligibility for families who in the last six months have received certain child welfare services. Additionally, the DCYF may not require an applicant or consumer to meet work requirements as a condition of receiving WCCC program benefits when the recipient is a full-time student of a community, technical, or tribal college, and enrolled in a vocational education program that leads to a degree or certificate in a specific occupation, an associate degree program, or a registered apprenticeship program. Subject to appropriations, the DCYF may also waive work requirements for full-time students who are enrolled in a bachelor's degree or applied baccalaureate degree program.

Therapeutic Courts.

"Specialty courts" and "therapeutic courts" remove a defendant's or respondent's case from the traditional criminal or civil court process and instead utilize programs structured to reduce

criminal recidivism and increase rehabilitation, or to reduce child abuse and neglect, out-of-home placements, termination of parental rights, and behavioral health symptoms, through the use of judicially supervised treatment and the appropriate use of services, sanctions, and incentives. Therapeutic courts include, but are not limited to, adult and juvenile drug courts, family dependency and family drug courts, mental health courts, impaired driving courts, truancy courts, veterans' courts, and domestic violence courts.

Summary of Bill:

The following changes are made relating to eligibility for the WCCC program, effective October 1, 2023.

Working Connections Child Care Eligibility for Child Care Employees.

Employees of licensed child care centers or family home providers are eligible for WCCC benefits when:

- the employee's household income is at or below 85 percent of the SMI level, adjusted for family size;
- the child receiving care is younger than 13 years old, or younger than 19 years old and has a verified special need or is under court supervision; and
- the employee's household meets all other program eligibility requirements.

To the extent allowable under federal law, the DCYF must waive the copayment for qualifying employees of licensed child care centers and family home providers, and otherwise must apply a maximum copay of \$15.

Working Connections Child Care Eligibility for Families of Therapeutic or Specialty Court Participants.

The DCYF must establish and implement policies to allow eligibility for the WCCC program for families with children that include a parent or guardian who, in the last six months, was a participant in a specialty or therapeutic court or who was a listed victim in a case before a specialty or therapeutic court, and have been referred for child care as part of the court's proceedings.

Determination of Child Eligibility for Working Connections Child Care.

The DCYF may not consider the immigration status of an applicant or consumer's child when determining eligibility for WCCC benefits.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 24, 2023.

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