

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5225

As of January 25, 2023

Title: An act relating to increasing access to the working connections child care program.

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

Sponsors: Senators Wilson, C., Conway, Frame, Hasegawa, Hunt, Keiser, Lovelett, Nguyen, Salomon, Shewmake, Stanford and Valdez.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Early Learning & K-12 Education: 1/25/23.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Expands Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) eligibility to include child care employees who have incomes up to 85 percent of the state median income and waives their 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 who in the last six months have a parent or guardian participating in a specialty or therapeutic court.
- Prohibits DCYF from considering the immigration status of a WCCC applicant or consumer's child when the applicant or consumer is a full-time student and enrolled in certain education programs.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

Staff: Ailey Kato (786-7434)

Background: Working Connections Child Care. The Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) program is a federally and state-funded program that provides child care subsidies to families, and is administered by the Department of Children, Youth, and Families

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

(DCYF). Families may be eligible for child care subsidies if they have a household income at or below 60 percent of the state median income (SMI) and have one or more children younger than 13, or younger than 19 with a verified special need or are under court supervision. As of October 1, 2022, 60 percent of the state median income is \$4,274 maximum monthly income for a family of three.

To be eligible for WCCC, the parent or guardian must meet certain eligibility requirements including being employed, self-employed, or in approved work or education activities. Children must be a U.S. citizen, a U.S. national, a qualified alien, or a nonqualified alien who meets the Washington State residency requirements and legally reside in the state.

The family is responsible for making a co-payment to the child care provider based on the family's countable income, which are established in state law.

In 2021, WCCC eligibility was expanded by phasing in higher income thresholds and lower copayments.

Authorizations for WCCC subsidies are effective for 12 months.

Therapeutic Courts. State law defines specialty courts and therapeutic courts to mean a court utilizing a program structured to achieve both a reduction in recidivism and an increase in the likelihood of rehabilitation, or to reduce child abuse and neglect, out-of-home placements of children, termination of parental rights, and substance abuse and mental health symptoms among parents or guardians and their children through continuous and intense judicially supervised treatment, and the appropriate use of services, sanctions, and incentives.

Summary of Bill: Child Care Employees. A family is eligible for WCCC when the household's annual income is at or below 85 percent of SMI adjusted for family size and:

- the child is less than 13, or less than 19 with a special need;
- the applicant or consumer is employed in a licensed child care center or family home provider; and
- the household meets all other program eligibility requirements.

DCYF must waive the copayment to the extent allowable under federal law; otherwise, a maximum of a \$15 copayment.

Therapeutic Court Participants. DCYF must establish and implement policies to allow WCCC eligibility for families with children who in the last six months have a parent or guardian participating in a specialty court or therapeutic court. These parents or guardians do not have to keep participating in these courts to maintain 12-month authorization for WCCC.

Immigration Status. DCYF may not consider the immigration status of an applicant or consumer's child when determining WCCC eligibility when the applicant or consumer is a

full-time student and is enrolled in a vocational education, associate degree, or registered apprenticeship program.

These WCCC eligibility provisions take effect October 1, 2023.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: The bill contains several effective dates. Please refer to the bill.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: Child care is one of the most urgent and pressing issues that the Legislature should address to help recover from the pandemic. This bill aims to increase access to child care to individuals working in child care, families going through the therapeutic courts system, and parents pursuing higher education that cannot access these services due to their immigration status. The child care workforce is in crisis. Access to subsidies will enable child care workers to stay in the field and attract new employees. Parents should be able to be in the same classroom as their child and receive subsidy. Parents pursuing higher education, who are not eligible due to their child's immigration status are experiencing difficulties in completing their education because of the high cost of child care. For these parents, having access to child care would help them complete their degree, leading to better job opportunities to support themselves and their families. This bill should be expanded so all children regardless of immigration status could potentially be eligible for WCCC, which is already the case for higher education tuition assistance. Half of all college students experience some form of basic needs insecurity. The bill should be expanded to include students in bachelor and graduate degree programs. This bill takes strategic steps to address the child care crisis.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Claire Wilson, Prime Sponsor; Colleen Condon, Lilac City ELC; Joel Anderson, University of Washington Graduate and Professional Student Senate; Delora Morgan Chelsea; Reshonna Reynolds, MomsRising; Eli Goss, OneAmerica; Nancy Cruz, Community For Our College; xochilt lopez, Community For Our College; Jessica Tollenaar Cafferty, King County; Pamela Munizza, AFT Washington Clover Park Vocation Local 3913; Emily Murphy, Child Care Aware of Washington.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.