OLR Bill Analysis
sHB 5449

AN ACT CONCERNING THE ADMINISTRATION OF CERTAIN EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS AND THE PROVISION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES BY THE OFFICE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD.

SUMMARY

This bill authorizes the Office of Early Childhood (OEC) to use up to $1 million of the amount appropriated for five of its programs to carry out duties the bill names, including program evaluation and improvement, interagency coordination and collaboration, evaluative tools and infrastructure, and its other statutory duties. The bill limits, to no more than 2%, the amount OEC can expend for these purposes from any single program’s appropriation.

The bill also:

1. adds promoting the delivery of infant and toddler services to ensure optimal health, safety, and learning of children from birth to three years of age to OEC’s existing list of responsibilities (§ 1);

2. changes the Care 4 Kids program waiting list prioritization law (§ 3);

3. removes the fixed figure $8,927 per child cost in the school readiness program and instead requires the OEC commissioner to conduct a review of rates (per child cost) for the program at least once every three years (§ 8); and

4. adds transition to preschool and parental engagement and family supports through the two generational initiative to an existing list of approved ways the OEC commissioner can use unexpended school readiness funds (§ 9).
EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2018

§§ 2-7 — DIVERSION OF PROGRAM FUNDS FOR EVALUATION AND IMPROVEMENT

The bill authorizes OEC to use up to $1 million of the amount appropriated for five of its programs to carry out duties the bill names, including program evaluation and improvement, interagency coordination and collaboration, and evaluating tools and infrastructure, and its other statutory duties. The bill limits, to no more than 2%, the amount OEC can expend for these purposes from any single program’s appropriation.

The programs are:

1. Care 4 Kids, a child care subsidy program for low-income families;

2. the school readiness program, a state-supported preschool program with an educational component;

3. the quality enhancement grant program for child care centers and school readiness programs;

4. Nurturing Families Network, which seeks to reduce infant abuse and neglect by assisting new parents through hospital-based assessment and home visitation follow-up; and

5. the financial assistance program for neighborhood facilities, including day care centers.

The bill requires OEC to report, by January 1 of each year, to the Education Committee on how it has expended the funds, including the results of any evaluations. The bill makes conforming changes in the laws that authorize each of the five programs (§§ 3-7).

§ 3 — CARE 4 KIDS WAITING LIST PRIORITIZATION

The bill changes the Care 4 Kids law regarding waiting list prioritization. Under current law, the commissioner must establish the
waiting list based on the following prioritization:

1. Temporary Family Assistance (TFA) recipients, who are either employed or in employment activities (training or career-focused education) under the Department of Social Services’ Jobs First Employment Services (JFES) program (see BACKGROUND);

2. working families whose TFA was discontinued not more than five years before the date of the Care 4 Kids application;

3. teen parents;

4. low-income working families;

5. adoptive families of children adopted from the Department of Children and Families and who were granted an income standards waiver;

6. working families who are at risk of welfare dependency; and

7. any household with a child or children participating in the Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership federal grant program for up to 12 months based on Early Head Start eligibility criteria.

In addition to the above list, the bill requires the waiting list to prioritize “within and across” existing priority groups, including, (1) households with an infant or toddler and (2) children who are homeless, from very low income families, or who have special needs or are part of a vulnerable population as defined by OEC (45 C.F.R. 98.46). Due to the numerous variables, it is unclear how OEC will implement this prioritization.

§ 8 — SCHOOL READINESS

The bill removes the fixed dollar amount of $8,927 per child in the school readiness grant law and instead requires the OEC commissioner to conduct, by June 30, 2019, a review of rates for the school readiness program at least once every three years. The review must examine the rates being used in school readiness child day care contracts. The
commissioner may establish, within available appropriations, new rates based on the review results, provided the new rates are established to improve program quality and access.

This section, which eliminates the fixed dollar amount, is effective July 1, 2018, but the review of rates is not due until June 30, 2019. It is not clear what dollar amount or rates will be in place between those dates.

§ 9 — UNEXPENDED SCHOOL READINESS GRANT FUNDS

Current law authorizes the commissioner to use unexpended school readiness grant funds for, among other things, professional development for school readiness staff, assisting readiness programs in meeting accreditation requirements, developing and implementing strategies for children to transition from preschool to kindergarten, and other purposes.

The bill additionally authorizes OEC to use such funds to (1) develop and implement strategies for children to transition to preschool and (2) assist transitions through parental engagement and whole-family supports through OEC’s two generational initiative or other available resources.

BACKGROUND

TFA and JFES

Unless exempted by law, TFA recipients generally have to participate in JFES to remain eligible for TFA. TFA generally provides up to 21 months of cash assistance to needy families with children. JFES provides services and support to help adult caretakers secure permanent employment within the time the recipient is receiving TFA.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Education Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 35  Nay 0  (03/23/2018)