



2024 Issue Paper: Early Care and Education

Position Statement

The national and state Leagues have long supported the availability of affordable, high quality early care and education services.

LWVUS: Recognizing child care as a separate position and priority under “Social Policy,” the following was adopted by the 1988 Convention: “LWVUS supports programs, services, and policies at all levels of government to expand the supply of affordable, quality child care for all who need it, in order to increase access to employment and to prevent and reduce poverty.”

LWVWA: The League of Women Voters of Washington’s Positions support the early care and education of young children including preschool for children 3-5 years, quality child care programs, home visiting and other educational programs for parents as first teachers, programs for children with special needs, public- private partnerships to expand the early care system, and minimum standards for day care to provide for a safe, healthy, clean environments; creative and child oriented activities; competent caring providers and sufficient staff for the number of children in care.

Recent Early Care and Education Legislation

The biennial budget passed by the 2023 State Legislature provided significant funding to improve early care and education access and quality consistent with the provisions of the visionary 2021 Fair Start for Kids Act (ESSS Bill 5237). This included increased reimbursement rates for the state pre-K program (ECEAP), child care providers serving children through the Working Connections Child Care (WCCC), and Home Visiting contractors. These rate increases were intended to support the financial viability of programs, make it easier for them to recruit and retain staff, and improve the availability of services for low-income families. Funding was also provided to assist ECEAP and child care providers in serving children with complex needs, expand ECEAP including conversion to full-day slots to respond to the needs of working parents, provide Tribal early learning grants, and help homeless families retain child care subsidies.

LWVWA followed six early care and education bills that were enacted into law in 2023:

- HB 1106 to make it possible for caregivers to receive unemployment benefits when a job loss is related to lack of care.
- HB 1199 to prohibit homeowner associations from unreasonably restricting the use of units as a licensed family home child care or center.
- HB 1525 to provide child care assistance for enrollees in apprenticeship programs.

- HB 1550 to create a new Transition to Kindergarten Program aimed at coordination between early learning programs and schools.
- SB 5225 to broaden the availability of child care subsidies for immigrant families and children.
- SB 5316 to waive background check fees for child care applicants.

Summary of Issues for the 2024 Legislative Session

While expectations are modest for the 2024 supplemental budget session, efforts will continue toward implementation of the 2021 Fair Start for Kids Act. Among proposals being considered are:

- Increasing investments in Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation.
- Excluding child support, Social Security and SSI payments from family income in determining eligibility for child care subsidies (WCCC) and ECEAP.
- Increasing funding for ECEAP toward meeting the legislatively-mandated entitlement goal by 2026.

Looking forward to the 2025 Legislative Session, advocates are mobilizing toward a major change in how the state pays for child care services for at-risk and low and moderate income families. Rather than reimbursing providers based on what they charge privately-paying families, steps would be taken toward paying for the full-cost of high-quality child care including living wages and benefits for workers.

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