



January Newsletter



LEGISLATORS PROPOSE FAIR START FOR KIDS ACT

Declaring a child care emergency in Washington state, 37 legislators are co-sponsoring the Fair Start for Kids Act (HB1213). It would expand accessible, affordable child care and early development programs. The bill was introduced in the House January 15 and is now in the House Committee for Children, Youth and Families.

The fact is, child care was in emergency mode even before the pandemic. **A survey** of business leaders and parents conducted by SELF in early 2019 revealed that the majority of businesses have had employees turn down a job, more hours or a promotion, or even quit working due to child care issues. Often, the cost of child care is more than the employee earns. And child care slots at that time existed for only 40 percent of Clark County's 20,000 children age 0-5 who had all parents in the workforce.

Here are the high points of HB1213:

1. COVID-19 has devastated the existing child care industry, making it unduly burdensome for families to find child care. Without immediate action to support child care providers and expand access to affordable care, parents will not be able to return to work and children will lose valuable learning opportunities.
2. Access to affordable child care increases economic growth. A 2019 Department of Commerce study found that working parents forego \$14 billion each year in our state directly due to child care scarcity, disproportionately affecting women and families furthest from opportunity.
3. Without access to comprehensive, high quality perinatal to five services, children entering kindergarten are already behind in skills they need for success. This can affect the rest of their schooling, culminating in lower graduation rates.
4. The vast majority of child care providers are small businesses and nonprofits. The challenges of COVID-19 — reduced staffing ratios, cleaning supplies, protective equipment, etc. — have strained the viability of this model.

5. Low wages, limited or no health care and a lack of retirement benefits make it hard to attract and retain child care workers. These essential workers deserve fair compensation. Training, shared business services and other supports would stabilize the early learning workforce.

6. Noting strength in diversity, the bill intends to expand language access services.

7. By eliminating copayments for low income families and limiting copayments for families on subsidy to no more than 7 percent of their income, child care eligibility and accessibility would expand.

8. The bill also addresses infant and early childhood mental health issues.

You can read all 49 pages [at this link](#).

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2. Read more on the Fair Start Act. On the right hand side you can sign up for email notifications on this bill.

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Stay healthy and safe

Debbie Ham
Executive Director

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