



MAY
Newsletter



ACT GIVES KIDS A FAIR START

Landmark legislation make child care more accessible and affordable was signed into law on May 7th. That's great news for parents, and also for child care workers as they look forward to the bill's stabilizing and expanding their industry.

Washingtonians who work in early childhood have known for years that child care was in crisis in our state. While key legislators have raised the issue in recent years, it took a pandemic to put the spotlight on the crisis for the business community, general public, and the rest of the lawmakers. The Legislature passed the Fair Start for Kids Act, the largest investment in early learning in state history. Gov. Jay Inslee signed it into law May 7th at a Child Care Provider Awareness Day celebration with early learning advocates and legislators.

The Fair Start for Kids Act aims to help both providers and families by expanding daycare subsidies to more families, including middle-class ones, and reducing copays for them. Its multi-pronged approach includes:

- Making child care more affordable by reducing copays and expanding eligibility for the Working Connections Child Care and the Early Childhood Education and Assistance (ECEAP) programs.
- Supporting the expansion of child care by making capital investments to expand existing child care facilities and build new facilities, plus offering technical assistance and shared service hubs for child care businesses.
- Strengthening child care programs by expanding access to support services, mental health consultations, dual language supports and more.
- Growing recruitment and retention for child care businesses by increasing subsidy rates, expanding access to health insurance for providers and providing resources for professional development.

"It's about time!" said Debbie Ham, Director of SELF.

Before the pandemic, nearly half of parents in the workforce reported difficulties finding affordable child care. About 25,000 children in the Southwest Washington region have all parents in the workforce, and this lack of access impacts both families and employers. Statewide, the lack of child care is estimated to have cost employers around \$2.08 billion a year in turnover and lost work. Parents lost \$14 billion a year in wages due to child care issues. And that was pre-COVID!

"The child care industry was one of the hardest hit during

the pandemic. As communities reopen it is one of the most crucial in terms of allowing parents to return to work," said John McDonough, CEO of the Greater Vancouver Chamber of Commerce. "The multiple aspects of the child care situation this act addresses not only makes it possible for the providers to re-open and stabilize but it provides access to a much broader group of parents by addressing the qualifying income levels and reducing the co-pay families pay for care. By addressing the system it will have a strong and positive influence on the recovery of local economies across the state."

"Childcare tops the list of concerns for the vast majority of our households," said Sen. Claire Wilson (D-Auburn), the bill's sponsor. "This bill will help kids across our state and it will help parents keep their jobs and the salaries they need to take care of their families."

The investment in child care is funded in part by the capital gains excise tax legislation that also passed this session and was signed by the governor earlier this week.

Stay healthy and safe

Debbie Ham | Executive Director

SELFies for SELF with a Twist

We want to highlight our little ones by putting them both in front and behind the camera. We are looking for pictures that kids take of themselves. It is a fun activity that puts them in charge of how the photo is taken. See Robert's picture as an example. Great job! We can't wait to post your masterpiece on social media.

Email your photo and caption to Debbie Ham at debbie.ham@selfwa.org

Let's Kick COVID

All adults are now eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. It works, it's free and it's available in multiple locations.

SELF is rising to the challenge. We are joining fellow businesses across the region to be "Safe By Summer." Our goal is at least 80 percent of our staff to be completely vaccinated by August 15th. This not only protects you, your coworkers, family and friends, it also reduces the chance that other COVID-19 variants emerge.

Are you up for the challenge!! Let's Kick COVID!!

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