



Pass HB2446/SB6226

Continuity of Care Helps Children

Washington made a smart choice in 2010 to translate research into practice by increasing continuity of child care for a small group of families who also qualify for ECEAP or Head Start. After a year of study, it's been shown to both help families AND save money. **Expanding 12-month authorization periods to all families receiving child care assistance** makes sense for children, their families, child care providers, and our state budget.

Currently the maximum eligibility period for Working Connections Child Care is 6 months, and the average length authorized is less than that. Many families lose their subsidy through lost paperwork, DSHS errors, missed deadlines, conflicting information from call centers, and other administrative challenges. Losing the subsidy often means losing time at work, losing a job, or losing a child's position at a child care and having to find a new caregiver.



The Importance of Continuity of Care for Children

Repeated studies have shown the importance of the creation and maintenance of quality relationships between children and caregivers. When early relationships are nurturing, individualized, responsive, and predictable, they increase the odds of the outcomes we want—children who can develop strong relationships with adults and peers, with brains that have the foundations necessary for learning and health. Research shows that children who do not have this foundation are more likely to exhibit behavior problems and have trouble with the complex skills required for learning and thriving when they are older. High numbers of changes in center or family child care providers in the earliest years is linked directly to more aggressive and less outgoing behaviors among 4 and 5 year olds.

Washington's Pilot Study Showed Increased Continuity and Lower Costs to the State

Washington State University's evaluation of the pilot suggests that the 12-month extended subsidy program has a substantial impact on the stability and the quality of child care for families. The 12-month extended subsidy leads to a greater percentage of children who are placed in a child care center or a family child care home, and to a greater percentage of children who are placed in a *licensed* facility and one that offers a learning curriculum.

On the cost side, the report found that the eligibility extension had either no impact on program cost or reduced costs per family and per child. DSHS staff involved reported that the current 6-

month program requires more administrative time and effort for processing applications and that expansion would increase administrative savings.

Reporting Requirements and Increased Resources Available will Minimize Overpayment

Other states who have implemented the extended eligibility have not reported increased costs to taxpayers (Colorado, Michigan, Massachusetts) and after studying the issue Colorado and Michigan implemented the program specifically to save administrative costs. Safeguards were included in both Washington's pilot and in the current bill requiring self-reporting for significant income changes.

In 2011 Federal Office of Child Care released a memorandum identifying ways that states can and should promote the continuity of child care services and enhance the child care subsidy system. The number one item on their lists of suggested policies was a 12 month eligibility period for child care subsidy recipients, and their recommendation included the following:

“OCC has found that strengthening eligibility determination practices through strategies such as caseworker training and automated data matches is a more effective method of reducing error than increasing the frequency of eligibility determinations. Accordingly, OCC considers 12-month eligibility to be consistent with the goals of both program integrity and child-focused, family-friendly policies. A 12-month eligibility period ensures regular, periodic eligibility reviews while also reducing the administrative burden on States and minimizing disruption to children and families. periodic eligibility reviews while also reducing the administrative burden on States and minimizing disruption to children and families.

This bill represents a rare opportunity to promote the kind of child development policies that we know work while increasing governmental efficiency, helping parents and providers, and doing it all for very little, if any additional cost.

For more information, please contact:

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