

# 2026 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY: INVEST IN HIGH-PRIORITY, UNFUNDED EARLY LEARNING FACILITIES (ELF) FUND APPLICATIONS

The Department of Commerce is reviewing and scoring 192 Early Learning Facilities (ELF) Fund applications that would expand and maintain capacity to serve children in child care and preschool. Similar to previous years, the need far outweighs the resources available. With application requests totaling \$183.2 million, there is a total funding gap of \$127.3 million – including \$120 million for expansion grants and \$7.3 million for maintenance grants.

With ELF award announcements expected in late winter, **Capital Budget writers can help alleviate the child care crisis by “buying down” the list of approved shovel-ready projects.** Priority should be given to maintenance projects that will preserve existing capacity to serve children and families.

## Summary of 2025-2027 ELF Fund Expansion and Maintenance Applications

	Expansion Grants	Maintenance Grants
Family Child Care	13 applications \$1.6 million	26 applications \$2.9 million
Center-Based Care	91 applications \$166.7 million	62 applications \$13.2 million
Total Applications	104 applications \$167.2 million	88 applications \$16 million
ELF Funds Available	\$47.2 million	\$8.6 million
<b>Funding Gap</b>	<b>\$120 million</b>	<b>\$7.3 million</b>

*Expansion grants would increase the number of children and families with low incomes served through Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) and the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP), and maintenance grants would preserve existing capacity.*

**About the ELF Fund:** The ELF Fund makes high-quality, affordable preschool and child care available to more Washington families by preserving and expanding physical capacity to serve children. Through ELF Fund programs, Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) and/or Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) providers can access grants for pre-development, remodel, purchase, construction, and/or minor renovations of early learning facilities and classrooms. ELF Fund resources are prioritized for communities in greatest need, including:

- Rural counties and/or small cities and towns;
- Child care deserts (where the demand for care far outweighs the supply);
- Communities with low incomes

**The Early Learning Facilities Group is convened by Start Early Washington.**  
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