

2026 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA:

Protect Investments in Child Care



Investments in high-quality child care are taking root in communities across Washington. Continued availability of affordable early learning – through a mixed-delivery system that includes Working Connections Child Care (WCCC), Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP), and Transition to Kindergarten (TTK) – keeps families in the workforce, fuels our state’s economy and helps ensure kindergarten readiness. As lawmakers grapple with difficult budget decisions, children, families, and employers are counting on continued access to affordable care options through the state’s mixed-delivery system.



START EARLY WASHINGTON CALLS ON BUDGET WRITERS TO:

- **Continue serving Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) caseloads under current eligibility guidelines without adoption of a caseload cap:** Without WCCC subsidies, the cost of child care is simply unattainable for many of our state’s lowest income working families. With an estimated caseload of 40,000 working families by July 2026, working families are counting on this essential support.
- **Preserve access to Transition to Kindergarten (TTK):** TTK programs are provided at no cost to families and staffed by certificated educators through public schools. Maintain budgeted funding for the 7,266 eligible year-olds in need of extra preparation for kindergarten.

SUPPORTS FOR PROVIDERS

- **Fund Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) child care center subsidy rates at the 85th percentile of the 2024 Market Rate Survey:** This rate more accurately reflects the true cost of delivering high-quality child care and makes care more affordable for families.

MAINTENANCE AND EXPANSION OF FACILITIES

- **Fund approved and shovel-ready Early Learning Facilities (ELF) Fund projects:** The Department of Commerce is currently reviewing 325 ELF Fund applications for expansion and maintenance construction projects totaling \$277.4M, but the need far outweighs the resources available. Based on initial review, there is a funding gap of approximately \$200M for expansion projects and approximately \$18M for maintenance grants. **With ELF award announcements expected in late winter, supplemental investments could help alleviate a level of the child care crisis by “buying down” the list of approved shovel-ready projects.**

For more information, please contact:

Erica Hallock | ehallock1224@gmail.com | (509) 991-2390

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