

By Senator Smith

17-01338-25

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1                   A bill to be entitled  
2       An act relating to early education workforce support;  
3       providing a short title; creating s. 1002.996, F.S.;  
4       establishing the Early Education Workforce Support  
5       Pilot Program within the Department of Education for a  
6       specified period; providing the purpose of and funding  
7       for the program; defining terms; providing program  
8       services; providing early education worker eligibility  
9       requirements; providing department and participating  
10      provider responsibilities; providing reporting and  
11      recommendation requirements; providing for the future  
12      expiration of the program; providing for rulemaking;  
13      providing an effective date.

14  
15       WHEREAS, the Legislature finds that this state faces a  
16      critical shortage of early education workers due to low wages  
17      and high job demands, leading to instability in the child care  
18      sector, and

19       WHEREAS, the Legislature finds that providing access to  
20      free early education services for the children of early  
21      education workers can reduce the financial strain on and improve  
22      the job satisfaction of early education workers, and increase  
23      workforce retention for early education providers, and

24       WHEREAS, the Legislature further finds that supporting the  
25      early education workforce is essential for expanding access to  
26      high-quality early learning programs for all families in this  
27      state, and

28       WHEREAS, it is the intent of the Legislature to establish a  
29      program that provides free early education services to the

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30 children of eligible early education workers and strengthen this  
31 state's early education workforce by reducing barriers to  
32 employment and retention of early education workers, NOW,  
33 THEREFORE,

34  
35 Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

36  
37 Section 1. This act may be cited as the "Early Education  
38 Workforce Support and Access Act."

39 Section 2. Section 1002.996, Florida Statutes, is created  
40 to read:

41 1002.996 The Early Education Workforce Support Pilot  
42 Program.—There is established the Early Education Workforce  
43 Support Pilot Program for a period of 2 years, to be  
44 administered by the Department of Education to provide free  
45 early education services to eligible children of early education  
46 workers. Funding for the program shall be as provided in the  
47 General Appropriations Act. The department may also use any  
48 eligible federal funds, including, but not limited to, the Child  
49 Care and Development Block Grant Trust Fund.

50 (1) DEFINITIONS.—For purposes of this section, the term:

51 (a) "Early education worker" means a person who is a paid  
52 child care personnel as defined in s. 402.302 who works at least  
53 20 hours per week.

54 (b) "Eligible child" means the biological, adopted, or  
55 legal child of an early education worker who is not yet eligible  
56 for kindergarten and who resides with the early education  
57 worker.

58 (c) "Participating provider" means a child care facility

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59 licensed under s. 402.305, family day care home licensed under  
60 s. 402.313, large family child care home licensed under s.  
61 402.3131, or faith-based child care provider exempt from  
62 licensure under s. 402.316 that is approved by the department to  
63 offer free early education services through the program.

64 (d) "Program" means the Early Education Workforce Support  
65 Pilot Program.

66 (2) PROGRAM SERVICES.—The program shall provide funds  
67 directly to participating providers for the full cost of tuition  
68 of an eligible child selected to participate in the program,  
69 including either full-time or part-time care based on the needs  
70 of the family.

71 (3) EARLY EDUCATION WORKER ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS.—To be  
72 eligible for participation in the program, an early education  
73 worker must:

74 (a) Be a resident of this state who resides in a  
75 participating county and has an eligible child who resides with  
76 him or her.

77 (b) Be employed for at least 6 months by a child care  
78 facility licensed under s. 402.305 for a minimum of 20 hours per  
79 week.

80 (c) Provide proof of employment and residency in this  
81 state.

82 (4) DEPARTMENT RESPONSIBILITIES.—The department shall:

83 (a) Select at least two counties to participate in the  
84 program. Such counties must have the highest need for early  
85 education workers based on workforce shortages and access to  
86 child care services.

87 (b) Establish a process to verify the program eligibility

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88 of participating providers, early education workers, and  
89 eligible children.

90 (c) Establish participation requirements for participating  
91 providers and early education workers.

92 (d) Establish a grant mechanism and procedures to reimburse  
93 participating providers participating in the program.

94 (e) Monitor the implementation of the program to ensure  
95 equitable access.

96 (f) Evaluate the program's effectiveness in improving  
97 workforce retention for early education providers and access to  
98 child care for the children of early education workers.

99 (5) PARTICIPATING PROVIDERS RESPONSIBILITIES.—Participating  
100 providers must:

101 (a) Maintain compliance with all state and federal  
102 licensing and regulatory requirements.

103 (b) Submit the information and data required by the  
104 department, including an annual report detailing the enrollment  
105 of eligible children and the attendance and outcome of such  
106 children.

107 (c) Meet any other requirements established by the  
108 department.

109 (6) PROGRAM REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS.—Within 90 days  
110 after completion of the program, the department shall provide to  
111 the Legislature:

112 (a) A recommendation for the statewide expansion of the  
113 program.

114 (b) A report on all of the following:

115 1. Program enrollment.

116 2. Workforce retention rates.

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117       3. Financial impacts of the program.  
118       (7) EXPIRATION.—This section expires on June 30, 2028.  
119       (8) RULEMAKING.—The State Board of Education may adopt  
120 rules to administer this section, including rules to establish  
121 eligibility verification requirements, provider participation  
122 requirements, and reimbursement procedures.  
123       Section 3. This act shall take effect July 1, 2025.