



HB 21-1304: Enhancing Child, Parent, & Provider Experiences with a New State Department of Early Childhood

Rep. Sirota & Speaker Garnett/Sen. Buckner & Majority Leader Fenberg

The Passage of Proposition EE by voters in November 2020 established a graduated tax increase on tobacco and nicotine vaping products and created an historic opportunity to invest in the health and early education of Colorado children through the establishment of universal preschool. Beginning in 2023, Proposition EE is expected to raise approximately \$222 million annually to create and operate a **universal preschool program** so kids in their year before kindergarten have access to quality early childhood care and education. Children who attend preschool are less likely to have reading deficiencies, half as likely to be held back by third grade, and more likely to graduate on time and achieve long term career success.

Business leaders see the impending universal preschool design process as a catalyst to reimagine a complicated and fractured system that currently places a significant burden on Colorado families and the businesses providing early childhood care and preschool education.

The problem: **Complicated processes for families along with fragmentation of standards and program administration have been longstanding problems in Colorado's current early childhood programs. Despite the state's attempt to resolve these challenges, a systematic approach to early childhood still ceases to exist.** This fragmentation makes life more complicated for families, children, early care and education providers, and schools. Right now, early childhood is challenged by:

- Administration from at least two state agencies
- Funding from up to **five funding streams spread across two state agencies**
- Varying program standards from up to **six programs across multiple agencies**, which can be further complicated by requirements to meet federal to local provider Head Start standards.
- Quality evaluation and improvement efforts from **six unique initiatives across two state agencies**
- Workforce programs across **five initiatives**
- Policy decision-making authority held by at least **four entities**: School districts, counties, the State Board of Human Services/CDHS, and the State Board of Education/CDE.

The solution: **To promote alignment and improve access to high-quality early childhood programs, a new cabinet-level department of early childhood that can better govern programs serving young children and families is needed. This will alleviate the many administrative burdens and program requirements that children, families, and early care and education providers must navigate.**

- The goals of the new state agency will be to streamline existing administration and funding, create more user-friendly programs for parents and providers, and retain alignment with K-12, human services systems and other family support services while breaking down silos that currently exist in early childhood.
- Doing so will not only elevate the services themselves, but also the governance and authority to reflect the importance of this time in children's lives.

A new state agency provides the greatest opportunity to achieve a vision that puts children and families first.

Creation of a new Early Childhood Department



This legislation and the creation of a new state early childhood department meets the universal preschool design priorities created by EPIC, Colorado Succeeds and other business organizations:

Children and Families: Ensuring Access for All students

- ✓ *Supporting Colorado's future workforce and economic development by ensuring all children have access to quality preschool experiences.*
- ✓ *Empowering family choice and individualize funding to meet unique child needs and streamline with other community investments.*
- ✓ *Ensuring all children have access to preschool and prioritize those with the greatest need.*

Preschool Providers: Ensuring Access for All Licensed Providers

- ✓ *Ensuring participation and public funding is equally accessible to all licensed preschool providers.*
- ✓ *Addressing long-term capacity needs and reduce barriers to entry for individuals seeking opportunities to open child care and preschool programs.*

Design and Implementation: Ensuring Agility, Innovation, Efficiency, and Transparency

- ✓ *Design processes and systems with simplicity, efficiency, and ease of use for families and preschool providers.*
- ✓ *Implement program administration with agility, innovation, and transparency.*

The time to act is now!

Call or e-mail legislators and ask them to vote "Yes" on House Bill 1304. We need to let them know why our Early Childhood system needs to be elevated, streamlined, and reimaged for Colorado's families and economy.

<https://leg.colorado.gov/find-my-legislator>