

ASSEMBLY WOMEN AND CHILDREN COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

ASSEMBLY, No. 4179

with committee amendments

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: JUNE 9, 2022

The Assembly Women and Children Committee reports favorably Assembly Bill No. 4179, with committee amendments.

As amended by the committee, this bill establishes the “Thriving By Three” grant program to incentivize the development of child care programs for infants and toddlers and provide technical assistance to child care services providers for the expansion of infant and toddler child care slots. The purpose of the grant program is to address shortages in the number of regulated child care providers that are available for working families and support the developmental needs of young children. The Department of Human Services (DHS) is to establish the grant program in consultation with the Department of Education, Office of Licensing in the Department of Children and Families, and the New Jersey Economic Development Authority.

As amended, grants under the program are to be awarded to licensed child care providers, registered family day care providers, Head Start programs, charter schools, renaissance schools, and school districts on a competitive basis. The DHS will make separate one-time grants available to: (1) expand, renovate, or reconstruct existing facilities to increase the number of infant and toddler child care spaces and classrooms; and (2) recruit staff and provide staff development opportunities. These one-time grants may be awarded to a provider, program, school, or school district at separate times. The amount of each one-time grant will be determined by the Commissioner of Human Services, who will additionally establish selection criteria for the grant program. As amended, the bill authorizes an additional, one-time grant for family day care providers who are registered with the Department of Children and Families in accordance with the “Family Day Care Provider Registration Act,” P.L.1987, c.27 (C.30:5B-16 et seq.).

To be eligible for consideration for a grant award, a provider, program, school, or school district will be required to:

(1) submit an application to the commissioner, in a form and manner prescribed by the commissioner, outlining the purposes for which a grant award would be used;

(2) comply with the current child care licensing standards for infant and toddler child care, including, but not limited to, class size, child-to-staff ratios, and health and safety standards;

(3) participate in the State's child care quality rating and improvement system, Grow NJ Kids;

(4) require room supervisors to have earned an infant and toddler child development associate (CDA) or equivalent credential or to attain a CDA or equivalent credential within two years of the effective date of this act or within two years of commencing employment with the provider, program, school, or school district, whichever occurs later; and

(5) require that every six to eight rooms at the provider, program, or school be supervised by at least one individual who holds a bachelor of arts degree and has at least two years of early childhood experience, provided that no room supervisor will be responsible for supervising more than 24 children at one time.

In awarding grants, the commissioner will be required to establish a preference for providers, programs, schools, and school districts that:

(1) are located in communities with few or no child care options for infants and toddlers;

(2) are located in communities with high percentages of low-income families; and

(3) can align the provider's, program's, school's, or school district's infant and toddler child care programs with high-quality preschools, support collaborations for shared services, and build upon existing early childhood education services.

The commissioner will be required to publicize the existence of, and encourage providers, programs, schools, and school districts to apply to participate in, the grant program and provide technical assistance to the grant awardees.

Within one year after receiving a grant award under the program, a grant awardee will be required to submit a report to the DHS containing information on the provider's, program's, school's, or school district's use of the grant funds. The report is to include, at a minimum, information on the number of additional infant and toddler child care spaces created using grant funds, the number of additional staff hired and any staff development initiatives created using grant funds, increases or improvements in the provision of child care services as a result of the grant, and any notable changes in child care enrollment and attendance rates or other measures the provider, program, school, or school district observed since receiving the grant. The bill also requires the commissioner to submit a report to the Governor and the Legislature, no later than two years after establishing the grant program, detailing: the number of grant applicants; the number and amounts of grants awarded; the purposes for which grant funds were used; the information grant awardees are required to report under the bill; the number of additional infant and

toddler child care slots created using grant funds; and any recommendations concerning the continuation or expansion of the grant program.

The bill appropriates \$28 million to the DHS to effectuate the provisions of the bill. This appropriation will comprise \$22 million from the General Fund and \$6 million from the federal “Coronavirus State Fiscal Recovery Fund” established pursuant to the federal “American Rescue Plan Act”, Pub.L.117-2. Of the \$6 million appropriated in federal funds, \$5 million will be dedicated to grants awarded to cover the costs of renovating, improving, expanding, or reconstructing existing facilities to increase the number of infant and toddler child care spaces and classrooms, and \$1 million will be dedicated to grants awarded to cover the costs of staff recruitment initiatives and creating scholarships for staff development and training.

COMMITTEE AMENDMENTS:

The committee amended the bill to require that the grants under the program are to be awarded to charter schools and renaissance schools. Currently, the bill requires that the grants under the program are to be awarded only to licensed child care providers, registered family day care providers, Head Start programs, and school districts.

The committee amendments clarify that the grant program will comprise separate one-time grants to expand the number of existing infant and child care spaces and classrooms and one-time grants to cover staff recruitment and development, as well as to clarify that additional one-time grants will be available to family day care providers that are registered with the State. The amendments specify that the various one-time grants may be awarded to providers, programs, schools, and school districts at separate times.

The committee amendments clarify that applications are to be submitted in a form and manner prescribed by the commissioner, and require that applications outline the purposes for which a grant would be used.

The committee amendments replace the term “classroom teacher” with “room supervisor,” and clarify the requirements for room supervisors to attain a child development associate or equivalent credential.

The committee amendments revise the reporting requirements for grant awardees to include information on the number of additional staff hired and the staff development initiatives created using grant funds.

The committee amendments revise the reporting requirements for the DHS to include information concerning the purposes for which grant funds were used.

The committee amendments revise the appropriation to clarify how the appropriated amounts are to be used.

The committee amendments make various technical changes to address issues related to grammar and syntax and to reorganize the bill to better clarify how its provisions apply.