A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO EARLY LEARNING.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF HAWAII:

SECTION 1. The legislature finds that the demand for quality early care and education far exceeds the amount of available and qualified early childhood educators. Given the critical need to expand access to and the availability of high-quality early care and education programs for the benefit of the State's children and their families, which will ultimately benefit the entire society, particularly now as the State focuses on taking steps toward economic recovery from the unprecedented strain of COVID-19, the legislature recognizes that there must also be enough qualified educators to staff the programs. Furthermore, the legislature recognizes that these educators must have the research-based knowledge and competencies to work with young children and their families. Researchers have repeatedly demonstrated that children, particularly those who come from disadvantaged backgrounds, will benefit from early childhood education; however, it is emphasized that the education must be of high quality.
The legislature also finds that preschool teachers are amongst the lowest paid occupations, making less than parking lot attendants. Moreover, it is difficult to attract individuals to this highly specialized field with such low pay and the misperception that preschool teachers are babysitters. There are many professionals currently working in the early childhood field who aspire to work in higher paying positions and could benefit from obtaining the necessary credentials. A stipend program will assist with workforce development and support those individuals seeking to become high-quality early childhood educators, thereby moving the State toward reaching its goal of increasing access to high-quality early learning programs.

Acknowledging the importance of obtaining credentials or coursework in early childhood education, the stipend program aligns with national policy initiatives which recognize that workforce development is key to creating the kind of early childhood systems that make a significant and impactful difference for families and children by financing and bolstering programs that help offset the cost of tuition and encourage higher educational attainment. Furthermore, the federal
government recognized the necessity to develop the workforce of early childhood professionals and allowed for preschool development grant funds to be utilized for stipend and scholarship programs. There currently exists private sector funding for the establishment of the stipend program. Without qualified teaching staff, providers across the system will be unable to expand the inventory of early care and education opportunities. Where providers do develop programs, they run the risk of implementing programs that may be detrimental to children, many of whom are living in poverty and who have experienced trauma, and possibly excluding children through suspension and expulsion practices.

The purpose of this Act is to make stipends available through an early childhood educator stipend program, to be administered by the executive office on early learning, to encourage individuals, especially those already working in the early childhood field, to pursue a certificate, degree, or license in early childhood education and fill the critical need for qualified educators across the early learning system in programs delivered in either of Hawaii’s two official languages.

Recognizing early care and education as a specialized field,
this program shall be based on the strong foundations laid by
the existing Grow Our Own teacher stipend program currently only
available for kindergarten through grade twelve teachers and is
structured similarly to the stipend program funded through the
federal preschool development grant that ended in 2019.

SECTION 2. Chapter 302L, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is
amended by adding two new sections to be appropriately
designated and to read as follows:

"§302L— Hawaii early childhood educator stipend

program. (a) There is established the Hawaii early childhood
educator stipend program to be administered by the office to
address the shortage of early childhood educators who have
coursework in early childhood education.

(b) An individual shall be eligible for stipend
consideration if the individual:

(1) Is enrolled at a University of Hawaii campus or in a
University of Hawaii program and qualifies for Hawaii
resident tuition; and

(2) Is enrolled in a certificate, degree, or license
program in early childhood education, including those
in the Hawaiian language medium, which includes
courses required for the respective program of study,
within the University of Hawaii system.

(c) Immediately following completion of a certificate,
degree, or license program pursuant to subsection (b), stipend
recipients shall provide early care and education services
directly to children from birth through five years of age for at
least two consecutive years in one of the early learning
settings described in section 302L-2, including Hawaiian
language medium and Hawaiian immersion settings and early
learning settings at charter schools.

(d) If the recipient fails to complete a certificate,
degree, or license program pursuant to subsection (b), or to
satisfy the work requirements of subsection (c), stipend funds
shall be repaid as follows:

(1) For each year less than the designated number of years
that a stipend recipient does not meet the work
requirements of subsection (c), the recipient shall
repay a proportionate percentage of the total stipend
funds received; and

(2) The repayment shall be subject to the terms and
conditions set by the office for stipend repayment,
including circumstances under which recipients may be eligible for deferment or forgiveness due to hardship or inability to secure employment, as well as potential for fees for the collection of delinquent repayment.

Stipend funds repaid by a stipend recipient pursuant to this subsection shall be deposited into early learning special fund established pursuant to section 302L-5.

(e) In accordance with chapter 103D, the office may enter into written contracts with collection agencies to collect delinquent repayment of stipends owed to the office pursuant to subsection (d). A collection agency that enters into a written contract with the office to collect delinquent stipend repayments pursuant to this section may collect a fee from the debtor in accordance with the terms of, and up to the amounts authorized in, the written contract.

(f) The office may adopt rules pursuant to chapter 91 to implement and administer the stipend program, including the terms of repayment pursuant to subsection (d)."

SECTION 3. Section 302L-5, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is amended by amending subsection (a) to read as follows:
(a) There is established within the state treasury the early learning special fund, to be administered by the executive office on early learning, into which shall be deposited all moneys received by the office in the form of:

(1) Repayments made from the Hawaii early childhood educator stipend program pursuant to section 302L-(d);

(2) Fees;

(3) Grants;

(4) Donations;

(5) Appropriations made by the legislature to the fund; and

Revenues regardless of their source, and earnings on moneys in the fund. Moneys in the fund shall be used for the early learning system. Expenditures from the fund may be made by the office without appropriation or allotment."

SECTION 4. Statutory material to be repealed is bracketed and stricken. New statutory material is underscored.

SECTION 5. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 2021.

INTRODUCED BY
Report Title:
Early Childhood Educator Stipend Program; Executive Office on Early Learning; Early Learning Special Fund

Description:
Establishes an early childhood educator stipend program to be administered by the executive office on early learning to address the shortage of qualified early childhood educators in Hawaii. Requires stipend fund repayments for the early childhood educator stipend program to be deposited into the early learning special fund.

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