



One Hundred First Legislature - First Session - 2009
Introducer's Statement of Intent
LB 609

Chairperson: Tim Gay
Committee: Health and Human Services
Date of Hearing: February 26, 2009

The following constitutes the reasons for this bill and the purposes which are sought to be accomplished thereby:

Nebraska consistently ranks in the top five states with all available parents in the workforce yet we rank 50th in the nation in the level of eligibility we require for working families to qualify for child care work support. Child care is the #1 work support that keeps parents in the workforce and off of full assistance. This bill recognizes that helping working parents with child care assistance is not just a work support, but also a way to help children who are at risk of failing in school access high quality care that helps set the foundation for success in school and later in life.

LB 609 would ensure that children from low-income families have access to high quality care environments by doing three things:

1. Gradually increase the eligibility level for low-income, working families to have greater access to high quality care. Currently a family of four can make up to \$25,440/year to qualify for child care work support. The eligibility increase in the first year would extend the same benefit to working families who earn up to \$28,620/year for a family of four. Families must provide documentation they are working in order to receive this benefit.
2. Reinstate a period of 12 months of continuous eligibility as long as the family does not have income or household changes that would make them ineligible. Currently, eligibility is determined for an initial six months and monthly thereafter, making it difficult for both the provider and the family to keep children in the same care arrangement. Continuous eligibility does NOT mean that families are eligible regardless of income or household changes. All families are required to report any and all income and household changes to their caseworker within 10 days of the change in case the worker needs to re-determine eligibility.
3. Require the Department of Health and Human Services to offer families of low income a choice between receiving a contracted slot or a voucher. Currently Nebraska only allows families to access child care through a voucher system. Contracts will not only encourage development and stabilization of high-quality child care across the state, but

it will also allow families of low income to access high quality programs, thus giving more at-risk children the kind of solid early childhood foundation they need to start school on par with their more advantaged peers. Contracts would not change the amount currently paid to providers, but it will stabilize the provider's budget, encouraging them to serve greater numbers of at-risk children.

Principal Introducer:

_____ **Senator Heath Mello**