

ACT 203

H.B. NO. 692

A Bill for an Act Relating to the Preschool Open Doors Program.

Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Hawaii:

SECTION 1. The purpose of this Act is to expand the eligibility criteria for the preschool open doors program, thereby enhancing access to child care opportunities for families with young children. This expansion seeks to address the needs of families with young children by increasing access to affordable childhood care services, contributing to the positive developmental outcomes for Hawaii's youngest residents.

SECTION 2. Section 346-181, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is amended to read as follows:

“§346-181 Preschool open doors program. (a) There is established within the ~~[department a school readiness program to be known as the] department's child care assistance program~~ a preschool open doors program ~~[within the department's child care assistance program]~~. The program is intended to support families in accessing early learning services for young children. The program shall:

- (1) Provide access to ~~[school readiness]~~ early learning services that address children's physical, cognitive, linguistic, social, and emotional development;
 - (2) Require each provider to conduct ~~[school readiness]~~ early learning assessments; ~~and~~
 - ~~[(3) Give priority to children from low and moderate income families; and~~
 - (4) ~~(3)~~ Prepare children for school through either of the State's two official languages.
- (b) Subject to the availability of funds, the program shall ~~continuously~~ serve ~~[three and four year old]~~ children who are in the ~~[two]~~ three years ~~[prior to]~~ before kindergarten entry until they enter kindergarten pursuant to section 302A-411~~], with priority extended in the following order during a priority application period established for each upcoming state fiscal year:~~

- ~~(1) Children who are not eligible to attend public school kindergarten in the calendar year in which they turn five years of age because their birth date occurs after the kindergarten eligibility date pursuant to section 302A-411;~~
- ~~(2) Underserved or at-risk four-year-old children who were previously served as three-year-old children;~~
- ~~(3) Four-year-old children who were previously served as three-year-old children;~~
- ~~(4) Four-year-old children;~~
- ~~(5) Underserved or at-risk three-year-old children; and~~
- ~~(6) Three-year-old children;~~

provided that the department shall adopt rules, pursuant to chapter 91, to determine a child's underserved or at-risk status, if not duplicative of the rules already adopted under chapter 17-799, Hawaii Administrative Rules; and applications received after the end of the priority application period and through January 31 of each year shall be processed on a first-come, first-served basis for the remainder of the state fiscal year].

(c) A child care program chosen by a parent or guardian for the purposes of this chapter shall be limited to:

- (1) A group child care center that is licensed by the department under section 346-161;
- (2) A group child care home that is licensed by the department under section 346-161; or
- (3) An exempt center-based provider that meets the requirements of section 346-152.5.

(d) Participation in the program shall not require group child care centers or group child care homes to be accredited by an approved accredited body.

~~[(e)]~~ (e) Enrollment in the program shall be voluntary. A parent or guardian of a child enrolled in the program ~~[shall]~~ may share in the costs of the program through a copayment according to a sliding fee scale that is based on need pursuant to rules adopted by the department.

~~[(f)]~~ (f) The department may adopt interim rules to carry out the purposes of this section without regard to chapter 91 or 201M; provided that:

- (1) The department shall hold at least one public hearing prior to the adoption of interim rules;
- (2) The interim rules shall comply with all applicable state and federal laws; and
- (3) The interim rules shall be effective for no more than one year after their adoption.”

SECTION 3. Section 346-188, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is amended by amending subsection (b) to read as follows:

“(b) The department shall develop standards, policies, and procedures for the administration of the child care accreditation program, which shall, at minimum:

- (1) Provide upfront grant funding to cover the cost of accreditation by one of the national early learning accrediting organizations, ~~[as identified in section 346-184(b), or]~~ as approved by the director;
- (2) Provide grant funding for technical assistance to assist an eligible child care provider through the accreditation process; and
- (3) Be available to licensed group child care centers, licensed group child care homes, licensed infant and toddler child care centers, and registered family child care homes.”

SECTION 4. Section 346-184, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is repealed.

SECTION 5. Statutory material to be repealed is bracketed and stricken.¹ New statutory material is underscored.

SECTION 6. This Act shall take effect on January 1, 2026.

(Approved June 24, 2025.)

Note

1. Edited pursuant to HRS §23G-16.5.