

119TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. 5248

To authorize the Secretary of Health and Human Services to make grants to States to improve the knowledge, credentials, compensation, and professional development of early childhood educators working with children in early childhood education programs.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

AUGUST 5, 2026

Mr. LUJÁN (for himself, Mrs. SHAHEEN, Mr. HEINRICH, and Mr. KIM) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

A BILL

To authorize the Secretary of Health and Human Services to make grants to States to improve the knowledge, credentials, compensation, and professional development of early childhood educators working with children in early childhood education programs.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Early Childhood Edu-
5 cator Professional Improvement Act of 2026”.

1 **SEC. 2. PURPOSE.**

2 The purpose of this Act is to provide assistance to
3 States to improve the knowledge, credentials, compensa-
4 tion, and professional development of early childhood edu-
5 cators working with children in early childhood education
6 programs.

7 **SEC. 3. DEFINITIONS.**

8 In this Act:

9 (1) **EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PRO-**
10 **GRAM.**—The term “early childhood education pro-
11 gram” has the meaning given the term in section
12 812 of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20
13 U.S.C. 1161i–1).

14 (2) **INSTITUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION.**—The
15 term “institution of higher education” has the
16 meaning given the term in section 101(a) of the
17 Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1001(a)).

18 **SEC. 4. PROGRAM AUTHORIZED.**

19 (a) **IN GENERAL.**—The Secretary of Health and
20 Human Services, in consultation with the Secretary of
21 Education, is authorized to award grants to States to im-
22 plement and administer the activities described in section
23 6.

24 (b) **DURATION.**—

25 (1) **IN GENERAL.**—Each grant awarded under
26 this Act shall be for a period of 5 years, with fund-

1 ing provided annually subject to the availability of
2 appropriations and continued compliance with the
3 terms of the grant.

4 (2) RENEWAL.—A State awarded a grant under
5 this Act may apply for renewal of the grant at the
6 end of the 5-year grant period. The Secretary may
7 renew the grant if the State demonstrates compli-
8 ance with the requirements of this Act and satisfac-
9 tory program outcomes.

10 **SEC. 5. APPLICATIONS.**

11 (a) IN GENERAL.—Each State desiring a grant under
12 this Act shall submit an application to the Secretary of
13 Health and Human Services—

14 (1) that includes the information described in
15 subsection (b); and

16 (2) at such time, in such manner, and accom-
17 panied by such additional information as the Sec-
18 retary, in consultation with the Secretary of Edu-
19 cation, may reasonably require.

20 (b) CONTENTS.—Each application submitted under
21 subsection (a) shall include a description of the State’s
22 comprehensive early childhood professional development
23 system, including the following:

24 (1) A description of how the State’s system was
25 developed in collaboration with the State Advisory

1 Council on Early Childhood Education and Care
 2 designated or established under section 642B of the
 3 Head Start Act (42 U.S.C. 9837b), the State agency
 4 responsible for administering childcare, the State
 5 Head Start collaboration director, the State edu-
 6 cational agency, institutions of higher education, or-
 7 ganizations that represent early childhood educators,
 8 child care resource and referral organizations,
 9 staffed family child care networks, and credible early
 10 childhood education professional organizations.

11 (2) A designation of a State agency to admin-
 12 ister the grant program.

13 (3) A description of how the State's comprehen-
 14 sive early childhood professional development system
 15 provides—

16 (A) an oversight structure for such system;

17 (B) early childhood educator standards
 18 and competencies;

19 (C) a career and wage lattice;

20 (D) coordination with State higher edu-
 21 cation agencies, higher education accrediting
 22 bodies, and accredited 2- and 4-year institutions
 23 of higher education;

24 (E) articulation agreements between 2-
 25 and 4-year institutions of higher education and

credit-bearing opportunities and articulation agreements that recognize prior learning, early childhood educator credentials, and expertise in early childhood education and development;

(F) accessible higher education for working students through offering of college courses at accessible time and locations, with particular attention to rural areas;

(G) support to students who are dual language learners, or come from low-income or minority communities;

(H) training and expertise that reflects linguistically and culturally appropriate education and practices;

(I) use of workforce data to assess State and local workforce needs; and

(J) financing over time.

SEC. 6. STATE USE OF FUNDS.

A State that receives a grant under this Act shall ensure that grant funds are used to carry out the following:

(1) To provide scholarships to cover the costs of tuition, fees, materials, transportation, paid substitutes, and release time for early childhood educators employed in an early childhood education pro-

1 gram to pursue a bachelor's degree in early child-
 2 hood education or a closely related field.

3 (2) To support early childhood educators em-
 4 ployed in an early childhood education program, and
 5 who have obtained a bachelor's degree in a field
 6 other than early childhood education or a closely re-
 7 lated field, to attain a credential, licensure, or en-
 8 dorsement that demonstrates competence in early
 9 childhood education.

10 (3) To increase compensation for early child-
 11 hood educators who are enrolled and making
 12 progress toward a degree in early childhood edu-
 13 cation and to provide parity of compensation upon
 14 completion of such degree and retention in the early
 15 childhood education program.

16 (4) To provide ongoing professional develop-
 17 ment opportunities to early childhood educators and
 18 teacher assistants employed in an early childhood
 19 education program that address—

20 (A) all areas of child development and
 21 learning (cognitive, social, emotional, and phys-
 22 ical);

23 (B) teacher-child interaction;

24 (C) family engagement; and

1 (D) cultural competence for working with
2 a diversity of children (including children with
3 special needs and dual language learners) and
4 families.

5 **SEC. 7. SUPPLEMENT NOT SUPPLANT.**

6 Grant funds provided under this Act shall supple-
7 ment, and not supplant, other Federal, State, and local
8 funds that are available for early childhood educator prep-
9 aration and professional development.

10 **SEC. 8. MAINTENANCE OF EFFORT.**

11 A State that receives funds under this Act for a fiscal
12 year shall maintain the fiscal effort provided by the State
13 for the activities supported by the funds under this Act
14 at a level equal to or greater than the level of such fiscal
15 effort for the preceding fiscal year.

16 **SEC. 9. AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.**

17 There are authorized to be appropriated to carry out
18 this Act such sums as may be necessary for fiscal years
19 2027 through 2032.

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