

Alaska State Legislature

House Education Committee

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House Bill 376

Version 34-LS1545\N

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Sponsor Statement

“An Act relating to early intervention services for certain children; relating to optional services under the medical assistance program; and providing for an effective date.”

Alaska is currently on the wrong side of the “pay now or pay more later” equation for early intervention services. Approximately 90 percent of a child’s brain development occurs before age three, making early intervention one of the most effective ways to improve long-term outcomes.

This is why the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is sound policy. IDEA is a federal law that requires public education systems to provide students with disabilities ages three and older a free appropriate public education and ensures early intervention services for eligible infants and toddlers with developmental delays at no cost to families.

In Alaska, these federally mandated early intervention services are delivered through the Infant Learning Program (ILP), and the Alaska Department of Health (DOH) sets eligibility policies. Alaska is one of three states with the most restrictive eligibility standards for early intervention services in the nation. Under current policy, infants and toddlers must demonstrate a 50 percent developmental delay to qualify for services. Because this threshold is so high, many children with significant developmental delays cannot access early intervention during the most critical stage of development, often leading to more intensive and costly services later, ultimately increasing costs for the state.

HB 376 addresses this issue by lowering the eligibility threshold for Alaska’s Infant Learning Program to include children with a 25 percent developmental delay, bringing Alaska closer to national standards. Importantly, providing interventions and support to infants and toddlers with meaningful developmental delays, as well as their families, will improve their future outcomes and long-term success.

In addition, HB 376 expands and clarifies the definition of early intervention services in the statute, allowing services currently funded primarily with state funds to be reimbursed through Medicaid in the future. The bill also requires the Alaska DOH to review the list of conditions that qualify as disabilities under the program and provide recommendations to the legislature to ensure the program reflects current medical knowledge and best practices.

HB 376 is based on recommendations from the Alaska Interagency Coordinating Council for Infants and Toddlers and was developed with input from providers, advocates, and families across Alaska.