

Alaska GOP legislator's child care bill advances toward a final House vote

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The Alaska State Capitol in Juneau. (Emily Mesner / ADN archive)

JUNEAU — An Alaska House Republican's child care bill advanced on Thursday toward a final vote on the House floor.

Alaska's beleaguered child care sector has long struggled with long waitlists, low wages and high tuition costs. House Bill 89 was introduced last year by Anchorage GOP Rep. Julie Coulombe as a way to give corporations child care tax credits, and to subsidize tuition costs for more children.

A handful of Democrats and independents signed on last year to co-sponsor Coulombe's measure, which advanced on Thursday without objection from the powerful House Finance Committee.

The child care bill would expand the income threshold for families that can receive subsidies for tuition costs. The state Department of Health estimates that an additional 18,000 Alaska kids under 12 would meet the new criteria for financial assistance.

Families who receive the subsidies would have a maximum co-pay of 7% of their monthly incomes on child care under the measure.

The federal government currently pays all the child care subsidies received by low-income families in Alaska. Under Coulombe's bill, the state anticipates needing to contribute \$5.6 million per year for the newly-eligible children.

Coulombe said the bill's price tag has frustrated some progressive legislators as too small to see major changes for the child care sector, and too expensive for some of her conservative Republican colleagues.