

# Alaska House passes bill aimed at expanding access to child care

By **Wesley Early, Alaska Public Media - Anchorage**

February 28, 2024

Rep. Julie Coulombe, R-Anchorage, speaks in favor of House Bill 89, a bill aimed at increasing the accessibility of child care, on the floor of the Alaska House of Representatives on Feb. 28, 2024. (Eric Stone/Alaska Public Media)  
The Alaska House passed a bill Wednesday aimed at making child care more accessible and available in the state.

Rep. Julie Coulombe, an Anchorage Republican, sponsored House Bill 89. She said the bill is an effort to ease the strain on Alaska families who are facing rising child care costs and limited availability.

"They want to go back to work, they can't find child care," Coulombe said. "And then sometimes when they find child care, they can't afford it."

The bill makes several changes to the state code, including increasing the eligibility for the state's child care assistance program from families making 70 percent of the median household income to those making 105 percent. In comments in support of the bill, Rep. Jennie Armstrong, D-Anchorage, said that would expand eligibility to more than 18,000 additional Alaska families.

Coulombe's bill also allows businesses to get a tax credit for providing child care for their employees, either by operating a child care facility or by offsetting their employees' child care costs.

"It's a very specific and targeted way to try to incentivize the private sector," Coulombe said. "I don't think the government can solve this problem. I think everybody needs to kick in. The private sector needs to be helping. Communities need to be helping."

The bill also increases the amount of credits individual taxpayers can claim from \$1,000,000 to \$3,000,000.

The bill correlates with a lot of [the recommendations](#) made by the task force Gov. Mike Dunleavy established last year to address the state's child care crisis.

Wasilla Republican Rep. David Eastman voted against the bill. He argued the state would better provide for families by paying a full statutory Permanent Fund dividend, and said increasing the eligibility for child care assistance would make more people reliant on the state.

"Where we are going is more people participating in more government programs, receiving more public assistance through this and other ways, and less money for a dividend program in the future," Eastman said.

Rep. Will Stapp, a Republican from Fairbanks, disagreed with Eastman's position, and said the bill would actually make people less reliant on public assistance.

"If you're making less money, and you're at home now, you probably are on public assistance," Stapp said. "So the way I look at this program is it gives people the individual liberty and freedom to go out, contribute to the labor force. If folks want to work, they can have the opportunity to do that and make sure that their kids have a safe place."

The bill ultimately passed 35 to 5. It now moves to the Senate.