

STATE OF OKLAHOMA

2nd Session of the 59th Legislature (2024)

HOUSE BILL 3531

By: Ranson

AS INTRODUCED

An Act relating to children; creating the Early Childhood Task Force; providing for task force membership; providing for election of chair and vice-chair; permitting the selection of honorary chair; directing task force to provide reports; disallowing certain members from receiving compensation or reimbursement; permitting certain members to claim certain expenses; requiring task force to be subject to the Oklahoma Open Records Act and Oklahoma Open Meeting Act; providing that task force documents and recommendations shall only be considered advice; providing a vision statement; providing a mission; providing principles the task force is to be guided by; providing tasks for the task force; providing for codification; and providing an effective date.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF OKLAHOMA:

SECTION 1. NEW LAW A new section of law to be codified in the Oklahoma Statutes as Section 390 of Title 10, unless there is created a duplication in numbering, reads as follows:

A. There is hereby created the Early Childhood Task Force to study and make recommendations to improve access to and increase the quantity of high-quality early childhood services.

1       B. The task force shall be comprised of nineteen (19) members  
2 to be appointed as follows:

3       1. The Secretary of Human Services, or a designee;

4       2. The State Commissioner of Health, or a designee;

5       3. The Secretary of Commerce, or a designee;

6       4. The Secretary of Education, or a designee;

7       5. A representative of business selected by the State Chamber  
8 of Oklahoma;

9       6. A representative of a philanthropic organization dedicated  
10 to early childhood;

11       7. A representative selected by the Director of Oklahoma Head  
12 Start;

13       8. A representative selected by the Oklahoma Child Care  
14 Association;

15       9. The Executive Director of Oklahoma Partnership for School  
16 Readiness;

17       10. A representative of the Children's Advocacy Centers of  
18 Oklahoma;

19       11. A representative of the Oklahoma Institute for Child  
20 Advocacy;

21       12. An Oklahoma State Senator selected by the Pro Tempore of  
22 the Senate;

23       13. An Oklahoma State Representative selected by the Speaker of  
24 the House of Representatives;

1       14. A representative of the Oklahoma Parent Teacher  
2 Association;

3       15. A representative of parents with young children selected by  
4 the Oklahoma Early Childhood Program (OECF);

5       16. A representative responsible for programs under Part C of  
6 the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) selected by  
7 the State Commissioner of Health;

8       17. A representative from Oklahoma State University's  
9 Department of Human Development and Family Science selected by the  
10 Director of the Department of Human Development and Family Science;

11       18. A pediatric specialist selected by the Oklahoma Chapter of  
12 the American Academy of Pediatrics (OKAAP); and

13       19. A child development specialist selected by the Early  
14 Childhood Education Institute.

15       C. The Early Childhood Task Force shall elect a chair and vice-  
16 chair, or co-chairs, from the Task Force's membership, and the chair  
17 or co-chairs shall establish rules for the Task Force's meetings and  
18 the conducting of business. Upon the absence or vacancy of the  
19 chair, the vice-chair shall serve as chair in an acting capacity.

20       D. An honorary chair may be selected to serve in a ceremonial  
21 capacity. The honorary chair shall not serve as a voting member of  
22 the Task Force but may engage with the work of the Task Force in an  
23 advisory role or in a manner deemed appropriate by the chair or co-  
24 chairs.

1 E. The Task Force shall develop and submit an initial report to  
2 the President Pro Tempore of the Senate and the Speaker of the House  
3 of Representatives by November 2024 and a final report by November  
4 2025.

5 F. Members shall receive no compensation or reimbursement for  
6 expenses and shall serve voluntarily. Officers or employees of  
7 state agencies who are appointed to the Task Force as part of their  
8 duties shall be authorized to participate on the Task Force and may  
9 claim subsistence, allowance, mileage, or associated expenses from  
10 their respective agency budgets as permitted by law.

11 G. The Task Force shall be subject to the Oklahoma Open Records  
12 Act and the Oklahoma Open Meeting Act.

13 H. Plans, reports, or recommendations of any nature adopted by  
14 the Task Force shall be considered advice to the Legislature and  
15 shall not be construed as official policies, positions, or  
16 interpretations of laws, rules, or regulations by any department or  
17 agency of state government, nor shall any such department or agency  
18 be bound in any manner to consider such advice when conducting their  
19 advisory and regulatory affairs.

20 I. The Task Force shall be guided by the following vision  
21 statement: Oklahoma children, especially those between zero (0) and  
22 five (5) years of age deserve healthy childhoods that are supported  
23 by a robust early childhood system which improves outcomes and  
24 effectively provides high-quality early care and education, adapts  
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1 to the needs of families and communities, and is equitably  
2 accessible to all communities across the state.

3 J. The Task Force shall work towards the mission of creating a  
4 framework for a single agency governance structure for early  
5 childhood programming that consolidates initiatives and funding  
6 under the leadership of a new cabinet- or department-level position.

7 K. The Task Force's work shall be guided by a commitment to the  
8 following principles:

9 1. Children, family, and community well-being shall be centered  
10 throughout the Early Childhood Task Force's work;

11 2. Efforts shall be focused on maximizing efficiencies to  
12 reduce the administrative burdens on families and improve access to  
13 early childhood services through the creation of a new executive  
14 agency or department;

15 3. The consolidation of early childhood services shall be  
16 informed by what families and communities say they want and need;

17 4. Access to programs and services shall be equitable and  
18 available to all children and families regardless of socioeconomic  
19 status or geographic location;

20 5. Intentional focus shall be placed on developing strategies  
21 to reach families and young children in care deserts or furthest  
22 from opportunity and existing resources;

23 6. Access to affordable and quality healthcare, nutrition,  
24 childcare, mental health, home visiting, early intervention, support  
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1 for families, early learning, and other services in the critical  
2 prenatal to five (5) age period will decisively impact academic  
3 success, economic opportunities, and the prosperity of Oklahoma;

4 7. Efforts shall be made to use data-informed approaches and  
5 explore better ways to develop shared data systems;

6 8. Work shall focus on strengthening and expanding the  
7 childcare delivery system already in use in Oklahoma;

8 9. Alignment across sectors and state agencies will increase  
9 capacity, maximize funding, and create a more streamlined delivery  
10 of services;

11 10. The importance of growing a diverse and well-supported  
12 early childhood workforce shall remain at the forefront and be  
13 informed by the Task Force's work;

14 11. While focusing on advancing the delivery system, work shall  
15 highlight the importance of defining quality care and expanding  
16 capacity and access to create a greater quantity of quality  
17 services;

18 12. To incentivize innovation and respond to family needs,  
19 communities must be empowered to develop local, community-based  
20 solutions that take a whole-child and whole-family approach in  
21 responding to needs;

22 13. To ensure holistic childhood well-being and improve health  
23 outcomes, there must be alignment between state efforts to improve  
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1 early learning and care and existing prenatal and maternal health  
2 initiatives; and

3 14. Strengthening early childhood developmental health is vital  
4 to ensuring that children are prepared to achieve academic success  
5 and are setup for lifelong learning.

6 L. The Task Force's duties shall include:

7 1. Conducting an analysis of the current early childhood  
8 delivery system in Oklahoma and how it is financed with specific  
9 focus on gaps, inefficiencies, and redundancies. This work should  
10 focus on how creating a single-agency governance structure for early  
11 childhood services could overcome these challenges and improve how  
12 care is delivered, accessed, and funded. This analysis must  
13 specifically include:

- 14 a. a review of current early childhood programs and  
15 policies dispersed between the Department of Human  
16 Services, State Department of Health, Oklahoma  
17 Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse  
18 Services, and the State Department of Education. The  
19 review should pay special attention to where current  
20 statutory authority over certain operations exists and  
21 where possible areas of redundancy occur,
- 22 b. a review of how current funding systems blend and  
23 various funding opportunities, with special attention  
24 as to how funding streams are currently utilized for  
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1 early childhood programs that are housed across  
2 departments. This fiscal review should map the routes  
3 all private, public, federal, and state funding  
4 streams take from funding authority to program  
5 application,

6 c. a review of how Oklahoma might integrate existing  
7 programming into a consolidated delivery system and  
8 what needs might exist for new programming that the  
9 state currently lacks,

10 d. recommendations on how cross-agency collaboration and  
11 partnerships can be fostered to develop a whole-of-  
12 government approach to strengthening the delivery of  
13 early childhood services in a single-agency model,  
14 (1) specifically ensuring that data infrastructure is  
15 integrated across agencies, account for both  
16 qualitative and quantitative methods, and can be  
17 widely utilized by multiple state agencies,

18 e. recommendations on how a single executive agency or  
19 department might maximize efficiencies for early  
20 childhood providers and their workforce. This work  
21 should determine how licensing, workforce development  
22 and support, and facility review can be improved to  
23 eliminate barriers to entry for providers and  
24 professionals. This should also include a review of  
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- 1 current regulatory structures that complicate the  
2 process of entering the early childhood sector,
- 3 f. recommendations on how a single executive agency or  
4 department can strengthen the existing health care  
5 workforce to better support the development of young  
6 children and well-being of mothers through improved  
7 access to comprehensive and preventive care. This  
8 should also include a review of how to secure improved  
9 health outcomes for children, financial sustainability  
10 of delivery models, and cultivating workforce  
11 pipelines,
- 12 g. an analysis of key lessons learned from states already  
13 advancing consolidated systems of early childhood  
14 governance to inform Oklahoma's own process;

15 2. Conducting a series of stakeholder engagement opportunities  
16 to elicit feedback on the current early childhood governance  
17 structure and better understand the needs of parents, families,  
18 providers, and businesses;

- 19 a. Following the engagement of stakeholders, the Task  
20 Force shall conduct a review that synthesizes feedback  
21 received from families, providers, community leaders,  
22 and the business sector. This review shall include  
23 recommendations on how the state delivery system and  
24 governance model can be improved to respond to family  
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1 and community needs. It shall also include  
2 recommendations for how the state can better engage  
3 with parents, families, and communities on a regular  
4 basis to ensure family-voice is centered in the work  
5 of state agencies;

6 3. Drafting a transition plan to ensure the continuous  
7 operation of state services upon the creation of a new state agency  
8 for early childhood. This plan shall:

- 9 a. include detailed recommendations for what programs and  
10 services should remain in their current place or  
11 transition into a new agency. Each recommendation  
12 shall consider the challenges and benefits of moving  
13 programs from one agency to another,  
14 b. focus on movement between agencies and how  
15 collaboration can be strengthened with nonexecutive  
16 agencies. It shall also include recommendations for  
17 any necessary interagency agreements,  
18 c. include a review of what additional funding and  
19 resources might be needed to transition to a single-  
20 agency governance model effectively and efficiently,  
21 d. Provide recommended goals and metrics for the agency  
22 to strive towards once operational, and  
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4. Drafting proposed legislation that creates a new cabinet-level, single state agency that oversees Oklahoma's early childhood education and care programs.

SECTION 2. This act shall become effective November 1, 2024.

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