

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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