

WSPTA Testimony on HB 1351

Jan 29, 2019, House Human Services & Early Learning Committee

My name is Sylvia Gil and I am testifying on behalf of the Washington State PTA in support of House Bill 1351

The Washington State PTA is in support of increasing access to high-quality preschool and supports on its platform legislation or policies to develop a plan to ensure that all preschool-age children in our state have access to preschool that is:

- High-quality
- Local
- Inclusive
- Evidence-based
- Developmentally appropriate

This legislation is aligned with aims for a plan to increase access to high-quality preschool

- The research is clear to show that high quality preschool can have lasting impacts for k-12 outcomes and life; and impact equity by addressing the opportunity gap at one of the earliest points in a child's life
- As a parent of a preschooler, every day I see my daughter learning new skills and gaining important social and emotional awareness that will provide a critical foundation for school readiness

The issue for our state is access – our state preschool program is of high-quality, but a low eligibility threshold has created a gap where children are left out

- The gap exists for families that cannot afford tuition for preschool and cannot also qualify for head start or ECEAP
- For families that make above 110 percent of the federal poverty level, paying the full cost of tuition for private preschool would amount to a significant portion of family income and this puts preschool out of reach
- Family income should not impact a child's ability to be ready for kindergarten, but our current kindergarten readiness data shows that readiness is lower for children from families with income at lower income levels; for children from families that are non-low-income the rate of readiness is still only 61 percent

To ensure that all children have the best opportunity to be prepared for school, we must address this disparity.

We urge you to pass HB 1351 to allow more children from families along the continuum of income to participate in our state high-quality preschool program

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you and for considering this legislation.