

HOUSE BILL NO. 835

INTRODUCED BY N. DURAM, L. SMITH, D. LENZ, Z. WIRTH

A BILL FOR AN ACT ENTITLED: "AN ACT EXTENDING THE AT-HOME INFANT CARE PROGRAM TO 3 YEARS; PROVIDING AN APPROPRIATION; AMENDING SECTION 52-2-710, MCA; AND PROVIDING AN EFFECTIVE DATE."

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MONTANA:

Section 1. Section 52-2-710, MCA, is amended to read:

"52-2-710. At-home infant care program -- definition. (1) There is an at-home infant care program for low-income families in which a parent provides full-time child care for the family's infant under 2-3 years of age that will be funded if a specific appropriation is added to the general appropriations act or by budget amendment if funds become available from federal or private sources. Subject to subsection (2), the family may receive a payment in lieu of child-care assistance if the family meets the following eligibility requirements:

- (a) The family is not receiving cash assistance under Title 53, chapter 4, parts 2 and 6.
- (b) The family has not previously received a total of 24-36 months of at-home infant care assistance under this section.
- (c) The family is at or below 150% of the federal poverty level.
- (d) The family has fulfilled the following work requirements for 1 out of the 3 months prior to entering the program:
 - (i) 120 hours a month for two-parent families, which may be the contribution of one or both parents;
 - (ii) 60 hours a month for single-parent families;
 - (iii) 40 hours a month for single-parent families who are attending postsecondary education or training.
- (e) A parent must be 18 years of age or older or, if under 18 years of age, have attained an equivalency of completion of secondary education, as provided in 20-7-131, or a high school diploma.

~~(f) A parent must meet any additional requirements as provided in administrative rules.~~

(2) A parent who is under 18 years of age and attending high school or a program for equivalency of completion of secondary education, as provided in 20-7-131, may receive benefits for months outside of the regular school year.

(3) For the purposes of this section, "parent" means a birth parent, a stepparent, a foster parent, or a guardian who is acting in loco parentis.

(4) The maximum rate of assistance allowed is equal to the amount of child-care assistance for infant family care for the appropriate district, as adopted by the department by rule. The family may not receive subsidies for child care for other children in the family.

(5) A participating family shall report income and other family changes as specified by rule. State agencies shall treat income received under this program as earned income.

(6) Family members may participate in education and work activities as long as one or both parents provide care full time for the infant."

NEW SECTION. **Section 2. Appropriation.** (1) There is appropriated \$2 million from the general fund to the department of public health and human services for each year of the biennium beginning July 1, 2025.

(2) The appropriation must be spent for the purposes of the at-home infant care program provided for in [section 1].

(3) The legislature intends that the appropriation in this section be considered part of the ongoing base for the next legislative session.

NEW SECTION. **Section 3. Effective date.** [This act] is effective July 1, 2025.

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