

Position Statement on House Bill 2400, Printer's Number 3512

Issued September 30, 2022

Position

The Pennsylvania Association for the Education of Young Children (PennAEYC), Trying Together, and First Up: Champions for Early Education support House Bill 2400 PN 3512. This legislation recognizes the importance of quality care and education as parents choose a provider for their children. It gives child care providers the option to post their STAR-level rating in a public-facing location utilizing a Department of Human Services (DHS) issued placard and post their STAR-level rating on their website. The provider may also provide their STAR-level rating and the DHS website in writing to the family at the time of application, so families can obtain information on the Keystone STARS Program.

Recognizing that a skilled and stable teaching workforce maintains a high-quality early learning environment, it is important that teachers have the specialized content knowledge which supports children in their cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development that lays the foundation for all future learning competencies. As amended, Section 923 (c) includes language that requires DHS to create a rubric that would provide a pathway to permit appropriate demonstration of a combination of staff qualifications, work experience and professional development, quality early childhood education program activities, partnerships with families and communities and effective leadership and program management when applying for additional STARS. In addition, the bill as amended includes identical language in Article X to ensure the legislation applies to both non-profit and for-profit providers.

Bill Summary

HB 2400 amends the Human Services Code, Articles IX and X, to add a section to allow providers to:

- Post their STAR-level rating on their website;
- Provide the STAR-level rating in writing to the parent in a linguistically appropriate manner along with the DHS website where information on the Keystone STARS Program can be found and;
- Obtain the DHS-issued placard with their STAR-level rating which may be posted in a public-facing location.

DHS would be responsible for issuing the placards, which must be clear, visible, readable and linguistically appropriate. The placard must also include the provider name, DHS' name, the date the placard was issued, STAR-level, and address, phone number, website with information on the Keystone STARS Program and the email address of DHS.

HB 2400 also requires DHS to issue guidance that establishes a Keystone STARS rubric which would provide a pathway for child care providers to permit appropriate demonstration of a combination of staff qualifications, work experience and professional development, quality early childhood education program activities, partnerships with families and communities and effective leadership and program management when applying for additional STARS. This amendment addresses our concern with a prior printer's number.

The bill also makes updates to the term "day care" to change it to "child care" in Articles IX and X.

The act would take effect in 180 days.

Background

Keystone STARS is Pennsylvania's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) for early care and education programs. A QRIS is a continuous quality improvement systemic approach to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early and school-age care and education programs. Keystone STARS aims to improve, support and recognize the continuous quality improvement efforts of early learning programs. One of the primary goals of Keystone STARS is to provide families with a way to choose a quality early care and education program.

All certified child care providers are included in Keystone STARS and the system has four STAR-level ratings, STAR 1-4. Providers maintaining a certificate of compliance with no additional activities are designated as STAR 1 programs and STAR 3 and 4 providers represent programs that have achieved high-quality designations. Similar to the certification process, DHS, through the Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL), issues a STARS designation certificate, which is intended to be prominently posted as well. This is part of DHS policy. In addition to the posting of this information on-site, DHS also maintains the www.findchildcarepa.gov which displays child care provider inspection history and STAR rating, along with other helpful information to aid families in the decision of choosing a program for their child.

OCDEL partners with regional Early Learning Resource Centers (ELRCs) to support quality for providers and access for families through the Keystone STARS and Child Care Works Subsidized Child Care programs. Regionally, the ELRCs provide continuous quality improvement through individualized coaching of providers to obtain higher STAR-levels and to support understanding and meeting compliance measures. ELRC Quality Coaches can be utilized to guide providers through this change and offer assistance if needed.

A skilled and stable teaching workforce maintains a high-quality early learning environment and it is important that teachers have the specialized content knowledge which supports children in their cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development that lay the foundation for all future learning competencies. A high-quality program expects and demands the appropriate knowledge and credentials of professionals. Teachers are the foundation of high-quality early education.

Recommendations and Rationale

Allowing providers to post their STARS-level rating on their website and in a public-facing location using a DHS-issued placard, along with sharing it in writing at application, is an important tool in helping families understand the importance of quality in their decision-making about child care options. We believe all of Pennsylvania's children deserve the opportunity to attend a child care program which has met high-quality standards, so they have the opportunity to grow, learn and succeed. The more information which can be provided to families, so they understand the importance of quality early care and education in preparing their children for school and life success will ultimately increase demand for STAR 3 and 4 providers.

At the same time, our organizations recognize the unmet need in the child care system is significant. Further investments are needed at the state and federal levels to help families afford high-quality child care that elevates their child's potential, improves compensation for the workforce to attract and retain the workforce so every child can grow, learn and succeed.

We appreciated the opportunity to provide feedback early in the session and this summer and are pleased to see our concerns addressed in HB 2400 as amended.

Educating families about Keystone STARS should be the core of HB 2400. Conducting a public education campaign to educate parents on quality and Keystone STARS is critical prior to the parent seeing the placard that a child care provider may publicly display or rating they post on their website. In our comments to the sponsors in 2021, we highlighted that providers believed that the public education piece on educating parents about STARS and explaining what quality means was missing, however they did not believe this responsibility should be placed solely on providers. Although the bill requires the website where information on STARS can be found to be placed on the placard and provided in writing to parents, it is a passive public education effort.

Through a small focus group of providers in February 2021, it was shared that families need to be educated on Keystone STARS to help them understand what quality is well before choosing a child care provider. Providers also noted that families are choosing them as providers because of their location, hours, and cost, with cost being the biggest factor, followed by whether the provider has availability. Providers also do not see families choosing them because of their STAR-level rating. Providers agreed that a robust media campaign on Keystone STARS along with posting their STAR-level rating would be effective in increasing the number of families that consider quality when choosing their provider.

Fiscal Impact to Child Care Provider Community

As written, this bill will not have a fiscal impact to the child care provider community.