

As Introduced

136th General Assembly

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2025-2026

H. B. No. 1028

Representative Williams

To enact sections 5181.01, 5181.02, 5181.03, 1
5181.04, 5181.05, 5181.06, 5181.07, and 5181.08 2
of the Revised Code to enact the Early Childhood 3
Opportunity and Enrollment Act. 4

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF OHIO:

Section 1. That sections 5181.01, 5181.02, 5181.03, 5
5181.04, 5181.05, 5181.06, 5181.07, and 5181.08 of the Revised 6
Code be enacted to read as follows: 7

Sec. 5181.01. As used in this section: 8

(A) "Department" means any of the following: 9

(1) A department as defined in section 121.01 of the 10
Revised Code; 11

(2) A county department of job and family services as 12
described in section 329.01 of the Revised Code; 13

(3) Any authority, board, bureau, commission, department, 14
division, entity, or other instrumentality of a county, city, 15
health district, school district, village, or township; 16

(4) Any private agency, entity, or organization operating 17
a head start program, as defined in section 5104.01 of the 18
Revised Code, or providing services as described in divisions 19

<u>(B) (11) and (12) of this section.</u>	20
<u>(B) "Public assistance" means any financial assistance,</u>	21
<u>medical assistance, or social services that are provided under a</u>	22
<u>program administered by a department. "Public assistance"</u>	23
<u>includes any of the following:</u>	24
<u>(1) The supplemental nutrition assistance program as</u>	25
<u>administered under section 5101.54 of the Revised Code;</u>	26
<u>(2) The early childhood education grant program</u>	27
<u>established under section 5104.53 of the Revised Code;</u>	28
<u>(3) The child care cred program established under section</u>	29
<u>5104.54 of the Revised Code;</u>	30
<u>(4) Publicly funded child care administered under section</u>	31
<u>5104.30 of the Revised Code;</u>	32
<u>(5) The head start program as defined in section 5104.01</u>	33
<u>of the Revised Code;</u>	34
<u>(6) The Ohio works first program established under section</u>	35
<u>5107.03 of the Revised Code;</u>	36
<u>(7) The prevention, retention, and contingency program, as</u>	37
<u>established in section 5108.02 of the Revised Code;</u>	38
<u>(8) The medicaid program;</u>	39
<u>(9) The help me grow program established under section</u>	40
<u>5180.21 of the Revised Code;</u>	41
<u>(10) The part C early intervention services program</u>	42
<u>administered by the department of children and youth pursuant to</u>	43
<u>section 5180.30 of the Revised Code;</u>	44
<u>(11) Funding made available and services provided under</u>	45
<u>part B of the "Individuals with Disabilities Education Act," 20</u>	46

U.S.C. 1411 to 1419;

(12) Funding made available and services provided under
the federal maternal, infant, early childhood home visiting
program, 42 U.S.C. 711.

Sec. 5181.02. (A) As soon as practicable after an
application for public assistance is submitted, the department
responsible for administering the public assistance program
shall contact the applicant to determine if the applicant is the
parent or guardian of a child who is five years of age or less.
If the applicant indicates to the department that the applicant
is such a parent or guardian, the department shall provide to
the parent or guardian an early childhood opportunity
orientation.

(B) During the early childhood opportunity orientation,
the department shall inform the parent or guardian about other
public assistance programs relating to early childhood for which
the child or child's family may be eligible, including by
explaining the other program's eligibility conditions and
benefits. The orientation shall not be limited to providing the
parent or guardian only with a list of public assistance
programs, web site addresses, or telephone numbers. Rather, to
the extent permitted by federal law and with the parent's or
guardian's permission and notwithstanding any conflicting
provision of the Revised Code, the department also shall assist
the parent or guardian in directly contacting other departments
responsible for administering public assistance programs
relating to early childhood and shall use any information
included in the application submitted under this section to
directly assist the parent or guardian in completing or
submitting an application for public assistance relating to

early childhood.

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(C) This section does not authorize a department that is
not responsible for administering a public assistance program to
determine if a child or child's family is eligible to
participate in the public assistance program.

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Sec. 5181.03. (A) To the extent permitted by federal law
and notwithstanding any conflicting provision of the Revised
Code, a department shall recognize participation in any public
assistance program as evidence of categorical or potential
eligibility for another public assistance program relating to
early childhood. Such a department shall notify a parent or
guardian that the child or child's family may qualify for one or
more other public assistance programs relating to early
childhood. The department shall, as soon as practicable after
identifying programs and notifying the parent or guardian,
assist the parent or guardian in applying for the one or more
other programs, but only with the parent's or guardian's
permission.

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(B) (1) This section does not require a child or child's
family to participate in any public assistance program,
including one relating to early childhood.

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(2) Participation in any public assistance program
relating to early childhood is subject to availability.

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(3) Declining to participate in a public assistance
program relating to early childhood does not affect eligibility
for any other public assistance program.

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(4) This section does not compel any child or child's
family to participate in any preschool program or receive child
care from a child care provider.

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Sec. 5181.04. (A) To the extent permitted by federal law 106
and notwithstanding any conflicting provision of the Revised 107
Code, the department of children and youth, in coordination with 108
other departments that the department of children and youth 109
considers appropriate, shall designate or establish a single 110
statewide portal focused on early childhood, which shall be 111
known as the Ohio early childhood education portal. The aim of 112
the portal is to limit the number of instances in which a parent 113
or guardian must provide basic details regarding the child, 114
family, and household to multiple departments when applying for 115
or seeking information about public assistance. 116

(B) The portal shall allow a parent or guardian to enter 117
basic details regarding the child, family, and household into 118
the portal once and receive from the portal, as soon as 119
practicable after the details have been entered, information 120
identifying programs relating to early childhood in which the 121
child or child's family may be eligible to participate as of the 122
date the details were entered. 123

(C) The portal shall screen for potential eligibility for 124
public assistance, in particular the public assistance described 125
in divisions (B) (2), (3), (4), (5), (9), (10), (11), and (12) of 126
section 5181.01 of the Revised Code. 127

(D) (1) The portal shall not make final eligibility 128
determinations unless otherwise authorized by law. 129

(2) To the extent permitted by federal law and 130
notwithstanding any conflicting provision of the Revised Code, 131
the portal shall do all of the following but only on the 132
permission of the parent or guardian of a child: 133

(a) Identify programs for which the child or child's 134

family may be eligible; 135

(b) Provide an explanation to the parent or guardian why 136
the child or child's family may qualify; 137

(c) Identify additional information necessary to establish 138
eligibility; 139

(d) Permit information already provided to the state to 140
prepopulate applications when legally permissible; 141

(e) Provide a direct electronic pathway to apply; 142

(f) Transfer by electronic means information to the 143
appropriate administering department; 144

(g) Identify participating providers or local entities 145
through which services may be obtained; 146

(3) The portal shall permit a parent or guardian to 147
decline further contact through the portal and to decline 148
enrollment in any of the early childhood programs identified by 149
the portal. 150

Sec. 5181.05. The department of children and youth shall 151
enter into partnerships with entities that regularly interact 152
with families with young children and also seek to serve as Ohio 153
early childhood education portal navigators. An entity serving 154
as a navigator shall assist families with the Ohio early 155
childhood education portal established under section 5181.04 of 156
the Revised Code. Such an entity may include a child care 157
provider, community organization, county department of job and 158
family services, educational service center, head start agency, 159
pediatric health care provider, public library, school district, 160
and other entity the department considers appropriate. 161

Sec. 5181.06. (A) To the extent permitted by federal law 162

and notwithstanding any conflicting provision of the Revised 163
Code, each department shall routinely use any administrative 164
data that the department maintains to identify children, 165
families, and households who may be eligible for any public 166
assistance relating to early childhood. 167

If a child, family, or household is identified under this 168
section, then as soon as practicable after identification, the 169
department shall notify the child's parent or guardian, family, 170
or household of the public assistance program for which the 171
child, family, or household may be eligible and, with the 172
parent's or guardian's permission, provide the parent, guardian, 173
family, or household with a direct method by which an 174
application for public assistance relating to early childhood 175
may be submitted. 176

(B) Each department shall give special consideration to 177
creating an automatic notification system whereby, when a child 178
approaches the age at which the child is considered to be a 179
preschool-age child, the department is capable of doing both of 180
the following, but only to the extent permitted by federal law 181
and notwithstanding any conflicting provision of the Revised 182
Code: 183

(1) Notifying the child's parent, guardian, family, or 184
household that the child or child's family may be eligible for 185
certain public assistance once the child is a preschool-age 186
child; 187

(2) With the child's parent's or guardian's permission, 188
providing the parent or guardian with an opportunity as soon as 189
practicable to apply for the public assistance program. 190

As used in this division, "preschool-age child" has the 191

same meaning as in section 5104.01 of the Revised Code. 192

(C) Any notification made under this section does not 193
constitute an eligibility determination. 194

Sec. 5181.07. (A) Not later than the thirty-first day of 195
December of each year, the department of children and youth 196
shall prepare and submit to the general assembly an early 197
childhood participation report. The report shall be submitted in 198
accordance with section 101.68 of the Revised Code. 199

(B) The report shall include for each public assistance 200
program relating to early childhood, including as described in 201
divisions (B) (2), (3), (4), (5), (7), (9), (10), (11), and (12) 202
of section 5181.01 of the Revised Code, the following data, but 203
only to the extent that such data is available: 204

(1) The total of federal and state expenditures; 205

(2) The number of potentially eligible children; 206

(3) The number of enrolled children; 207

(4) The program's participation and utilization rates; 208

(5) The estimated number of eligible but unenrolled 209
children; 210

(6) The number of available funded slots; 211

(7) The number of unused funded slots; 212

(8) The number of children remaining on waiting lists; 213

(9) The capacity of providers; 214

(10) The geographic availability of programs; 215

(11) The rates of county-level participation; 216

(12) Any significant barriers to enrollment that have been 217
identified. 218

In preparing the report, the department shall distinguish 219
between the following: a lack of funding, a lack of provider 220
capacity, and a lack of participation by otherwise eligible 221
families. 222

(C) To the extent permitted by federal law and 223
notwithstanding any conflicting provision of the Revised Code, 224
each report shall specifically address children who are four 225
years of age to assist the general assembly in determining the 226
costs and capacity necessary to provide voluntary universal pre- 227
kindergarten access to four-year-olds in this state at a future 228
date. 229

Sec. 5181.08. (A) To the extent permitted by federal law 230
and notwithstanding any conflicting provision of the Revised 231
Code, each department shall share with other departments the 232
minimum data and information necessary to satisfy the 233
requirements of this chapter. Such data and information shall be 234
shared only as required by the chapter and not for any other 235
purpose. Each department shall engage in efforts to ensure the 236
security and confidentiality of any data or information it 237
maintains or receives. 238

(B) Not later than the thirty-first day of December of 239
each year, the directors of the departments described in 240
division (A)(1) of section 5181.01 of the Revised Code as well 241
as the director of budget and management shall collaborate and 242
identify sources of federal funding or existing state funding to 243
support the purposes of this chapter. The foregoing directors 244
also shall collaborate and identify any provisions within this 245
chapter that may jeopardize any funding the state receives or 246

seeks to receive from the federal government.

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