

Legislative Priorities 2024

Each year from January through April or May when the Tennessee General Assembly holds its legislative session TQEE advocates for a set of legislative and budget proposals that would have a meaningful impact on one or more of the priorities outlined in our [Policy Blueprint](#).

This year, we're pleased to support a number of budget items proposed by Governor Bill Lee and bills proposed by members of the General Assembly.

Governor Lee Proposed 2024–25 Budget

We applaud proposals in the Governor's budget presented [Monday, February 5](#) to support child learning, health and mental health, and the health and mental health of their families and urge the General Assembly to approve them. In particular:

- › **Increases to TISA by \$261 million.** This investment would add funding to the Tennessee Investment in Student Achievement (TISA) public school funding formula. This includes additional investments in teacher salaries toward the state's commitment to bring public school teacher salaries to a minimum base of \$50,000 by 2026.
- › **New school-based behavioral health liaisons.** This investment of \$8 million would add 114 additional school-based behavioral health counselors. Currently there are 274 counselors who cover about 330 of the ~1900 public schools in Tennessee. The new additions would help continue moving Tennessee the right direction toward the recommended ratio of 1 counselor for every 250 student per the American School Counselor Association.
- › **Numerous investments in child health and mental health through TennCare savings.** We're still unpacking the specifics but glad to see some items such as children and youth crisis stabilization, infant and early childhood mental health training for providers, and strategies for growing the mental and behavioral health workforce.

Tennessee General Assembly Legislative Proposals

Early Care and Education

- › **Promising Futures child care scholarships.** [SB750/HB785](#) (White/Massey) Establishes an early learning scholarship program that would make high quality child care and preschool an option for more working families. The bill would tap sports betting tax proceeds to fund the program. [Here's a short overview](#) with more details on the "how" and "why".
- › **Child care regulatory barriers study.** [SB2374/HB2317](#) (Watson/Williams). Requires the Tennessee Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (TACIR) to conduct a study to identify laws, regulations, and rules that impose costs, financial burdens, or operating delays on child care business owners or prospective owners but which are not necessary for the health, safety, and welfare of children. The study will focus on both local and state regulations and will make recommendations to address them.
- › **Child care payment assistance program expansion.** Two similar bills would extend eligibility for the Smart Steps child care payment assistance program to families earning between 85% and 100% of state median income, making child care more affordable for more families.
 - [SB1816/HB2944](#) (Kyle/Johnson)
 - [SB2064/HB2233](#) (Oliver/Freeman)



Creating a Cycle of Success

**What children need to achieve
3rd grade level reading and
math proficiency**

- **High-quality birth-through-age-eight learning environments**
- **Physical health, mental health, and development on track from birth**
- **Supported, and supportive, families and communities**

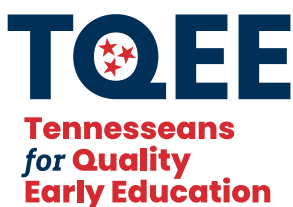
- › **TISA funding for pre-k students with special education needs.** [SB2213/HB2181](#) (Powers/White). Adds pre-k students with special education needs and peer models to the categories of students who generate education funding through the Tennessee Investment in Student Achievement (TISA)– the state’s K-12 school funding formula.
- › **Eliminate suspensions for students kindergarten through second grade.** [SB2210/HB2493](#) (Powers/Hurt). Eliminates the possibility of suspensions from school for young children unless they are a danger to others.
- › **Pilot project to invest in self-sufficiency of child care workers.** [SB1891/HB2112](#) (Oliver/Powell). Creates a pilot project whereby child care workers may continue to receive public assistance when wage increases cause their income to exceed program eligibility limits. Also requires TACIR to study wages and related issues for child care workers, including the benefits cliff.
- › **Child Care assistance for teachers.** [SB1901/HB1927](#) (Hensley/Cepicky). Authorizes LEAs and public charter schools to reimburse teachers for child care expenses, and provides state-funded reimbursement to the LEAs or public charter schools for a portion of those expenses.
- › **Child care cost estimation model to set provider reimbursement rates.** [SB1805/HB1962](#) (Oliver/Powell). Requires the Department of Human Services to set child care reimbursement rates based on estimated cost to provide quality care vs a market rate which is based on what families can afford to pay.
- › **Increased number of pre-k classrooms.** [SB2754/HB2769](#) (Akbari/Thompson). Expands the number of voluntary pre-kindergarten classrooms by approximately 20% to 1200.

Early Childhood Health, Mental Health and Development

- › **Continuous enrollment in TennCare for children birth through age five.** [SB2125/HB2557](#) (Kyle, Shaw). Ensures that children enrolled in TennCare or the CoverKids program remain continuously enrolled until age six without redetermination of eligibility.
- › **Enhanced health screenings for infants to ensure best opportunity for life-saving treatment for rare conditions** [SB1791/HB1973](#) (Massey/Hawk). Maintains TN’s position at the forefront of newborn screening by requiring that all infants be screened for specific genetic, metabolic, or other heritable conditions, including, but not limited to, conditions listed on the Recommended Uniform Screening Panel (RUSP).

Family Supports

- › **Paid Family Leave.** In 2023 the state implemented a 6-week paid family leave program for teachers and other licensed public school personnel as well as for state employees upon the birth or adoption of a child. Two bills would extend state paid leave benefits to more parents:
 - [SB2830/HB2923](#) (Haile/Slater) would add teachers and other licensed personnel at public charter schools
 - [SB1545/HB1554](#) (Rose/Slater) would add state employees who become a foster parent of a minor child
- › **Exemption from sales tax for infant diapers, wipes and formulas in FY 2025.** [SB1755/HB1637](#) (Lowe/Martin) exempts from sales tax the retail sale of infant diapers, wipes, and formula sold between July 1, 2024, and June 30, 2025.
- › **Exemption from sales tax for voucher-eligible food under the WIC program.** [SB2323/HB2044](#) (Yager/Fritts) Exempts from the state sales and use tax the retail sale of food and food ingredients that are voucher-eligible under the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children.
- › **Inflationary Adjustments to TANF.** [SB1961/HB2397](#) (Campbell/Harris). Requires the base payment for TANF eligible families to be increased to reflect the effect of inflation.



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