

Assembly approves bills aiming to boost child care availability, reduce costs

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The Assembly today approved a package of child care bills Republicans argue are designed to make it easier for child care providers to expand services and save money.

The six-bill package includes measures that would create a revolving loan program for facility renovations, among other things. The package also creates a new category of licenses, which means there would be licenses for serving up to four children, four to eight children and more than eight children.

Every measure passed along party lines except two, with Rep. Scott Allen, R-Waukesha, joining Dems on two measures.

Allen told WisPolitics some Republican ideas “may be less helpful than others.”

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“I appreciate the overall approach taken by this package of bills but felt that AB 390 and AB 391 were less effective than the others,” he said.

One of the bills, AB 387 would create tax-deductible savings accounts for parents, guardians, employers and others to contribute \$10,000 a year for child care.

Dems proposed an amendment to the savings account bill that would continue funding for Wisconsin’s Childcare Counts Program, which offers monthly subsidies for providers. They argued providers need funding now, not in their next tax returns. Gov. Tony Evers in his call for a special session asked for the Legislature to fund the program.

Rep. Tip McGuire said many child care facilities will close without the funding.

“And those problems will not only drive up the cost and lower the availability of child care in our state, but it will force families to choose between working and caring for their kids,” the Kenosha Dem said. “And no tax benefit later on in the future will make up for the loss of earnings if they are forced to stay home.”

Republicans voted to table the amendment.

Rep. Amy Binsfeld admitted the bill doesn't solve the problem immediately, “but it allows for future planning, and for that reason, Mr. Speaker, the vote is green.”

“AB 387 shouldn't just be thrown to the side because, in the words of some, ‘it only creates a \$500 benefit, it's just not worth it,’” the Sheboygan Republican said. “That's around \$500. Put that together with a tax credit and you could get \$100 a month.”

AB 390, approved 61-36 with Allen joining Dems against, would lower the minimum age to 16 from 17 for assistant child care teachers and sole supervisors over groups of children.

Rep. Lee Snodgrass, D-Appleton, called the bill “embarrassing,” arguing early childhood education requires trained professionals during such an essential time in a child's development stages.

“Instead, we're talking about how to loosen the laws to allow kids to care for kids,” she said.

“Even the most mature and hardworking and studious and well-behaved 16-year-olds are not equipped to handle increasingly complex challenges of kids today,” she added. “Each child deserves educated, informed and experienced professionals caring.”

Rep. Karen Hurd, R-Fall Creek, argued different teens have different abilities, noting she started caring for her siblings at age nine.

She added the “beauty” of the bill is that it allows child care providers to decide if a 16-year-old is right for them; providers aren't forced to hire anyone.

“It is strictly up to them, and they know their children best, the children that are in

their care,” she said. “They know if those children have special needs, special things that need to be adhered to.”

Other bills include:

*AB 391, which would change the minimum ratio of child care workers to children in group care center settings to allow more children under each worker. The measure would also allow more children in a group child care setting.

*AB 392, which would do away with restrictions on the number of non-family children a child care provider certified by the Department of Children and Family Services can care for. Current law sets the limit at six children, but only up to three can be unrelated to the car provider.

See coverage of the public hearing on the package [here](#).