

Early Learning Background Check FAQ

Who must have background checks?

Individuals who work, volunteer, reside or have unsupervised access to children in an early learning or child care setting must complete a background check.

This includes individuals who:

- Currently have a background clearance and are seeking to renew the authorization.
- Are seeking a background check authorization for the first time.

A background clearance authorizes subject individuals to:

- Work at a child care agency.
- Care for children receiving early learning services.
- Reside on the premises of a child care agency or certified facility.
- Care for children in the child's or provider's home, including family, friends, and neighbors (FFN) or in-home/relative care providers.
- Have unsupervised access to children receiving early learning services, including those not directly caring for children but work or volunteer on the premises.

For other helpful information, please visit: <https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/services/early-learning-providers/background-checks>

Which early learning or child care settings are subject to the background check requirements?

- Licensed family home early learning programs
- Licensed child care center early learning programs
- Licensed school-age programs
- License-exempt in-home/relative providers eligible to receive WCCC
- Licensed outdoor Nature-Based Child Care Programs

What is considered “unsupervised access”?

Per [WAC 110-06-0020](#): “Unsupervised access” is defined as “not in the presence of a subject individual who is an employee of a child care agency and is authorized by DCYF to be alone with children receiving early learning services from the same agency. For purposes of this definition, unsupervised access includes, but is not limited to, access to children receiving early learning services who are not within constant visual or auditory range of the individual authorized by



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DCYF to be alone with children receiving early learning services.”

If an applicant’s background check clearance is suspended due to an investigation by Child Protective Services (CPS) or Licensing Division (LD), can they still work, volunteer, live in the home or have unsupervised access with children in an early learning or child care program?

No. A suspended background check means their clearance is no longer valid pending the outcome of the investigation or suitability assessment. This is true even if the person was previously cleared.

Do overnight houseguests need a cleared Portable Background Check (PBC)? If so, what is the stay duration that would trigger need for PBC?

Yes, if they will have unsupervised access to children in early learning care.

Can an applicant start immediately, and work supervised until their background check clears?

Fingerprints must be completed and cleared prior to starting work. Any new child care staff, applicants, or volunteers may be on the premises if not in licensed child care space and not counted in ratio, not interacting with or unsupervised with children. This includes interviews, training, and hiring new staff. This would also include individuals engaging in classroom observation as a component of the interview process, and the individual being interviewed is not considered employed or hired.

Where can I find the associated federal and state statutes and rules?

- [Child Care and Development Block Fund Grant Act](#) (CCDF) federal requirements are implemented in [RCW 43.216.270](#) and [WAC 110-06](#).
- [DHHS CCDBG Background Check Requirements](#) provides a helpful overview of the federal background check components and requirements for child care and early learning applicants.

How does an early learning applicant apply for a Portable Background Check (PBC)?

Applicants should visit the following link for instructions to create a MERIT account, which is required to fill out a PBC application: [MERIT Workforce Registry | Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families](#)

Friends and Family Network (FFN) providers should visit the following link: [Family, Friend, and Neighbor Providers | Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families](#)

How does an applicant renew a PBC?

Background checks must be renewed every five years. A new fingerprint check must be completed at the time of renewal for applicants who previously fingerprinted and applicants who have not fingerprinted.

Applicants will receive a notification that it is time to renew their PBC with the following instructions:

1. Log in at merit.dcyf.wa.gov
2. Click on the “My Applications” tab.
3. Click on the blue link labeled “Portable Background Check Application”.
4. Complete and submit the application.

How does an applicant fix employment information in the PBC application?

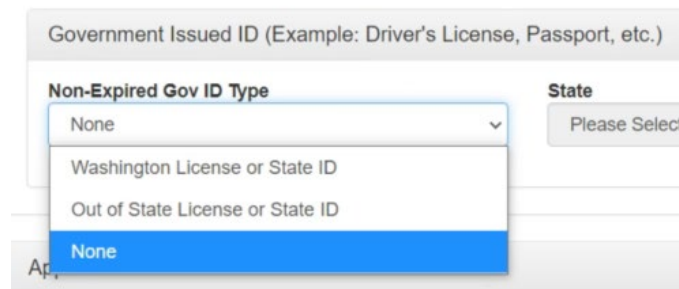
This does not impact the PBC, but the applicant will want to verify their current employment is correct in their MERIT Professional Record.

How does an applicant add a current address into the PBC application in Step 3?

When adding address information in step 3 of the PBC application, the applicant must indicate which address is current by selecting the box labeled “Check box if this is your current address.” If this box is not checked, the applicant will not be able to proceed.

How does an applicant add ID information if no state ID?

In the PBC application, if an applicant is not using a License or State ID, click on the “Non-Expired Gov ID Type” drop-down and choose the “None” option:



The screenshot shows a form titled "Government Issued ID (Example: Driver's License, Passport, etc.)". It contains two dropdown menus: "Non-Expired Gov ID Type" and "State". The "Non-Expired Gov ID Type" dropdown is open, showing options: "None", "Washington License or State ID", "Out of State License or State ID", and "None" (highlighted in blue). The "State" dropdown is currently set to "Please Select".

How does an applicant print a copy of their PBC clearance?

1. Applicant must log in at merit.dcyf.wa.gov
2. Go to the “My Record” tab.
3. Go to the “Professional Record” sub tab.
4. Find the box labeled “Personal Data”. In the box, you will see your date of birth. Underneath your date of birth, you will see your Portable Background Check information.

Underneath that, you will see a blue link labeled “Click here to view and print your Portable Background Check Certificate”. Please click on this link and you will be able to print out your certificate.

Can a disqualification be appealed?

Applicants who are disqualified based on a character, suitability, and competence assessment may request a review of the decision by emailing DCYF.BackgroundCheck@dcyf.wa.gov. If they would prefer to appeal the decision, they may do so by requesting an appeal in writing to the Office of Administrative Hearings (OAH). **Detailed instructions and instructions regarding the appeal process will be included in the certified letter that is mailed to applicants who are disqualified.**

How often does an applicant need to get a background check done?

- The background check must be renewed every five years from the date of the previous clearance.
- Providers who separate from employment are required to complete a new background check regardless of time between separation and reapplication.
- Staff members who separate from employment from a child care provider within the state for 180 consecutive days.