

# Portable Background Checks Q&A

## Who Needs a Portable Background Check (PBC)?

Contractors must ensure that the Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) PBCs are completed for all persons who have or may have unsupervised access to children during Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) programming in accordance with WAC 110-06. This includes prohibiting employees from working in an early learning program until a fingerprint-based background check is completed and their PBC status shows “Cleared” in MERIT.

Effective Jan. 1, 2024, all child care and early learning providers, including those not working directly with children or youth, who were previously allowed to work supervised after submitting their background application, must complete fingerprints and have a “Cleared” status in the Managed Education and Registry Tool ([MERIT](#)) to continue work at the child care facility.

Any application received by DCYF on or after Jan. 1, 2024, for child care and early learning providers, must have an approved background check clearance for each applicant, staff member, or eligible household member, which includes fingerprints, before the background check applicant can be hired or be on the child care or early learning premises, even if the applicant may not work directly with children or youth.

### A PBC is Required for:

- Classroom staff.
- Family support staff.
- Other ECEAP staff with any job title that may have unsupervised access to children at any time during program hours.
- Regular volunteers in licensed ECEAP sites.

### A PBC is Not Required for:

- School district staff who visit the classroom in their roles as speech/language pathologist, occupational therapist, etc., and have Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) background checks.
- Volunteers in non-licensed ECEAP sites who will never have unsupervised access to ECEAP children.
- School district employed substitute teachers who work temporarily in non-licensed ECEAP classrooms and will never have unsupervised access to ECEAP children. These staff must have Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) background checks.

### DCYF Allows the Following Exceptions to All Programs

- Non-classroom school district staff with unsupervised access to ECEAP children on an IEP **do not need a PBC**. This includes school district staff who visit the classroom in their roles as a speech/language pathologist, occupational therapist, etc., and have a cleared OSPI background check. To use this exception, programs must have signed permission from the parent to work with their child or take the child out of the classroom for services.
- At this time, school bus drivers who have a cleared OSPI background check **do not need a PBC** and can transport ECEAP children. DCYF will continue to work on a permanent solution to the issue of PBCs for bus drivers.
- School District and ESD staff can choose to do the DCYF PBC and request that the PBC be shared with OSPI. Requirements for individuals wishing to share their background check results with

OSPI can be found [here](#).

### What Happens When an Individual is Disqualified?

DCYF Background Check Unit will notify the site contact listed in MERIT directly to inform them of an individual's disqualification. They will also inform the ECEAP team of the disqualification. "Contractors cannot allow individuals whose PBC Status shows "Disqualified" in MERIT to have access to children" (WAC 110-06- 0070).

### Can the Disqualification Be Appealed?

Yes. An individual may request an administrative hearing under WAC 110-06-0100 if they disagree with the decision. An individual may also request to vacate the disqualification decision if they believe the reason for its determination was based on inaccurate background information or the individual believes they have changed since this determination (WAC 110-06-0115).

### Why is a PBC Required?

State law and Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) rules require DCYF to conduct background checks on anyone who is authorized to care for or have unsupervised access to children in licensed child care facilities and ECEAP sites.

### The Process

DCYF issues PBCs, which are valid for five years, and can be submitted through MERIT. Individuals associated with a licensed child care facility or an ECEAP site must register in MERIT and have a STARS ID. This includes:

- The licensed provider (if a licensed site).
- Anyone who cares for or has unsupervised access to children in an ECEAP site or licensed child care facility. This includes all classroom staff and family support staff.
- Anyone age 13 or older who lives in the licensed family child care home.

Visit MERIT online:

- Sign in if you already have a STARS ID; or
- Apply for a STARS ID if you do not have one.
  - Click on the "application" tab.
  - Click "Portable Background Check Application" and follow all the instructions.
    - You will need the following to complete the application:
      - Name of the Licensed Child Care Provider or ECEAP site.
      - Addresses where you have lived for the last five consecutive years.

First-time applicants must complete the fingerprint process. Subsequently, individuals must **submit a new application before the expiration date** of the active background check application. **If a PBC expires**, the individual must complete the fingerprint check process again. ECEAP contractors and licensed providers can track the background check clearances for staff and applicable household members through the MERIT facility registration process. ECEAP staff clearances can also be tracked through the



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Staff Qualifications Status report in ELMS.

### Fingerprint-Based Background Checks

DCYF contracts with IdentoGO by IDEMIA to conduct the fingerprint process. This website has a list of the fingerprinting locations. When the fingerprint process is required, an individual will receive a fingerprint appointment form via email or USPS when email is not available. Use the form to schedule an appointment. This is the only acceptable fingerprinting option for a PBC. There is no cost for applicants to process fingerprinting.

More information about Background Check fingerprint process can be found [here](#).

#### **Request a Copy of Results:**

Individuals may request a copy of their completed background check application, including supporting documents. To make the request, submit a [Request for Background Check Results](#) form.



Washington State Department of  
**CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES**

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