

Child-care stipend in, payments for doctor visits out ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

The German parliament has passed two laws aimed at saving Germans money. The first introduced a child-care stipend for parents who stay home to care for children. The other ends charges for visits to the doctor.

Parliamentarians voted on Friday to implement both measures, with the child-care law providing a source of contention between the coalition of the Christian Democrats (CDU) and Free Democrats (FDP) and members of the opposition.

That law passed with 310 votes in favor, 282 votes against and two abstentions.

The vote to end co-payments for visits to the doctor was approved by all 548 parliamentarians present. The previous fee had been 10 euros (\$12.8) per quarter for Germans with public health insurance. The co-payments are set to end on January 1, 2013.

The child-care stipend takes effect on August 1, 2013 and will provide 100 euros (\$128) per month for parents who keep their kids at home rather than sending them to a public daycare. Starting in August 2014, that amount will go up to 150 euros.

German daycares are beyond capacity. The government is aiming to increase capacity by August 2013, when another law guaranteeing parents a daycare spot for their kids comes into effect, but there may still be a shortage.

Parents with kids aged one to three born after July 31 of this year are eligible to apply for the child-care stipend.

Lack of complete coalition support

Dorothee Bär of the Christian Socialists Union (CSU), the CDU's Bavarian sister party, said the bill advanced "the freedom of parents to make a choice regarding the care of young children.

"In parliament on Friday, the Social Democrat's (SPD) 2013 chancellor candidate, Peer Steinbrück, called the measure "foolish" and said it was a step backwards for society.

Jürgen Trittin, co-chair of the parliamentary fraction of the Green party, said the measure was a political attempt by the government to drum up election-year support for the CSU, which heavily backed the law.

"We're all going to pay for this expensive folly," Trittin said on Friday, adding that the child-care stipend was "against children, women, families, and the economy."

One of the general criticisms of the stipend is that it will encourage women to stay out of the workplace for longer after having a child and that it keeps young kids away from the educational opportunities offered by public daycare.

-reprinted from Deutsche Welle

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