

Ford is failing families: Let's make child care essential for economic recovery

IN A NUTSHELL

The Ford government has not promised any new funding to Ontario's early learning and child care sector since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Their failure to act is pushing child care into a funding crisis that will destabilize the entire sector.

With only 3 days' notice to re-open, child care centres are being forced to lottery off child care spaces, lay off staff, or close permanently. Parents are worried about a shortage of child care spaces as several programs are on the verge of financial devastation. **We don't have to accept Ford's disastrous re-opening plan: Now is the time to speak out about the dire crisis facing child care.**

LACK OF COVID-19 RELIEF FUNDING

- Minister Stephen Lecce instructed child care operators to rely on the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS) when the COVID-19 pandemic started. Child care operators paid the remaining 25% of staff wages using their annual provincial funding — but in May Lecce told operators that they will have to pay back these funds retroactively to March 15, 2020. This reckless decision has put several child care centres into thousands of dollars in debt.
- On April 29, 2020, Minister Lecce announced support to cover fixed operating costs for child care operators and they waived fees for licensing applications. However, he did not attach a dollar amount to this plan, and existing provincial funding is expected to stretch for additional 20% of child care operators who weren't in receipt of public funding before. The Ford government hasn't provided clear and sufficient funding guidelines to ensure the viability of the sector.
- Without additional funding for guaranteed access to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), increased staffing, additional space, screening, cleaning, and physical distancing measures, it's unclear how child care centres will operate safely.

NEGLECT OF CHILD CARE PROFESSIONALS

- Emergency child care workers were **excluded** from the \$4/hour top-up "pandemic pay" and the sector had vast disparities in compensation: in Peterborough, emergency child care workers are earned \$30/hour; yet, emergency child care workers in Halton only received \$18/hour for the same jobs.
- Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) and child care professionals are undervalued for their high-level of skills and education. It's time to close the gap by implementing a province-wide starting rate of \$25/hour for all child care staff.

ONTARIO'S CHILD CARE CRISIS BY NUMBERS

56,000 child care spaces in Toronto could be lost without a plan to provide new funding.

60% to 70%

There could be up to 60% to 70% fewer child care spaces across Ontario than there were before the COVID-19 pandemic began.

42% of Early Childhood Educators earn \$15-\$20 per hour and 43% earn \$20-\$27 per hour.

\$21,096 Parent fees are as much as \$21,096 a year in Ontario's cities. These are the highest parent fees in Canada for full-time centres and regulated home child care.

31% Preschool fees are 31% higher in for-profit child care centres than non-profit child care centres.



FORD'S COST-CUTTING AGENDA FOR CHILD CARE

- Shortly after becoming elected, the Ford government made a \$50 million cut to stabilization funding for child care operators.
- The Ford government allocated \$7.35 million for municipalities to 'finding savings' in their budgets — many of them agreed to this offer and they are seeking more cuts to municipal child care centres.
- If too many not-for-profit and public child care facilities close as a result of COVID-19 and the Ford government's refusal to inject new funding, the sector will be dominated by for-profit centres. Economist Armine Yalnizyan warns that child care could face the same health crisis as long-term care facilities. Child care should not be managed by the for-profit sector — it's in the public interest, so it should be delivered by the public system.

WE NEED A REVOLUTION IN CHILD CARE!

- The experience of 24-hour emergency child care for frontline workers during the pandemic has shown us that accessible child care is possible with political will.
- The ability for women, single parents and low-income families to re-enter the workforce is compromised without accessible and affordable child care — boosting the child care sector will create economic stimulus by increasing labour market participation, creating new jobs, and retaining child care professionals. These factors will help respond to slow economic growth from COVID-19.
- Child care was in crisis long before the pandemic. We need to dramatically expand child care as a vital public service.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Reach out to your local municipal councillors to pass a motion in support of child care! On June 29, 2020, City of Toronto Councilors Joe Cressy and Mike Layton passed a motion to declare child care essential for economic recovery. Their motion called on the provincial government to:

1. Develop and release a comprehensive plan to ensure every child who was enrolled in licensed child care before the COVID-19 pandemic has access to a spot as centres re-open with reduced capacity.
2. Provide stable provincial funding for child care centres for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. Work with the federal government to develop a National Child Care Strategy to make child care more accessible and affordable for all families, which is essential to economic recovery.

Ask your local councilors to pass this motion! Contact carolyn@childcareontario.org to get in touch with the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care.

WHAT WE NEED NOW

- New funding to ensure the viability of child care centres and to create additional child care spaces.
- Guaranteed access to PPE and enhanced health and safety measures recommended in the OCBCC and AECEO report *From Reopening to Recovery: A Child Care Plan for Ontario*.
- Fix the gaps in compensation with province-wide starting rate of \$25/hour for all staff working in child care centres, along with retroactive "pandemic pay".

For more information visit:

www.childcareontario.org

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