

Child Care and Early Years Act Policy Brief #3

Unlicensed Child Care Registry

This policy brief is part of a 4-part series intended to summarize community consensus, research and policy recommendations on the Ontario's government's proposed regulatory changes to the Child Care and Early Years Act (CCEYA). This brief responds to the proposal to create of an online registry of unlicensed home child care providers.

Community Survey Results

In a community survey of 2,400 ECEs, operators, and families:

- 60.7% of respondents were either opposed or unsure of the registry, with 39% in support.
- Respondents expressed confusion over what this proposal would look like, including whether it would be a mandatory or voluntary register or whether it would provide oversight.
- Of those in support of the registry that left comments, 40% indicated they thought a registry would ensure accountability to, and oversight by, the Ministry of Education, which the current proposal does not ensure.

Organizational Consultation Responses

"[Past proposals for an unlicensed child care registry] have been rejected again and again, based on concerns about legal liability and concerns about blurring the lines between regulated child care, where parents can be assured of public oversight, and unregulated child care, where they cannot be.... Surely in 2020, regulation should be a starting place for quality child care in Ontario, not something we have to fight for." - Childcare Resource and Research Unit.

"It is our firm position that such a registry, based solely on the objectives and parameters outlined in the consultation document and discussion questions, represents an unacceptable risk to the health and safety of children.... Such a registry would create serious risks by giving parents a false sense of security about the safety of their children and the level of oversight and enforcement of these providers." - Home Child Care Association of Ontario.

"Providing parents with a false sense of security that these programs have oversight or are regulated would be a risky proposal. The licensed home environment follows a comprehensive set of requirements, and a public list of unlicensed providers hosted on the Ministry website may appear like an endorsement of the health, safety and quality of those environments." - City of Toronto, Children's Services.

"Set standards to require all home child care provided in Ontario be part of the licensed system. Develop a protocol that will bring the unlicensed providers into the licensed system with dignity, mutual respect and accountability rather than establishing an alternate system of registering with no accountability." - Compass Early Learning and Care, Peterborough.

Summary of Evidence /Research

There is a wide body of research that shows the importance of licensing/regulation to the quality of home child care environments.[1] Studies also show that many parents misreport that their home child care arrangement is licensed when it is in fact unlicensed, suggesting that adding another category of "Registered" home child care could add to parent confusion. A 2019 study of Ontario home child care by Varmuza, Perlman and White found: "more parents report that their children are in licensed home child care than is possible. The lack of accurate parental reporting calls into question a key assumption of current regulatory systems, which is that parents are informed consumers of ECEC services." [2]

Recommendation

The Ministry of Education should not proceed with developing an unlicensed child care registry. Instead Ontario needs to set standards that require all home child care providers to be regulated, as part of a comprehensive universal child care system.

[1] For a review of the literature on the connection between regulation and quality in home child care, please see: Ferns, C. & Friendly, M. (2015). Background paper on unregulated child care for the "Home child care: More than a home project" (pp. 14-17).

[2] Varmusa, P., Perlman, M. & White, L. (2019). Understanding early childhood education and care utilization in Canada: Implications for demand and oversight. International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy, 13 (7).