

Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care
Coalition ontarienne pour de meilleurs service éducatifs à l'enfance



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June 14, 2012

Hon Laurel Broten
Minister of Education
Mowat Block, 22nd Floor
900 Bay Street
Toronto, ON M7A 1L2

Sent by email, hard copy in the mail

Dear Minister Broten,

Thank you for meeting with the OCBCC executive on May 9. You bring a tremendous amount of energy and personal commitment to your work at the Ministry of Education and we are excited to continue our work with you.

We want to recognize the commitment of \$242 million in new funding for child care that will be allocated over the next three years and the Liberal government for acknowledging the essential role that child care plays in our communities.

We are pleased that the transfer of licensed child care to the Ministry of Education is complete and that we can now focus on building a high-quality, affordable and not-for-profit child care system to serve the children and families of Ontario.

We recently did a deputation to the Standing Committee on Finance regarding Bill 55 – the Budget bill. Our message to the Committee was that the funding allocated in the budget will not be enough to stabilize Ontario's fragile child care system. As you know, there was widespread consensus within the child care sector that \$287 million this year is the amount needed to stabilize Ontario's existing programs. The proposed funding in the budget is roughly one third of the amount needed. In addition, the allocation is one-time funding and not built into the base of the provincial funding for child care.

While we support full day kindergarten, without money to stabilize child care programs *and* transition to the role of caring for younger children, the cost of offering child care programs will simply continue to go up and child care centres across the Province will be at risk of closures, forcing parents to scramble for alternatives amidst fewer options.

Therefore we would urge that the \$242 million in new funding for child care be allocated upfront in the current fiscal year in order to stabilize child care and avoid a crisis for Ontario families in accessing affordable child care. Further, we would urge that the indexation of child care transfer funds from the Provincial government to municipalities reflect annual inflation rates as a crucial component of stabilizing the child care sector.

At the May 9th meeting, we expressed that we strongly believe that the funding contained in the 2012-2013 provincial budget must make a real difference to struggling child care programs and parents who face rising fees. As the funding is limited we encouraged the Ministry to set clear and measurable goals to maximize the impact of the funding. While funding administration of child care programs is a constant challenge, these limited funds must be directed to address the struggles child care programs are facing.

We also expressed that the money should be spent in a way that supports a long-term vision for child care.

The OCBCC's long term vision sees the provincial government move to "base" funding of child care programs, as is in the rest of the education system. An adequate per-child amount paid to child care centres would enable centres to provide high-quality care at affordable rates for parents.

Given the small amount of available funding, we would encourage you to look at increasing wage subsidies. Wage subsidy is a form of base funding and increasing wage subsidy will begin to recognize the profession of early childhood educators and help stabilize child care programs. Helping centres to provide fair wages not only addresses the issues of recruitment and retention in the child care sector, it is also an investment in quality.

This funding should not be used to create *new* subsidies. Instead, along with wage subsidy, the funding should introduce a per-child direct grant, starting with younger children. This will make a difference in the fees paid by parents and address the real costs of delivering care to younger age groups.

In addition, are committed to engaging in an inclusive process to develop a vision for child care.

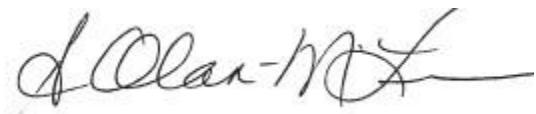
At our meeting, we told you that we believe that a clear commitment to build a child care system focused on not-for-profit, public and Aboriginal providers must be a fundamental component of the modernization of Ontario's child care system.

Ontario is at an important moment in child care policy with child care having moved to the Ministry of Education and the introduction of full day kindergarten for 4 and 5 year olds. In order to engage in a meaningful process to develop a full vision for child care, it is critical to introduce a moratorium on further licensing of for-profit child care. As you know, for-profit providers are now being traded on the Toronto Stock Exchange, and for-profit child care is taking hold in Ontario. This is concerning because the research shows, that on average, for-profit child care is more likely to be of lower quality than not-for-profit child care. This is a critical moment to introduce legislation on a moratorium on new child care licenses to for-profit companies.

Changes in funding models, new approaches to child care, and potential changes to legislation will require public consultation and communication within the sector and the broader community. We are committed to supporting outreach, education, and capacity building. Please call on the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care to assist in consultations with the sector.

Once again, thank you for taking the time to meet with our new executive. We are excited about the work ahead and look forward to hearing from you,

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sheila Olan-MacLean".

Sheila Olan-MacLean
President, Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care

MPP Lisa MacLeod, PC Critic, Education
MPP Peter Tabuns, NDP Critic, Education
OCBCC Executive and Council
Jim Grieve, Assistant Deputy Minister, Ministry of Education