

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



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Hon. Laurel Broten
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October 20, 2011

Dear Minister,

On behalf of Ontario's early learning and child care sector, we would like to welcome you as Minister of Education. Yours is a challenging and exciting portfolio, and we look forward to working with you to create a strong, stable system of early childhood education for Ontario.

The Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care is Ontario's advocacy group supporting universal, affordable, high quality, not-for-profit early learning and child care. We believe in universal programs and have done everything we can to support full-day learning for 4 and 5 year olds in schools.

We were pleased to work with you when you were the Minister of Children and Youth Services. We know you have a real commitment and dedication to Ontario's children and families.

We would like to invite you to a reception for the early learning and child care community on Tuesday, November 8, and would be happy if you could say a few words of welcome. The reception is part of a two-day provincial meeting being held in Toronto. Further, we would like to meet with you on Thursday, November 10, the day after our meeting concludes.

While we welcome you to your new post, it is also our duty to alert you to an immediate crisis.

Chronic underfunding of child care programs and pressures from the implementation of full-day kindergarten mean that parents can expect fee increases of 15 to 30 per cent in the next year. Because of these pressures many child care centres may close.

This is not a looming crisis, it is one that has arrived. Child care centres are already beginning to announce their closures, and the families of this province need you to take action to prevent this crisis from becoming a tragedy. In the long term, the system needs a stable funding model. However, in the short term, early learning and child care programs need an emergency

injection of funding to prevent mass closures and program cuts between now and the next provincial budget.

Your government ran on a platform of “modernizing child care.” We support that goal.

Today’s child care system is based on families paying the full cost of operating child care centres. The result is that child care programs are too expensive for the average family. Ironically, while families struggle to find care, many child care centres have vacancies because the cost of providing care is beyond what local families can afford, and there are long wait lists for subsidies.

As you know, 2012 marks the year at which half of all 4- and 5-year-olds will be enrolled in full-day kindergarten programs. Child care centres are losing those children, leaving the centres with vacancies. To make up the shortfall, centres have to accept more younger children.

However, providing care for younger children is more costly and, without additional funding to ensure child care centres can serve those younger children, we will see a wave of closures across the province over the next year. Several organizations are sounding the alarm about the immediate crisis facing child care programs. At risk are hundreds of purpose-built child care centres in schools, a critical part of the infrastructure of our communities.

The following organizations have sounded the alarm on the crisis facing child care:

OMSSA

A report released in May by the Ontario Municipal Social Service Association states that, in rural Ontario, more than 8,100 children are at risk of losing their child care, including over 500 children with special needs.

It goes on to say that at least 52 rural child care centres have already closed in the past two years and more than 200 licensed centres with 600 employees face immediate risk of closing, as do 150 home care providers.

The report states, and I think you will agree this is an unacceptable outcome for the province, that *“More than 90 towns and villages across rural and northern Ontario will be left with no local licensed child care options.”*

City of Toronto

The City of Toronto has identified five wards which are at-risk to lose more than half of their current child care centres. An additional 13 wards are at-risk to lose between 25 per cent and 49 per cent of their current child care centres. Those closures are already beginning to take place. Be aware that the handful of closures you will hear about in coming weeks are but the tip of the iceberg. Without your intervention, Torontonians will come to associate your government with the end of child care programs in their city.

OCBCC

The Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care has launched a new website, www.4outof5.ca, to profile child care centres that are closing and those at risk of closure. We are currently working with several centres that are trying desperately to avoid closing their doors.

Progress Child Care, serving a low income area in Scarborough, faces an immediate risk of closure because of ongoing financial problems and a 35 per cent vacancy rate. Filling vacancies with full-fee-paying children is not possible in this low-income neighbourhood, so freezes on the number of children receiving subsidies in the area has compounded an already difficult situation for the centre.

The Bond Infant and Child Care, a 72-year-old centre serving low-income and special-needs children, is also at facing closure this fall because of a 50 per cent vacancy rate.

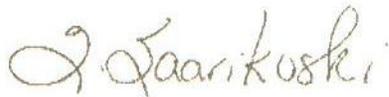
Your government recognized that there would be financial effects on child care programs. That is why, in 2010, your government committed to “stabilization” funding growing over five years to \$12 million in capital funding and \$51 million over five years in additional fee subsidies. So far, some municipalities have seen no more than a few thousand dollars for capital, and fee subsidy funding does not address the main issue of the cost of child care for all families.

In the 2011 provincial budget process, the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care proposed a stabilization plan for our sector. Our plan called for a direct grant to child care centres to enable those centres to limit fee increases and offer comparable wages to staff doing the same work in the school boards. This new direct funding could be a temporary measure to ensure that we do not see a wave of child care centre closures throughout the province.

In last year’s budget process we called for \$100 million in new provincial funding this year. We called for an additional investment of \$200 million in the year 2011/2012. We are eager to meet with you to discuss solutions to keep our child care centres open.

We look forward to meeting with you. Despite the challenges ahead, we are excited and motivated to find solutions that help children, families and our communities have the stable, high-quality early learning and child care programs that they need.

Sincerely,



Tracy Saarikoski, RECE
President, Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care

Cc: OCBCC Executive, Council and Members
Jim Grieve, Assistant Deputy Minister, Ministry of Education