

Throne speech another 'promise to promise' on child care assistance, says mom ^[1]

Author: MacKinnon, Bobbi-Jean

Source: CBC News

Format: Article

Publication Date: 4 Nov 2016

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EXCERPTS

A Riverview mother, who has two children in after-school programs, says she's tired of waiting for the Gallant government to help "average" New Brunswick families pay for child care.

Lacey Long was reacting to Wednesday's throne speech, which promises to "increase the amount" it provides to parents, but does not provide any specifics on the amounts or on the criteria.

"If they were quite serious on making this happen, and very soon, obviously we'd have more details," said Long. "This sounds like again, a promise to promise."

During the 2014 election, the Liberals promised to spend \$62 million more over four years to subsidize daycare for low-income working families, including \$15.5 million in each of the first two Liberal budgets.

Long, who describes her family as "higher low-income," with a combined household income of under \$60,000 a year, was excited about that initial promise.

"Loving the new Liberal platform," she had written on the Liberal Party's Facebook page after the daycare plan came out.

But the government added nothing to its first budget and only a \$500,000 increase in February's budget.

'Words in the wind'

"I feel like we've given [Premier Brian Gallant] tons of chances to show us the money, or at least give us real figures," said Long. "'We promise to help you guys out some day;' that doesn't help," she said.

"Without figures, without criteria, it's words in the wind."

Long said it's "financially exhausting" trying to cover the \$285 per week it costs to send her children, aged five and eight, to after-school programs three days a week.

Child care fees are "devastating," she said. "They're almost more than rent," and roughly "triple a car payment."

"Disposable income is nearly non-existent," so there's no "new, shiny toys" for the children, or entertainment for the family, she said.

"Basically you live to pay your rent and your day care and hope your kids turn 12 [the legal age to be left home alone] sooner rather than later."

Long was offered \$8 a week, but it wasn't even enough to cover the cost of gas for her to get to work and she would have had to take time off work to attend the follow-up appointments required to verify her family's financial situation hadn't changed.

And she's not alone, she said. Long contends more help should be extended to parents with a household income of under \$80,000 because they're "suffering."

Owners face increasing costs

Maureen Dignard, the owner and operator of Angels R Wee daycare in Saint John, would also like to see more government help for parents.

"There is a very big need," she said. "The working families, the parents of our community, struggle constantly to meet the fee and be able to pay."

"And as an owner, we don't want to raise the day care fees, but we struggle because you know, the power bill goes up, the food goes up. It's

a very hard business to be in."

Dignard said she's happy to see the throne speech promise to "increase the amount" it provides, but without specifics, it's difficult to comment.

'Complex sector'

Marjolaine St-Pierre, the executive director of Early Childhood Care & Education New Brunswick (ECCENB-SEPENB), the provincial association representing the early learning child care sector, agrees the throne speech is "vague."

She welcomes the fact the government wants to lower the cost of early learning and child care fees. She also values the throne speech promise to better train child care workers so they can meet new training standards.

"But what we would love to see is a clearer plan on how they will invest in the whole sector," said St-Pierre.

She remains optimistic, however, noting an independent child care review report was released in August.

"I think the intention is to build a better system and maybe this is why we don't see detail [in the throne speech] of how we'll invest," she said.

"We understand that this is a complex sector and there's a lot of components, but we'll see."

-reprinted from CBC News

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<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/funding> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/affordability> [6]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/accessibility> [7] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/subsidies>