

Toronto proposes ending daycare occupancy grant ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Toronto parents could be paying more for child care if the city moves ahead with a budget proposal to eliminate a grant that helps fund daycares in schools.

City staff have proposed ending the occupancy grant that Toronto gives to childcare centres to help pay for the general maintenance of daycare spaces on school property.

The city said the move would save about \$3.39-million over two years. Parents would have to take on those costs through an increase in fees of as much as \$1.35 a day. Low-income parents who receive fee subsidies would not be affected.

Jennifer Story, a trustee at the Toronto District School Board, said she is sympathetic to the city's budget challenges, but eliminating the occupancy grant would add to the costs of parents who already pay full fees.

"We don't think parents can afford that," she said at a news conference on Thursday. "We don't think our child-care centres can afford the instability that it's going to create."

Ms. Story said the city's occupancy grant has been in place for 20 years, and has helped in the operation of daycares in public, French and Catholic schools. She and other school trustees are planning deputations to urge the city to reverse its proposal.

"We are asking the city to reconsider this budget proposal, and in the long-term we're asking for the province to come to the table and look at how we fund childcare centres in schools," Ms. Story said.

Toronto is one of the most expensive cities for childcare, with fees for full-day care for an infant as high as \$1,800 a month. Spaces are scarce and waiting lists can be long.

Amanda Munday, a Toronto mother of two, said she struggles to pay for daycare. Her eldest daughter is two and attends daycare part-time, for which Ms. Munday pays \$550 a month.

"If there's increased costs, it means I have to look for another solution," Ms. Munday said.

Ms. Munday stood beside Ms. Story on Thursday to appeal to the city to reverse its budget proposal. Her second child is four months old.

She said she might have to quit her job if the city adopts the proposal and daycare costs continue to climb.

"I feel like we're moving in the opposite direction. I want to see more resources from the city, not less," she said.

Budget proposals presented to council in December say the city has to find \$91-million in savings or other revenue to balance its books. Consultations are under way, and the proposed budget will go to council in February.

Councillor Joe Mihevc said he and his colleagues have been hearing from parents about the proposed childcare cuts. He said he will not support the proposal.

Mr. Mihevc said the city should not cut childcare and further burden parents who pay full fees. Instead, he said, the city should be looking for ways to increase the number of subsidized spaces for children of low-income families.

"It [the proposed budget cuts] will make childcare unaffordable in this city of ours, and that's simply not acceptable," Mr. Mihevc said. "It's not smart economics."

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Region: Ontario ^[3]

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