

Toronto urged to add more child care subsidies ^[1]

Author: Monsebraaten, Laurie

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EXCERPTS

Toronto would need another 5,000 child care subsidies at a cost of almost \$50 million a year to make up for the growth of before- and after-school programs sparked by the introduction of full-day kindergarten in 2010, according to a new city report.

Although licensed child care in the city has grown by almost 15,600 spaces to more than 69,000 over the past six years, only about 2,000 more subsidies have been added.

It means the proportion of subsidized spaces has shrunk from 45 per cent in 2010 to less than 38 per cent today, says the report by Toronto children's services released Monday.

About 5,000 more subsidies would be required to ensure the same proportion of low- and moderate-income families have access to licensed care today as they did six years ago. With the annual cost of a subsidy running at about \$10,000, almost \$50 million more a year would be needed, the report adds.

City council in December called on Queen's Park to provide additional funding for subsidies and operating grants to support the expansion of kindergarten and school-age child care.

But Monday's report, to be discussed as part of the city's 2017 budget deliberations this month, highlights Toronto's responsibility to keep up the pressure, said Councillor Janet Davis, who asked city staff to crunch the numbers last fall.

"What this report makes clear is that as the system has grown, the number of subsidies has not," she said. "We have to expand the number of subsidies to maintain a healthy system and make sure we are not falling further behind in terms of access to affordable child care for Toronto families."

The city administers just over 26,000 daycare subsidies while another 18,000 children are on the waiting list at a time when Toronto has the highest child care costs in the country, she noted. The median cost of licensed care for a child under 4 is about \$1,400 a month.

A city report last fall found that three-quarters of Toronto parents can't afford licensed care.

Mayor John Tory has asked city departments to find 2.6 per cent in savings to fill a \$91 billion budget shortfall.

But Davis says this latest report underscores the urgency to stop a proposed \$2.3 million annual cut to a city grant that supports child care in schools and instead invest more money in subsidies.

If the city can't afford to retroactively correct the subsidy shortfall, it should start by ensuring at least 50 per cent of all new spaces are supported by subsidies, she said.

Toronto should start by funding 75 daycare subsidies approved in 2016 and not included in this year's budget. And it should approve another \$2.65 million over the next two years to fund subsidies for half of the 530 new spaces the city is slated to build by the end of 2018.

The city has approved the construction of 5,000 new child care spots by 2021.

Queen's Park, which is building 100,000 new child care spots for kids under age 4 over the next five years, needs to increase operating funding to keep parent fees down and provide subsidies for low- and moderate-income families, she said.

"But Toronto needs to step up and show that it's a willing partner and that we are a leader," Davis said. "If the city can invest millions of extra dollars on traffic measures . . . we can do the same things for our social infrastructure."

Davis will raise the issue Tuesday at a city hall news conference to oppose 2017 budget cuts and increased user fees for services that women and their families rely on.

She will be joined by Councillors Kristyn Wong-Tam, Joe Cressy, Sarah Doucette, and Maria Augimeri, along with mothers, recreation

workers, and women living in poverty who will speak about how the proposed budget is failing women and their families. They want council to live up to a decision last July to incorporate a gender equity lens into the 2017 budget process.

-reprinted from Toronto Star

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