

John Tory presses premier to address daycare crisis ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Mayor John Tory is urging the Ontario government to tackle the daycare crisis, days after demanding Premier Kathleen Wynne help shoulder Toronto's huge social housing costs.

In a letter to Wynne on Sunday, the mayor notes he stressed at their recent meeting it is "not business as usual between our two governments" — a reference to his anger at the premier for flip-flopping on Toronto's ability to toll the Gardiner Expressway and Don Valley Parkway.

"I firmly believe that when it comes to issues like child care and housing, it can no longer be business as usual because the status quo leaves Toronto taxpayers footing the bills that the province should be paying," Tory wrote, noting Wynne cited affordability for residents as the reason she blocked the tolls, after telling Tory last fall she would not do so.

"Given your recent comments and concerns about affordability for Ontario residents, I want to draw to your attention the child care affordability crisis unfolding in Toronto and the need for Queen's Park to address the issue."

Tory himself is under pressure on child care, with city councillors and parents criticizing his backing of a recommendation to help fill a \$91-million budget gap by scrapping grants to school boards for daycares in schools. The move would save Toronto \$1.13 million this year and \$2.26 million in 2018.

The mayor has proposed putting the savings toward 300 new child-care subsidies, a move called "cynical" by Councillor Janet Davis because the spots would essentially be funded by thousands of parents potentially facing hundreds of dollars in new annual costs because of the grant cut.

In his letter to Wynne, Tory urges her to take action, including the following measures:

Fund at least 4,918 new subsidies for low-income parents to help reduce the city's subsidized child-care wait list of more than 18,000 children.

Accompany any initiatives to expand the early learning and child care system with additional fee subsidies and other measures to help make the services affordable for families, and to ensure such funding keeps pace with inflation.

Embed child care as part of early learning and give kids in care the same opportunities and supports as kids in the elementary school system; also fund school boards directly for the cost of space used for early-years programs and care before and after school.

Tory notes a city study raised the alarm on child care in Toronto, where only 20 per cent of kids are in licensed care facilities — a figure that would jump to half if licensed care were available and affordable.

"I know child care and early learning are of keen and heartfelt interest to you as premier," Tory wrote. "With the promised investment to come from the Trudeau government, I believe, as with housing, that we are right now at a moment in time in which we can forge a historic partnership to benefit kids and families. Let's not miss the chance."

Tory is expected to release the letter publicly on Monday at a Scarborough daycare, accompanied by Councillor Gary Crawford, the city's budget chief.

Both men are expected to get an earful from parents over the school grants when Toronto's proposed 2017 budget goes to Tory's executive committee on Tuesday.

At press time Sunday evening, Wynne's office had not replied to a request for comment on the letter.

Councillor Davis, who has long championed increases in child-care funding, said she is glad Tory is pushing the premier to help "desperate" Toronto parents.

“But Toronto has to step up, too,” she said in an interview. “Our cost-sharing contribution has fallen significantly over the past few years while funding from parents and the province has increased.”

She added: “If the mayor wants to show real support for parents, he can start by keeping the (school) occupancy grant in place.”

Davis also said almost 5,000 new subsidized spaces would be only a “good start” that gets Toronto back to the ratio of subsidies to spaces the city had in 2010, and the city needs to keep pushing for more.

-reprinted from Toronto Star

Region: Ontario ^[3]

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