

Parents whose toddler died in daycare call for universal system ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

A Vancouver couple whose 16-month-old boy died in an unlicensed daycare earlier this year are pushing for B.C. to adopt a universal \$10-a-day child care system.

Shelly Sheppard and Chris Saini shared their views in an open letter on Facebook Wednesday, hours after the federal government pledged an extra \$7-billion toward affordable child care spaces across the country.

The grieving parents, who lost their son Macallan in January, said despite their overwhelming pain they are determined to make something constructive of their family's tragedy.

"As time goes on and we get further and further away from our son Mac the sorrow we feel deepens and darkens. The weight is crushing," Saini wrote.

"We cannot let this stop us from mounting a campaign that brings awareness and massive reform around the state of daycare in British Columbia."

They urged anyone who is fed up with the system to reach out to their local MLA and demand improvements before May's provincial election. The couple also endorsed a universal system offering child care for \$10 a day, which has been endorsed by the B.C. NDP.

"I really want Mac's death to not be in vain – I really want to see change," Saini told CTV News in a tearful phone call Thursday.

"What happened to Mac can happen again," Sheppard added. "We don't want any other parent to go through this."

The couple's son, described as a curious and joyful tot, died after an incident at a private residence near Kitchener Street and Commercial Drive on Jan. 18. Few details about what happened have been confirmed, and the parents said they can't share anything because of an ongoing police investigation.

CTV News confirmed there was no daycare registered or licensed at the address, though daycares that only care for two children or a group of siblings aren't required to register or obtain a licence in B.C.

The parents said they struggled to find available child care spaces in Vancouver, an experience that's all too familiar to many parents in the city.

"Our experience of licensed and unlicensed daycare facilities has been horrendous," Saini wrote in their letter.

"Governments are supposed to be responsible to the people that elect them. Their policies and programs should reflect the needs and wants of the electorate. We have to let them know we want massive reform in the daycare industry."

On Wednesday, B.C. Finance Minister Mike de Jong was asked whether the federal government's funding boost could make the province more amenable to the idea of \$10-a-day child care.

"No," he said.

The minister said the funding will be used to create additional child care spaces in B.C., however, which will make it easier for parents to find a spot when they need it.

"The more spaces that are built the less pressure there is on waitlists, and there's better availability," De Jong said.

Earlier this year, with the election looming, the province also promised to fund up to 4,100 new child care spaces on its own.

-reprinted from CTV News

Region: British Columbia ^[3]

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