

City's after-school daycares to exclude kids under 6 ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Despite hopes that the province would grant an exception, children younger than six years old will officially be banned this fall from before-and-after-school programs run by the City of Ottawa.

In an email to local politicians last week, city recreation manager Dan Chenier announced the new rules, which come out of legislation introduced in 2015 in an attempt to better regulate unlicensed daycares.

"Effective September 1, 2017, the city's recreation programs will only be permitted to offer programs to children [who are] between the ages of six and 12 years by December 31, 2017," Chenier wrote in his email.

The city will also only be able to provide each eligible child with a maximum of three consecutive hours of care per day - meaning that children older than six, Chenier wrote, can't take part in both before-school and after-school programs.

"The only way forward to continue and serve four- and five-year olds was really for us to become licensed child care providers," Chenier told CBC Radio's All In A Day Tuesday afternoon.

"We looked at that, and for 34 sites, for this September, we didn't feel like that was the right decision to make."

Legislation introduced in 2015

The changes are in response to the implementation of the Child Care and Early Years Act, which came into effect in 2015 and replaced the Day Nurseries Act.

The new legislation stipulates that before-and-after-school programs that care for more than five children be licensed as child-care centres. Schools may provide up to three hours of care daily, without a licence, for children ages six and older.

Indira Naidoo-Harris, the minister responsible for early years and child care, has said that the legislation was introduced because of strong recommendations made by former ombudsman Andre Marin, who issued a report in 2014 that found that unlicensed daycares in Ontario were operating under lax and barely enforced rules.

Asked for exception

Chenier said the City of Ottawa asked the province to be granted an exception to the legislation, as it's the sole municipal daycare provider in Ontario serving four-and-five-year-olds.

When that request was turned down, Chenier said the City of Ottawa made another plea: at least let children under six currently enrolled in city daycares be allowed to "age in" to the new child care regime.

"Then we would shut the gate and say, from here on in, we will do what other recreation departments are doing," Chenier told All In A Day.

"But there wasn't acceptance of that either. Which leaves us now with the decision we've made."

Chenier said converting the before-and-after-school programs to licensed daycares would require a "significant additional expenditure" on the city's side, mostly to cover the costs of hiring more staff.

In turn, daycare fees would increase from roughly \$1,900 per school semester to more than \$3,400 - which wasn't feasible, said Chenier, given that the new rules affect only about five per cent of the city's child care clients.

"We're talking about potentially just over something like 114 kids that won't be able to be accommodated, out of just under 2,000 kids that we serve," he said.

The city has never had "any issues with safety of any sorts" in its municipal-run daycares, Chenier added.

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