

Parents, advocates demand action on daycare ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

The time for talk is over. The time for action is now.

That was the message from parents and grandparents as they gathered Saturday at the downtown branch of the Vancouver Public Library to speak to NDP minister of state for child care Katrina Chen.

The meeting was organized by the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of B.C. following the government's budget announcement last week. Many parents and child care advocates expressed disappointment that the announcement made no mention of the NDP's promised \$10-a-day daycare plan.

"I appreciate the fact that you are listening but the time for listening is over the time for doing is now," said Susan Harney, chair of the coalition and, more importantly, a grandmother of four, and full-time caregiver to two of her four grandchildren.

"Our kids can't wait for compromise... they are counting on you, we are counting on you. You rose on this issue. You will go down on this issue if you don't do something soon."

Julia Smith, mom to eight-month-old Eleanor, said the family is on waiting lists at 14 different daycares. She said she's been told by some daycare operators she should get on more waiting lists because the chances of a spot coming up in the next four months is slim.

Smith said she got on the list at one licensed in-home daycare in her neighbourhood when she was four months pregnant.

"They say they might have a spot in July 2018 so that will be after two years on a wait list," she said.

Single-mom Laetitia Lerebourg, who is a full-time teacher, has daycare spots for her two children, but the cost is tremendous. She said she recently calculated that if the fee structure doesn't change, by the time her youngest is ready for kindergarten she will have spent \$100,000 on daycare.

"I feel sad. I feel mad. It's not right. It's not fair," she said.

"We need to take action now... it should have been done this week."

Sara Langlois is originally from Quebec, which has a universal child-care system. While it has its detractors, she said, the system works well for many.

"I can tell you that it's light years away from what we see here in B.C. and for my friends in Quebec with two, sometimes three, children finding daycare is a non-issue and paying for it as well. They are always surprised at my decision to stay here in B.C. knowing that I struggled so much to find childcare in the first place and pay for it now that I have it."

She is currently expecting her second child and questioning whether it is worth the cost of daycare to return to work after her maternity leave ends.

"My take-home pay cheque will soon be smaller than my child-care fees."

In response to the comments, Chen said that finding and paying for child care is not something that should be a burden.

"It should not be a worry to any family," she said, adding that child care should be a basic service.

Chen said she the \$10-a-day plan is still on the table.

"Our government is very committed to the \$10-a-day child care plan. That is still our goal because we know that it is the right thing to do and there's a lot of work ahead of us."

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