

# Manitoba takes baby step toward improving 'overly complicated' daycare legislation <sup>[1]</sup>

16,702 kids on child-care wait lists; province lost 20 more home-based child-care spaces as of March

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## EXCERPTS

The Manitoba government has introduced a legislative change it believes will clarify and streamline current rules governing the operation of daycares and home-based child care in the province.

Families Minister Scott Fielding tabled the Community Child Care Standards Amendment Act Wednesday during question period at the legislature. It seeks to "enhance powers respecting governance and accountability" in the child-care system, the minister said.

"We think it will make it a lot easier for child-care centres to start up, to create efficiencies in the system," he said.

"This is one of the elements, it's not the only element, of creating a more effective child-care sector."

Fielding said the change will lead to less red tape and follows conversations with current child-care providers who say the act is "overly complicated and outdated," Fielding said.

"So far it seems like the changes will indeed make the act easier to interpret and strengthen the legislation," said Pat Wege, executive director of the Manitoba Child Care Association, who provided consultation to the province on the legislative changes.

Wege said the first phase of the bill is only a "small piece" of the changes coming to the act.

"Today seemed to be just a small number of changes and the bigger changes will come into Phase 2," she said. "I think it's a good step forward."

## Giving 'good' daycares a break

Wege said one important thing the legislative change will do is extend the licensing period to three years for child-care facilities "that have a good track record of complying with legislation."

"I used to be an operator of a child-care centre and we never had any licensing issues, so I think rather than send someone to my centre every year to re-license, dedicate the time to a program that might be struggling. I think that makes sense."

The changes also could provide a safety net to boards of directors operating at child-care centres. Current legislation dictates that all not-for-profit child-care centres must have a board of directors that includes at least five parents whose kids attend the daycare.

Wege said that's a lot of responsibility to place on parents who might not always have the right expertise or resources.

"Some of these centres now are very large - they can have 200 or 300 spaces, multi-million dollar budgets and the governance is now up to parents whose kids attend the daycare to be responsible," she said. "That's a huge job."

The new legislation will give the families minister power to step in and help provide administrative support to boards in the event something goes wrong, be that financial mismanagement or safety issues, Fielding said.

"[It] will definitely help the system," Wege said. "We at the MCCA often get calls from boards who've gotten themselves into a pickle [and] however well intentioned they are, they need some help."

## Long wait-lists, short on spaces

There are more than 300 licensed family child-care providers operating out of homes that are part of the Manitoba Child Care Association, Wege said.

What the first of two phases won't do is help retain or attract more child-care providers, she said.

"That's something that has been a long-standing problem and we need to continue to move forward," she said.

The most recent figures from the province suggest the number of home-based child-care centres has continued to decline over the past year, despite a Tory election promise to license 550 child-care spots lost under the past NDP administration.

As of March 31 of this year, the most current numbers provided to CBC News, there were 35,469 child care spaces in Manitoba. Of those, 32,449 were offered through 699 child-care centres or daycares.

As for home-based settings, there were 3,020 spaces spread across 418 homes - 20 fewer spots than were recorded in December 2016 and 37 fewer than there were at the end of 2015-16 fiscal year.

CBC News asked for more up-to-date figures but has not had a response to that request.

The child-care wait-list also ballooned to 16,702 as of Aug. 31, a spokesperson for the families minister said in a statement. Minister Fielding pegged the wait-list at "about 15,000" in December 2016; a subsequent CBC News story in March 2017 reported the number at greater than 14,000.

Wege said the association has recommended more funding to increase child-care spaces in the province.

Fielding said his department is negotiating a deal with the federal government that could see an additional \$15 million in funding flow in each year for five years for more child-care spaces.

In addition to more funding for child-care spaces, Wege says she hopes the second phase of changes replaces the term "child-care worker" with "early childhood educator," as she said the latter term has been the industry standard for two decades.

#### **NDP raises safety concerns**

NDP Leader Wab Kinew said the amended act appears to lack clear safety guidelines for child-care providers, including those on fire evacuation protocols, and is missing details on the human rights code meant to protect kids from being discriminated against on the basis of gender, race or otherwise.

Fielding and Wege said those details will be worked out through regulatory policies that will be crafted in the coming months.

The Manitoba Child Care Association's ultimate goal is to make sure any changes strengthen rather than weaken the system, Wege said.

"Child-staff ratios, trained staff requirements and group sizes, we regard as the iron triangle for quality. So those are things we are going to be watching very closely."

-reprinted from CBC News

**Region:** Manitoba <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** social policy <sup>[4]</sup>

legislation and regulation <sup>[5]</sup>

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