

# Toronto should boost child-care spending by \$11M over 3 years, budget chief says <sup>[1]</sup>

Budget going to council will match 20% of new provincial, federal funds over 3 years, Gary Crawford says

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## EXCERPTS

Toronto Budget Chief Gary Crawford says the city will make good on its promise to match a portion of new provincial and federal funding for child care.

"The bottom line is we are living up to our commitment," Crawford told CBC Toronto on Monday.

Crawford said the city's budget committee will recommend on Tuesday, as part of the city's final 2018 budget, that council commit \$11 million over three years to child care. The recommendation will be made to Mayor John Tory's executive committee. Council is scheduled to consider the budget on Feb. 12 and 13.

Specifically, Crawford said the money will be used to increase the number of child-care fee subsidies for children, from birth to age 4, and to build an Indigenous child-care and family centre in Toronto. The number of subsidies will increase by 825 in 2018, he said.

The city's contribution to the federal and provincial funds will be phased in by 2021. The money will be used for both operating costs and capital expenditures.

"If we can do better, we are working at trying to do better. But at this point, we will commit to exactly what council wants, which was a 20 per cent over a three year commitment," Crawford said.

"There's a need for the city, along with our provincial and federal partners, to commit to increasing child care overall, between subsidies and spacing. We have been increasing that. This is something that we can't do alone. We're very pleased that the federal and provincial governments have stepped up to the plate."

Crawford's comments come several hours after a news conference was held by child care advocates who called on the city to fulfil its commitment.

## Families are 'desperate'

The advocates, who are also parents of young children, said families are "desperate."

Earlier, Carolyn Ferns, an employee of the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care, told reporters that she is on 12 waiting lists for child care. Fern is currently on maternity leave with her eight-month-old son Rowan.

Fern, a former child-care worker, said she and her partner are prepared to pay full fees for child care because they do not qualify for a subsidy. She said she is likely going to be paying more than \$1,500 per month for care for her son.

"For the last eight months, I've had a first-hand look at the child-care crisis," Ferns said.

"The federal and provincial governments have stepped up to add money to child care, and we need the city of Toronto to do the same. We need all three levels of government working together to make a difference on this issue."

She said the city should be involved in the planning process now that provincial and federal funding is available.

"The city should be supporting our youngest citizens. There's nothing more important than that."

According to Toronto ACORN, which stands for Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now, councillors voted unanimously last year in favour of a plan over 10 years to add new child-care spaces and reduce fees for parents.

The plan included a commitment by the city to match 20 per cent of new provincial and federal money for child care.

Pooria Just, a single dad to his son Dustan, 4, and a member of Toronto ACORN, said the high cost of child care takes a major toll on families.

Just, an entrepreneur who has founded three startups, said he took three years off to look after his son.

"We desperately need the city to keep its 20 per cent commitment."

Laurel Rothman, interim coordinator of the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care, said government investments in child care benefit low-to-middle income families, under served neighbourhoods and newcomers to the city.

"Toronto families are desperate for affordable, high quality child-care spaces," she said.

Average fees for parents are about \$1,200 per month, she said. About 12,000 eligible children are on the waiting list for child-care fee subsidies.

On Monday after the news conference, Rothman said provincial and federal funding for child care is a poverty reduction measure.

Coun. Janet Davis, who represents Ward 31, Beaches-East York, said the federal and provincial governments committed \$56 million to child care in Toronto last year. That means the city's contribution should be \$11.2 million.

Davis said at the news conference that the promise that the city's contribution will be phased in by 2021 is "not good enough."

-reprinted from CBC News

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