

Group calls for changes to rural child care on Prince Edward Island ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

TRACADIE, P.E.I. - A group is calling on the province to revisit regulations around child care, especially for rural areas where day care providers are not as common.

The new rules also seem to apply to large gatherings of children in general, says

Wanda McInnis, an unlicensed home child-care provider in Ten Mile House.

“These are all questions we need answers for because they’re saying it’s not just me, it applies to everyone that invites children into their home.”

In the past year, McInnis had surprise visits by Early Learning and Child Care representatives on three occasions investigating whether she was looking after too many children.

McInnis takes care of four children throughout the day, while five school-aged children wait at her house for about 15 minutes before and after their bus ride. McInnis said she was told those five kids put her over the limit and three would have to find alternate care. She was told she could not increase the limit even if another adult is in the home.

“(They said) that applies to anyone, not just day cares, even if I was retired. So how many children can you have at a birthday party or sleepovers for your hockey team?” said McInnis, who has provided care for 26 years.

More than 75 parents and kids came out to support McInnis during a public meeting at the Tracadie Recreation Centre Sunday night.

Many parents at the meeting noted that child care can be hard to find in rural areas.

“There isn’t a day care on every corner like there is in Charlottetown,” said Maxine Jay-Doucette.

“If nothing else, there should be some serious consideration given to some amendments to the (Early Learning and Child Care) Act. I’m here to support the community, most of all to support Wanda, who has really given her heart and soul to the community, to the residents and to the children who she loves dearly.”

-Liberal MLA Buck Watts

Bobby Cameron, chairman of the P.E.I. Early Learning and Child Care Board, responded to The Guardian's questions on the matter with an emailed statement.

The board says after the amended act became law in January, the number of children permitted in home child care increased.

An unlicensed home care operator can have up to seven school-aged children or six if the group also consists of preschool children.

McInnis could take care of one more child if she became licensed but would also have to complete a 30-hour course, create a business and service plan and file other paperwork.

"So what's the benefit?" she said.

The board said in its statement that it is working with McInnis to resolve the issue.

"Parents are aware that the centre is not in compliance, and the board is working with interested operators to expand access to spaces in the community for school-aged children," reads the statement.

"Wanda is not looking to break the rules, but she thinks, as well as we the parents think, there should be different rules for areas outside the city," said Jay-Doucette.

Liberal MLA Buck Watts, who attended the meeting Sunday night, says he is going to bring the group's message to Education, Early Learning and Culture Minister Jordan Brown.

"If nothing else, there should be some serious consideration given to some amendments to the (Early Learning and Child Care) Act," said Watts. "I'm here to support the community, most of all to support Wanda, who has really given her heart and soul to the community, to the residents and to the children who she loves dearly."

Child care act amended

An amendment to the Early Learning and Child Care Act came into effect on Jan. 27.

Under the new regulations, home-based child care providers can care for up to five children including two infants, six children with no infants or seven school-aged children before requiring a licence.

As well, children eligible to attend school within three months can enrol in programs for either pre-school or school-aged children, easing their transition to kindergarten.

Licensing requirements have also been clarified for single-purpose programs such as hockey camps where the purpose is not child care.

"These amendments respond to concerns from parents and child care operators who felt the new act is too restrictive in some areas," Education, Early Learning and Culture Minister Jordan Brown said in a statement. "The amendments add flexibility in the age and number of children that operators can care for before requiring a licence — which in turn, can make their businesses more viable and create more options for families."

The P.E.I. Early Learning and Child Care Board is responsible for overseeing adherence to the act and regulations.

-reprinted from the Guardian

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