

Budget marks 'historic change' in B.C. child care, says advocate ^[1]

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Source: Vancouver Courier

Format: Article

Publication Date: 20 Feb 2018

AVAILABILITY

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B.C. child care advocates are celebrating what some are calling a historic investment by the province.

"It's all very good news," Sharon Gregson, spokeswoman for the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of B.C.'s \$10-a-day campaign, told the Courier following Tuesday's budget announcement. "They get two thumbs up for the child care piece of the budget. They followed our recommendations very well."

The budget included a commitment of more than \$1 billion over the next three years to "set the province on the path to a universal child care plan that will make child care affordable for parents and caregivers," Minister of Finance Carol James said in delivering the budget.

"They are committing to new licenced spaces," Gregson said. "They are putting in a fee reduction and having a new affordability grant and they're investing in more licenced child care, so these are all very good things. They really are turning the corner on child care chaos with this budget."

The funding will create more than 22,000 child care spaces across the province, James said, with increased capacity for the province's health authorities to licence new spaces, conduct investigations and monitor compliance.

The budget also includes a new affordable child care benefit aimed at reducing costs by up to \$1,250 per month per child for 86,000 families a year by 2020/21. The government also promised up to \$350 per month paid directly to licenced child care providers to reduce fees for an estimated 50,000 families a year by 2020/2021.

Gregson and other child care advocates were left disappointed in September when the NDP's budget update failed to include any mention of the \$10-a-day plan, and were unsure going into today's announcement.

"We were optimistic but cautious about whether or not they'd deliver on all the aspects. They have," Gregson said. "We've still got a couple of details to work out around when the educators can expect wage enhancements and making sure that fees are capped, but all the elements are there, the funding is there. This is a historic change in B.C. for child care."

However, the work to reform child care in the province is not over.

"We have a 10-year plan so we have to keep those improvements coming," she said. "We have to keep investing so that we get to more affordable fees for all families, more spaces, more licenced spaces and the important wage enhancements for early childhood educators."

Gregson added that there is still much work to be done but today's announcement signals that the government is prepared to make needed investments.

"I think we need to give the child care folks in government credit."

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