

Questions remain as April opt-in deadline for child care fee reduction passes ^[1]

Confusion over the province's new child care plan and how it will impact private facilities has led to limited "buy-in" from daycare providers so far, said a spokesperson for the B.C. Child Care Owners Association.

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EXCERPTS

As the opt-in deadline to receive funding for April arrived Friday, many for-profit daycare providers were still trying to determine whether to apply, said Jennifer Maillet.

"At this point, I don't think the government is getting the buy-in that they thought they would," she said.

The director of Willow Creek Child Care in Terrace speculated that many private providers who applied did so out of fear that parents would move their children to another facility if they couldn't offer a rate reduction, or didn't want to "punish parents" as the details are sorted out.

Maillet said she applied in "good faith" and still believes the program could be successful if there is more transparency around it.

The fee reduction is part of the province's new billion-dollar child care plan, announced in February's budget.

The program will cut daycare costs by up to \$350 a month for each child, depending on the age of the child and whether they are in a licensed family or group daycare. The money goes to the daycare, and the savings are passed on to parents.

Questioned in the legislature Thursday, Children and Family Development minister Katrina Chen said the government had sent out 3,444 contracts, 2,200 of which had been returned. Of those returned, 72 per cent of providers had opted-in.

That would mean 1,584 providers, or 46 per cent of those with contracts, had opted in so far. There was no indication of how many private daycares without government contracts had applied for the funds, compared to those that had not.

Opposition critic Laurie Throness questioned what would happen to providers that were denied.

"These providers — as they tell me — will go broke as parents withdraw their children and look for a provider from whom they can get the fee increase," he said in an interview Friday.

The Chilliwack-Kent MLA said providers he's spoken to feel "coerced" by the situation.

“As the price of opting in, providers must agree to allow the government to approve or deny any fee increase,” he explained. “This will effectively give up control of their business to the government ... The policy tying the fee reduction to the surrender of business control jeopardizes the viability of every child care centre that doesn’t opt in.”

Postmedia has requested comment from the Ministry of Children and Family Development about the number of providers that have opted-in to the program.

In the legislature, Chen said staff are focused on processing applications and emphasized that providers can opt-in at any time going forward.

“They can join our plan. They can take their time. I really encourage providers to connect with us if they have questions.”

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