

Parents blast Toronto auditor's questioning of city-run child care centres ^[1]

Toronto's auditor general suggests city's 52 municipally-run child care centres could be transferred to non-profit sector to free up money for more fee subsidies.

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EXCERPTS

Parents, councillors and early childhood educators say they will fight the city auditor general's recommendation that Toronto consider handing over its 52 child care centres to non-profit operators.

Mayor John Tory, who is facing re-election in October, also appears reluctant to endorse the idea.

"I'm less interested in having a debate right now about transferring child care centres anywhere," he said in an interview Monday.

The proposal is among 20 recommendations to improve efficiency in Toronto children's services to be discussed by the city's audit committee Friday.

If the city stopped operating child care centres, an extra \$28 million would be available to create 2,000 new fee subsidies or boost wages by \$2.30 an hour for workers in the rest of the system, says Auditor General Beverly Romeo-Beehler.

"Using non-profit operations instead of city-run operations will make the government pool of subsidy dollars go further," she says in her 96-page report. "This will also likely result in lower fees at the 52 centres, making it more affordable for full-fee-paying families."

Fees in city operated centres are between 28 per cent and 45 per cent higher than those in non-profit daycares, largely due to higher city wages and benefits, the report notes.

But critics say the city shouldn't be increasing subsidies and lowering parent fees at the expense of well-paid early childhood educators in municipal centres. Especially when those centres are among the highest-quality in Toronto and serve some of the most vulnerable children.

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