

Group pans subsidy plan for private kindergartens ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

The Awakening Foundation yesterday criticized the government's plan to offer more than NT\$30 billion (US\$1 billion) in subsidies to private kindergartens, saying the money could build and fund almost 3,000 public childcare centers and non-profit kindergartens, which would benefit more than 310,000 children.

With Premier William Lai (2) (2) today scheduled to announce the details of a policy to address the nation's dwindling birthrate, the foundation called on the government to review its plan to subsidize private kindergartens, calling it a waste of money.

The Executive Yuan has previously said it would offer annual subsidies to private kindergartens that agree to raise the starting salaries of their teachers to NT\$29,000 as part of a plan to lower the tuition fees at such schools, said foundation board member Hung Hui-fen (洪慧芬), a Soochow University Department of Social Work associate professor.

The government would give each private kindergarten approximately the average cost of a non-profit kindergarten — namely one funded by government and run by a non-profit organization — plus 5 percent profit, she said, adding that the nationwide policy would require an estimated NT\$30 billion per year.

"Lai had said that the plan to subsidize private kindergartens was made because the speed at which public and non-profit kindergartens are being built cannot meet the nation's growing need for childcare services and preschools. However, if that is true, why not allocate more money to building them or even transform some private kindergartens to non-profit ones?" foundation policy director Chyn Yu-rung (覃玉蓉) said.

Private kindergartens are known for overworking their employees and their quality is often questionable, she said.

Only public and non-profit kindergartens, which are regularly reviewed to meet strict government standards, can be trusted for the quality of their childcare service, their pricing and work conditions, she added.

"The nation has been dealing with a lack of public childcare services and their uneven distribution for more than 20 years," Alliance of Educare Trade Unions director Kuo Ming-hsu (郭明旭) said.

Subsidizing private kindergartens would not solve any problems, as they would only be opened in profitable locations, he said.

"Of all the nation's districts and townships, 43 have no private kindergartens — and they are not necessarily what people typically consider 'remote areas,'" he said.

Offering subsidies to private kindergartens would not help families living in those areas, nor would it improve the quality of those kindergartens or increase birthrate, he said.

The NT\$30 billion could be better spent by building public childcare centers and non-profit kindergartens, Hung said.

The foundation has misunderstood the policy, Executive Yuan spokesman Hsu Kuo-yung (徐國勇) said yesterday.

The actual details would be announced at a news conference at the Executive Yuan today, Hsu said.

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