

# Worried parents and child care advocates ask 'what now?' in wake of PC win <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

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## EXCERPTS

Minutes after media outlets declared a majority government for Doug Ford's Progressive Conservatives last Thursday night, Carolyn Ferns began gearing up for a renewed fight for affordable, high-quality child care for Ontario families.

"Feeling blue about child care? We hear you," wrote Ferns, policy co-ordinator for the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care, in an email to early childhood educators, parents and other supporters urging them back to the battlefield.

"Ontario had never been closer to achieving quality child care that all families could afford and trust," Ferns wrote in the email fired off at 11:01 election night, as her Facebook feed started filling up with messages of despair.

Both Liberal and NDP platforms promised multibillion-dollar commitments to create more licensed spaces, boost wages for early childhood educators (ECEs) and either make child care free or lower parent fees to as little as \$12 a day.

But the PC platform promised just \$389 million in child care tax rebates, an amount critics say won't go very far because it covers both licensed and unlicensed care for as many as 2 million kids up to age 15. The rebate does nothing to address the lack of licensed spaces nor the chronically low pay for ECEs who are fleeing the sector in droves, leaving centres unable to hire enough qualified staff, critics add.

"The next few years will be a challenge for our community," Ferns wrote in her e-blast. "But child care advocates don't back down from a challenge!"

Ferns is most concerned about the PCs' support of any kind of care, including unlicensed home daycares.

"We forget the Liberal government started working on this issue in earnest because a child died in unlicensed child care," she said. Toddler Eva Ravikovitch died in 2013 after being left for eight hours in a hot car by Olena Panfilova, the owner of an overcrowded, unlicensed home daycare in Vaughan. Panfilova and her daughter were caring for 35 children, despite the provincial limit of five. Panfilova was sentenced to 22 months in jail a year ago.

"It's just beyond me to think we could be turning back to that," Ferns added.

Amanda Munday, a member of parent group Toronto East Enders for Child Care, is happy that child care was an election issue for the first time in Ontario and that her riding of Toronto-Danforth voted overwhelmingly for NDP candidate Peter Tabuns, a strong supporter of the cause.

"But as a parent, I'm pretty devastated by the overall results," said Munday, whose mother had to retire early to help care for her two young children so Munday could go back to work.

"Now we are trying to figure out how we can make sure this issue stays top of mind," she said. "Because the situation for parents like me hasn't changed today."

Councillor Janet Davis, a longtime child care advocate, called the PC majority "devastating to Toronto families." An unnamed party spokesperson was quoted in the Globe and Mail on the eve of the vote saying the PCs would honour the Liberal government's commitment to build 100,000 new licensed spaces over the next five years. But Davis is skeptical.

Without funding to support a provincial wage scale for early childhood educators and funding to make the spaces affordable for families, those spaces won't be staffed and families won't have the money to use them, she said.

The PCs did not return a Star request for clarification Friday.

Council has approved a provincially mandated 10-year child care growth strategy for Toronto that commits the city to create 30,000 licensed spaces, 27,000 subsidies, a wage grid for ECEs, and a 50-per-cent cut to parent fees, Davis noted.

Municipalities across the province have been working to implement their own growth plans, as directed by the province, and should be

equally concerned about the approach to child care at Queen's Park, she added.

"If (the Ford) government tries to rip up those agreements, they will meet the anger of parents right across this province," Davis warned.

The huge setback for child care in Thursday's election shows why Canada needs a well-funded national child care program with robust policy, said Martha Friendly of the Childcare Resource and Research Unit.

"With 13 provinces and territories that change government frequently, there is no chance for child care stability," she said. "If we didn't have a national approach to health care, we wouldn't see provincial medicare programs."

The federal Liberals renewed the national interest in child care in 2017 with a multilateral funding framework based on the principles of accessibility, affordability, quality, flexibility and inclusiveness. But Ottawa is not talking yet about how to make it happen.

Friendly wondered if the PCs' promised child care tax rebate would qualify for funding under the federal framework.

"The federal government wants to make sure its money is delivering on those principles, which I support," she said. "So how does giving people money through a tax rebate do that?"

**Related link:**

**Region:** Ontario <sup>[3]</sup>

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**Source URL (modified on 27 Jan 2022):** <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/18/06/worried-parents-and-child-care-advocates-ask-%E2%80%98what-now%E2%80%99-wake-pc-win>

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