

Ford government proposes increase in at-home, unlicensed daycare spaces ^[1]

Proposal could lead to 'horrifying situations,' NDP Leader Andrea Horwath says

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EXCERPTS

Unlicensed and at-home child-care providers in Ontario may soon be able to care for more children — something the Ford government says will make it easier for parents to find daycare spaces, but which the Opposition warns could put kids at risk.

The proposed change is one of many included in an omnibus bill tabled in the Legislature Thursday designed to ease regulations for businesses and take away unnecessary red tape.

"You risk putting kids in a situation where they may not have the amount of adult supervision that they require," said NDP leader Andrea Horwath.

"Let's not forget we've had some horrifying situations in this province ... where kids actually died."

Government House Leader Todd Smith tabled the bill, entitled the Restoring Ontario's Competitiveness Act, which proposes changes to 18 different provincial acts.

Government says no children will be put at risk with the changes

"It's not going to put anyone at risk," he said in an interview.

"This just makes it viable for private daycare operators to actually have a home business."

Among the proposed changes concerning childcare:

A home child-care provider or unlicensed child-care provider will be allowed to care for up to three children under the age of two, rather than two children.

A home child-care provider with two caregivers can include up to six children under the age of two, instead of four.

Smith said the change is an easy way of adding more childcare spaces for parents who struggle to find a spot for their child.

"There's a real demand," he said, adding it's not only an issue in large cities, but in rural communities, as well.

"It's a real barrier to young families that want to get back to work as fast as they possibly can."

The previous Liberal government "created a lot of unnecessary paperwork and allowed major duplications of effort between the province and the municipalities." Andrea Hannen, of the Association of Day Care Operators of Ontario (ADCO), said in a statement.

She hoped the proposal "will help make child care more affordable and easier to find," while acknowledging that "from a political perspective, child care is a tricky issue."

"We've heard is that there's just far too much over-regulation in Ontario," said Smith, adding that the changes include harmonizing the province's rules with current federal regulations and "removing burdensome barriers to expansion" for businesses.

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