

Ford government creating child care chaos, say parents and educators ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Nearly a year after the Ford government was elected, parents and educators are calling out the province's handling of child care.

"At every step, the Ford government is making child care less stable, less affordable and less accessible for families," said Carolyn Ferns of the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care. "This is either rank incompetence on the part of the government, or a deliberate attempt to undermine community programs. Either way the effect is child care chaos."

New mom Tracy Morris, who is currently on maternity leave, is worried about the state of child care when she heads back to work in November, "I didn't realize the child care crisis we have in Ontario until I became a parent. And the Ford government is making it worse. I'm worried that I won't be able to find a child care space at all, let alone a space that's flexible and works with my family's schedule. And if the child care fees go up it will be impossible – we can barely afford child care fees as it is."

The Coalition was at Queen's Park on Wednesday to deliver over 7000 petition signatures, collected in less than a month, calling for a reversal of all funding cuts to child care. Even after Premier Ford's promise last Monday that funding cuts were being put on hold, it was revealed that over \$50 million in fee stabilization funding is still on the chopping block for this year.

Opposition Early Years and Child Care Critic Doly Begum, who will present the petitions to legislature, thanked the coalition for their advocacy. "Ontario families struggling to afford child care fought tooth and nail to get the Ford Conservatives to back off of municipal cuts that jeopardized subsidized child care spaces, but we have to keep fighting," said Begum. "Municipal cuts need to be canceled altogether, not merely delayed, and the Conservatives need to reverse their cut to a fund that kept child-care fees from skyrocketing even higher."

From allowing for-profit child care companies in public schools and weakening regulations in home child care, to cutting fee stabilization funding and introducing new restrictions on municipalities' ability to create child care spaces, the Ford government and Education Minister Lisa Thompson are ending the legislative session with child care policy in a state of disarray, as operators still have little clarity on funding changes.

"Nearly two months after the Ontario budget, we don't have full details on child care funding. Thousands of early childhood educators are still waiting to receive their \$2 per hour wage enhancement, despite the Minister's promise that the funding would continue. Funding delays and confusion have left communities and child care programs scrambling," said Ferns.

Families and educators were joined at Queen's Park by Toronto City Councillor Mike Layton who raised concerns about Bill 108, which could halt plans for 12 child care centres in the City of Toronto, "If Bill 108 passes, it puts at risk funding that developers have previously been required to negotiate, so the City can build important community services like child care centres. I urge the province to reconsider their destructive actions on the child care file," said Layton. "Child care cannot be a race to the bottom."

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Region: Ontario ^[3]

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