

Families with child-care subsidy will get TTC discount, but thousands on wait list won't ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Toronto parents who receive a municipal child-care subsidy will soon also receive a discount on the cost of taking the TTC, but only those lucky enough to get a daycare spot will get the transit break.

Mayor John Tory announced Thursday that the city is expanding its Fair Pass Discount Program to include 23,000 low-income residents who have been approved for subsidized daycare, at a cost of \$2.4 million to the city.

"It does represent one more way and one more step we're taking today to make life more affordable for families with limited means who call Toronto home," Tory said.

The fair pass program was rolled out last year as part of the city's poverty reduction strategy. The discount allows eligible residents to save one-third the cost of an adult fare for a single ride or monthly pass.

Until now, only certain clients with Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program were eligible. A total of 173,000 low-income residents now qualify for the discount.

"Making transit more affordable is about making it easier for low-income residents to be connected to opportunities and to interact with their city," the city's poverty reduction advocate Anthony Perruzza said Thursday.

The transit discount, however, does not extend to families of the 17,284 children who are on the waiting list for a subsidized child care spot even if they meet the income requirements.

Tory acknowledged that this could be viewed as being doubly penalized, but said not everyone on the waiting list for a child care subsidy has been verified as eligible.

"We obviously would like to be in a position where we can have as many people as possible who are qualified to receive a [child care] subsidy, and in turn, if they receive a subsidy they would qualify for this program," Tory said.

But it's really a matter of the available resources to make that happen."

Advocacy groups for both transit and child care expressed concern with the limited rollout.

"Transit riders need deeper discounts rolled out faster," TTCriders' executive director Shelagh Pizey-Allen said Thursday.

Jane Mercer, the executive director for Toronto Coalition for Better Childcare, said in a statement that she too is concerned.

"Every parent who has had their income tested and been deemed eligible for a childcare subsidy should receive the TTC discount immediately, because the childcare waitlist is thousands long," she said.

The city had originally planned to extend the transit discount to low-income residents receiving housing supports this year, but that component was not funded in the 2019 budget.

A spokesperson told CTV News Toronto that the city does not have access to the income verification currently managed by more than 200 housing providers, and that entering into data-sharing arrangements in order to identify eligible recipients would have delayed this phase of the Fair Pass expansion.

Council did however approve \$2.4 million to subsidize transit for the child-care subsidy holders.

The third phase of the transit discount program, if approved by council, would provide the TTC discount to residents living with a household income under the low-income measure threshold plus 15 per cent.

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