

# Amid criticism, Ford government softens blow of Toronto child-care cuts <sup>[1]</sup>

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### EXCERPTS:

Premier Doug Ford's provincial government appears to be backing off but not reversing its decision to cut funds for Toronto child care.

After protest from city officials and advocates, over the weekend the city received word from the province that the total funding cut for child care would be \$2.8 million rather than \$15 million.

Though the allotment for child-care expansion would still technically be cut by \$15 million, as city officials previously reported, a letter showing specific funding allocations from the province indicated that a general pool of funds from the province would at the same time increase by \$12.2 million.

The \$2.8 million gap left by that cut puts 186 subsidized child-care spaces in jeopardy next year, according to the city, with a waiting list still thousands of children long — something city council will now have to contend with.

A spokesperson for Education Minister Stephen Lecce, Alexandra Adamo, confirmed the funding allocations for 2020 and said the general amount allocated for 2020 is "a reflection of updated data for this year," which takes into account "a variety of demographic and socioeconomic factors," and that the increase was not in response to recent criticisms of the planned cuts.

"Frankly, this is getting silly," said Cressy (Ward 10 Spadina—Fort York), who has been leading the criticism over the provincial budget, in a statement Saturday. "Rather than this slow and painful ripping off of a band-aid, it's time for the provincial government to completely reverse their cuts to child care. Full stop."

In response, Lecce said in a statement Monday that the government is making "key investments" that will "put more money in the pockets of middle class families through our child-care tax credit, improve accessibility to child care across the province by building 30,000 new child-care spaces over five years."

The update from the province comes ahead of a debate on this issue at a city council meeting that begins Tuesday.

In a report to council published earlier this month, city staff outlined the impact of the Ford government moving away from the 100 per cent funding model to expand affordable child-care spaces established under former premier Kathleen Wynne. The province, under Ford, is now only committing to cover 80 per cent. That, staff said, would mean the city would receive \$59.9 million in 2020 rather than the anticipated \$74.9 million.

A gap of \$15 million would have meant the potential loss of 760 subsidized spaces.

The waiting list for a more affordable daycare spot in Toronto is currently more than 17,000 children long.

The province has characterized the downloading as simply a return to pre-Wynne funding levels.

"We're just moving back to what was commonly used," Lecce's press secretary Adamo said.

She called the cuts largely "administrative" but did not explain what was meant by that.

Under the old funding model, the province is still committed to both the construction and operating costs of 17 new child-care centres, city staff reported.

The new plan would see the remaining centres in the city's capital plan built by the province, but all operating costs fall to the city. That would eventually cost the city \$35 million annually, staff previously said.

"The Ford government's latest climbdown on child-care cuts shows that advocacy works. When parents and (early childhood educators) speak out, we can make a difference," said Carolyn Ferns of the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care. "But we need to keep pushing until we have a full reversal of child-care cuts because Ontario families need child care and programs need stable, predictable funding, not this funding roller-coaster."

Mayor John Tory called the reduced cuts a “step in the right direction.”

“I will continue to advocate for more child-care funding from the other governments, not less.”

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