

Expanded provincial daycare strategy needs to be part of pandemic recovery program, regional councillor says ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Now more than ever, it's time to start investing in child care as an economic issue, Pelham Regional Coun. Diana Huson says.

Huson is bringing a motion to Regional Council asking the Government of Ontario to prioritize children and child care as part of the province's economic recovery plan.

"It's one of the things the government can do to help spur recovery," Huson said. "I don't think what we've done in the past is going to work. Historically we have invested in infrastructure, and that means jobs in construction and trades.

"Those are not the people who are out of work right now. If you try to schedule a home renovation project, they are booked up for six months.

"How the government has traditionally responded to recessionary pressures is not going to work in this instance."

The motion asks Queen's Park to adequately fund and publicly release a comprehensive plan to support families through the provision of licensed child care and early learning education.

Huson isn't alone on the issue. Toronto and Ottawa councils have passed similar motions.

A recent RBC economic report that noted women's participation in the workforce is now at 55 per cent, the lowest rate since the 1980s.

"We need to look at who this (the pandemic) has impacted the most," Huson said. "I think, for the most part, it is women. The solution to that is to support child care to help them get back to work. Child care isn't a personal issue. It's not a women's issue. It's an economic issue and we need to start treating it like that."

Huson said it is not uncommon for women to have to leave the labour market altogether to provide child care or home-schooling.

The headline story from this week's MacLean's magazine supports the assertion, quoting a Calgary mother on the cover saying, "Staying home with them is safest, even if it cost a huge chunk of my career."

Canadian statistics on sick time and workplace absenteeism illustrate the work-life balance challenges experienced by families with small children, said a report prepared for officials from Guelph and the surrounding area. The research shows that mothers of young children miss work an average of 10 days, and fathers miss work an average of 1.5 days due to child illness each year.

The report from Guelph that crunched the data found that for every dollar invested publicly in child care, there is a regional economic output of \$2.27.

"If women aren't working, households have less money, and we are spending less," Huson said. "Our No. 1 tool for economic recovery, consumer spending, is at risk.

"If you are just looking at it as a return on investment, the question should be, 'Why aren't we doing this?'"

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