

# Alberta proposes rule changes for licensing and monitoring child-care spaces <sup>[1]</sup>

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**Source:** Global News

**Format:** Article

**Publication Date:** 28 Oct 2020

## AVAILABILITY

Access online <sup>[2]</sup>

## EXCERPTS

Alberta is proposing new rules for child care that would include flexible oversight and availability 24 hours a day to accommodate parents who work shifts.

Children's Services Minister Rebecca Schulz says a bill introduced in the house Wednesday follows extensive consultation with stakeholders, parents and caregivers.

The bill proposes a risk-based licensing approach. That means child-care centres with good track records would still be checked on, but more focus and resources would be placed on new ones or those that were struggling to meet standards.

"(This) means our licensing officers and their teams can spend as much time as necessary with those centres that need attention and monitoring to be compliant with regulations and also to be safe," said Schulz.

"These changes will absolutely not compromise the safety of children and youth in child care. In fact, with risk-based licensing, enforcement will actually improve."

Tricia Cunningham, executive director of the SIGIS Child Care Society, said licensing officers have knowledge that would be better used working with struggling centres rather than spreading that expertise around in a cookie-cutter approach.

"They're going to be able take that energy and put it into the field and (into) the centres that need that support," said Cunningham, who stood beside Schulz at the announcement.

The bill would also allow for availability to care 24 hours a day. Details, ratios, safety rules and policies on such around-the-clock centres have yet to be drafted, but Schulz said "we now at least have the (legislative) flexibility to step up and meet the needs of those working parents.

"This is an ask that we've heard again and again from communities like Fort McMurray that have a high number of young families with parents who do shift work."

Record-keeping, traditionally done on paper, would be allowed digitally.

Current ratios and best practices would be maintained and accreditation would be streamlined.

"It was kind of confusing for parents," said Schulz. "Most parents didn't really understand or know whether their centre was licensed, regulated, accredited or approved."

She said if the legislation passes, there will be two choices: "You are licensed or you are not. You are a licensed facility, you are a licensed day home, or you are not."

Opposition NDP critic Rakhi Pancholi said the bill is vague and it's not clear if subsequent regulations will have the quality care standards that parents are seeking.

"We know to get our economic recovery back on track, parents want to have access to affordable, quality child care," said Pancholi.

"If it's not accessible, if it's not affordable, if it's not high quality, we know parents are either going to put their children in unlicensed child-care settings or they will choose to step out of the workforce."

The province has 2,701 day cares, out-of-school care and pre-school programs accommodating more than 111,000 spaces. There are about 2,900 active licensed or approved programs.

**Region:** Alberta <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** legislation and regulation <sup>[4]</sup>

quality <sup>[5]</sup>

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**Source URL (modified on 4 Nov 2020):** <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/20/11/alberta-proposes-rule-changes-licensing-and-monitoring-child-care>

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