

# Third-party review recommends shutting down regionally run child care centres <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

KITCHENER -- A review by a third-party consulting firm has recommended the Region of Waterloo shut down five child care centres. The firm found "inefficiencies" at the centres, which are operated by the region. It also said shutting them down could save millions of dollars.

The union representing staff at the child care centres said it's been difficult to find out they might be out of work.

"Scared, they're afraid, angry, uncertain," said Noelle Fletcher, president of CUPE Local 1883.

The report will go to council next week. It recommends closing four centres by mid-2021, with the fifth closing at a later date.

Fletcher said the union has questions after meeting with the region on Friday.

"They didn't commit to ensuring that they were going to be the 207 spaces that we're losing," she said.

A similar review was done in 2015 by consulting firm KPMG, but ultimately regional council voted in favour of keeping all five centres open.

Parents hope the vote will have the same result this time.

"Parents are stressed right now, parents are burnt out," Leigh Farlow said.

Many said the closures could come with extra challenges.

Kimberly Elworthy sends both her kids to a child care centre in Kitchener. She said finding daycare for them wasn't easy.

"There are hundreds of parents on the waiting list for the child care centres and there aren't enough spots in the city for childcare," Elworthy said.

Regional officials said they don't know the exact number of children on the waitlists due to COVID-19. They said they're operating at 70 per cent capacity right now.

"We are responsible for the entire system and all the children in the entire system," Regional Chair Karen Redman said.

The region operates five centres, but oversees 14,000 child care spaces provided by 67 operators.

"We provide 1.9 per cent of those spaces and use 10 per cent of the overall budget," Region of Waterloo CAO Bruce Lauckner said. "That's a massive amount of our budget for a very small amount of our spaces."

Lauckner added the region is looking at other solutions to address child care affordability through things like subsidies and fee reductions.

"We haven't made those decisions yet, these are recommendations," he said.

The report said the region could save \$6.8 million in operating costs if the centres closed.

There will be a public meeting next week, and regional councillors will vote on Dec. 2.

The region has information on waitlists for child care centres and before- and after-school programs available on its website.

The site said some school programs are handled by licensed operators, while others are operated by the Catholic and public school boards.

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

**Tags:** closures <sup>[4]</sup>

public management <sup>[5]</sup>

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