

Vancouver city council to debate encouraging after-hours child-care spaces ^[1]

Child-care advocate says B.C. only has spaces for 20% of children and most of them are during work hours

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EXCERPT

Vancouver city councillors will debate a motion next week to increase safe and affordable child-care spaces available outside of traditional work hours.

Coun. Melissa De Genova, who put forward the motion, says finding child care in Vancouver is hard enough, let alone for parents who work nights and weekends.

"There's always been a lot of emphasis on the difficulties and challenges with affordable housing in the City of Vancouver," De Genova said. "Some families are spending more on child care ... than they are on rent."

The motion calls on the city to direct staff to "encourage and incentivize the development and operation of 24-hour and/or extended hour child-care centres in Vancouver." It also asks council to explore the possibility of funding from the province specifically for a 24-hour or extended hours child-care facility.

Pandemic highlights essential workers

De Genova, whose daughter is three, has been vocal about her own challenges as a parent while attending council meetings that stretch late into the evening and says she has heard from other parents about their hardships as well.

"I do empathize with parents who have different schedules," she said.

She first put forward the motion last year, before the pandemic, but retracted it as COVID-19 became more pressing.

Putting forward the motion again became more necessary, she says, as the pandemic increased awareness about essential workers.

De Genova points out that after-hours child-care is often more expensive and many essential workers, like grocery store clerks and caregivers, make low wages.

'Night care'

Wesley Richards operates the Brighthouse Junior Kindergarten in Richmond.

Richards has spoken to enough parents to believe there's enough demand for him to open up a 50-spot "night care" in Vancouver — a child-care centre that would provide children's programming in the evenings and safe spaces for children to sleep at night.

"A few people told me they are finding it difficult to leave their children at nighttime when they come to work," he said.

"Most of the problem is single mums or single dads."

The parents Richards has been speaking with are mostly health-care workers and emergency services workers.

Access to high-quality early learning

Sharon Gregson, spokesperson for the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of B.C., says there are only enough licensed child-care spaces in the province for 20 per cent of children and typically it's offered between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m.

"The pandemic has laid bare that we don't have anywhere near enough child care for families and, even more so, those who need flexible arrangements," she said.

"Children deserve access to high quality early learning and child-care opportunities, whether their parents work early in the morning or late in the evening or on weekends or during business hours."

One of the outcomes Gregson hopes will come from the motion is an assessment of families' needs. The biggest gaps she hears about from parents is early mornings and late evenings, she says.

The motion points out that the province has committed funding for a 24-hour children's facility in Kitimat, which is expected to open in 2022.

Similar facilities also exist in Ontario and Quebec, the motion says, with one in Barrie, Ont., that has a wait-list of 800 children for 70 licensed spots.

Region: British Columbia ^[3]

Tags: school-age ^[4]

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