

Ontario announces reforms to child care programs to improve accessibility ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

TORONTO -- The Ford government announced regulatory amendments Friday to make child care programs more accessible and flexible for parents working erratic and unpredictable hours during the coronavirus pandemic.

Education Minister Stephen Lecce, alongside MPP for Flamborough-Glanbrook Donna Skelly, announced the new reforms, which aim to improve the availability of before and after school programming.

"The focus for today's announcement is very much on driving a reduction red tape for our operators, an improvement to the health and safety requirements for our students or for our youngest learners within childcare centers, and also an expansion of choice and flexibility when it comes to delivering these before and after school programs that were historically prohibited to three hours a day," Lecce said at a press conference.

The amendments include:

- Exempting certain authorized recreational providers from their three-hour operating limit.
- Enhancing health and safety protections in licenced child care settings, such as requirements to support contact tracing by local public health, new requirements for home-based child care and updates to the safe storage of potentially poisonous and hazardous items.
- Reducing regulatory/administrative burden on child care operators by removing redundant and unnecessary requirements for all providers. These include the removal of duplicate requirements related to the collection of children's emergency contact information, allowing records and documents required by the regulation to be kept in digital format, and no longer requiring licensees to seek ministry approval for children 44 months and up to bring their own meals from home.

The reforms will come into effect on March 8.

"Today's announcements allows eligible authorized recreational and skill building providers to offer expanded hours, which should create up to 5,000 new before and after school spaces right across Ontario," Skelly said at a media briefing.

In a press release, the government said it may consider broadening the three-hour exemption to additional authorized recreational providers after the first phase of implementation is applied to those 5,000 spaces across the province.

Lecce said the changes will provide parents and child care providers with more flexibility.

"Now more than ever, access to affordable and accessible child care will be critical to driving Ontario's economic recovery, these changes that are announced today support the goal, demonstrate our ability to the province that we will provide choice, flexibility, affordability and greater access for families across Ontario," he said.

Region: Ontario ^[3]

Tags: legislation ^[4]

after school programs ^[5]

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