

Province introduces legislation to ensure early learning and child care meet the diverse needs of families ^[1]

Childcare fees to be frozen for three years as Manitoba continues to recover from economic impact of COVID-19

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AVAILABILITY

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Excerpted from news release

The Manitoba government is introducing new legislation that would support greater equity and flexibility in child care, while maintaining parent fees at their current levels for three years to support the province's economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, Families Minister Rochelle Squires announced today.

"Our government is committed to modernizing Manitoba's child-care system to ensure that options for care are available when parents need them," said Squires. "Bill 47, the early learning and child-care act, would create more equity in the system and expand supports that better meet the diverse needs of families, especially those most in need of early learning and child-care services."

Early learning is defined as a program of learning experiences that supports children's social, emotional, physical and cognitive development. Bill 47 would formally introduce this concept into legislation, and clarify what is meant by child care and early learning services to support more flexibility within the sector and an increased focus on early learning.

The minister noted the proposed legislation outlines five basic principles that must be taken into consideration when making decisions under the act including that:

- early learning and child-care services should ensure the health, safety, development and well-being of children;
- access to early learning and child-care services should enhance the economic opportunities available to parents;
- early learning and child-care services should be available on a continuum that is responsive to the diverse needs of families;
- promoting inclusion and respect, and accommodating diversity should be inherent in early learning and child-care services; and
- public funding should promote fiscal responsibility and the sustainability of early learning and child-care services.

Existing legislation focuses on licensing of child-care centres and home-based child care, which limits options for families. Under the new legislation, other early learning and child-care providers would be eligible for licensing to enable more options for services. In addition, new provisions would require licensed child-care facilities to provide approved early learning programming to pre-school children.

The minister also noted that under Manitoba's current legislation, parents employed in lower-wage jobs or jobs with non-standard hours often experience difficulties finding child care, as the legislation does not enable a delivery of services outside of typical business hours. Bill 47 includes provisions that would support the development of more part-time and extended-hours options for those who work or participate in education or training in the evenings.

Bill 47 would also streamline the certification process for early learning and child-care providers to ensure qualified staff get into the workforce faster.

"Our government appreciates the skills, knowledge and dedication of early childhood educators and child-care assistants in providing high-quality care," said Squires. "I especially thank them for continuing to maintain those high standards during the pandemic."

The proposed legislation sets out a robust compliance framework that provides legal grounding for existing practice, the minister said.

The province would continue to provide operating grants to licensed and regulated child-care providers to support the care and supervision of children, though the new act would enable greater flexibility in the provision of grants to support the modernization of the early learning and child-care system. Bill 47 would improve accessibility with continued financial assistance for parents who use licensed facilities, in conjunction with related financial supports under other legislation.

The minister noted the new legislation would update provisions that were introduced more than 30 years ago and make the requirements easier to understand and apply.

Some provisions in the new bill align with options recommended in an Early Learning and Child Care Transformation report by KPMG, commissioned by the province last year. The minister said the province will release the full report within 30 days, along with the findings of

a public engagement on early learning and child-care modernization that closed in early March. A preliminary report has been shared with the province's Parent Advisory Committee on Child-Care Transformation.

In December 2020, the Manitoba government announced the establishment of the committee to guide public engagement and to provide advice to the province on how to ensure child-care services meet the diverse needs of parents and families. The committee sought the perspectives of other Manitoba parents and guardians to help inform the modernization of early learning and child care.

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