

# Daycare bill gives Quebec 5 years to create 37,000 spaces <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

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

Access article in French via La Presse <sup>[3]</sup>

## EXCERPTS

With just a few months to go before the Quebec election, Francois Legault's CAQ government finally passed its Bill 1 on Thursday, which aims to ease the major crisis that has shaken the daycare sector for years.

Parents, however, will have to be patient.

Currently, there is an estimated unprecedented shortage of 51,000 daycare spaces and a severe shortage of daycare workers.

Bill 1 passed with 77 votes in favour and four against, with dissenting votes coming from the Parti Quebecois (PQ) benches. Unlike Liberal and Quebec Solidaire MNAs, the PQ opposition chose to vote against the legislation, believing that it does not support the educational child-care program (Centres de la petite enfance) set up in 1997 by Pauline Marois and the Lucien Bouchard PQ government.

At a news conference, surrounded by several partners in the field, Families Minister Mathieu Lacombe reiterated that his objective was to complete the child-care network "once and for all" by 2025, in particular by modifying the method of allocating places in order to speed up the process.

"The game has just changed," said the minister, proud of his new law, which commits him and his action plan to creating 37,000 new spaces by then, in a possible second term.

Meantime, some 17,800 daycare workers will have to be trained and hired, a significant challenge in these times of labour shortages.

The order is large and the investment required will be significant.

Over five years (from 2021-2022 to 2025-2026), Quebec estimates that it will have to spend an additional \$5.8 billion to finance the network. More modestly, the actual creation of spaces will cost \$1.2 billion over five years, according to the table provided by the ministry. In his calculation, Lacombe included several related costs, including the future remuneration of educators.

In the short term, however, nothing will change in terms of access. Women who are currently pregnant and parents with a baby looking for a place will have to continue to make do without.

Lacombe acknowledged his inability to respond quickly to the demand, saying that the immediate solution to the current shortage of spaces "does not exist."

He justified the fact that he waited until the very end of his mandate to present a solution to the daycare crisis by the need to manage the COVID-19 pandemic, which has hit daycares, forcing them to close their doors temporarily.

According to PQ spokesperson Véronique Hivon, the legislation is "a missed opportunity," as Lacombe did not take advantage of the change in law to provide Quebec with a truly comprehensive network of low-cost educational daycare services, based on the 1997 model.

Hivon fears an anarchic development of the network over the next few years, particularly because of the lack of clarity regarding converting non-subsidized spaces into subsidized spaces at \$8.70 per day.

She also criticized the minister for not having specifically written into the law the right of each child to have a spot.

"Our children deserve better, and this is what we would have expected from a government that claims to be the legacy of the Parti Québécois and Ms. Marois, but that does not respect the principles at the basis of this network, which are quality, accessibility and universality," said Hivon on Thursday. "With Bill 1, the minister has given himself new levers to enable him not only to accelerate the process, but also to better control the development of the network."

Quebec will now favour a continuous call for tenders, and not targeted calls, as in the past, which led to delays that could stretch over several years.

The new law will give the minister more powers, particularly to ensure better development of services at the regional level. If there is no

interest from promoters in a particular region, the minister will be able to create spaces in regions where the need is not being met.

The needs assessment mechanism will be reviewed to allow the Minister to better determine supply.

Bill 1 will also create a one-stop-shop to replace La Place 0-5, which has been a source of frustration for parents. Parents will have to go through the one-stop shop to get a space once it is up and running. This will make it easier for parents to know where they are on the waiting list, which is virtually impossible now.

The rules for registration at the one-stop child-care centre will be formulated to give priority to children living in disadvantaged areas.

The maximum number of children per facility will be increased from 80 to 100, and temporary space will be allowed to accommodate them as needed.

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