

Early childhood educators among those calling for increased pay at May Day event in Hamilton ^[1]

Higher minimum wage, more sick days dominate asks during rally

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EXCERPTS

Alicia Winegarden has spent the past few years watching her fellow early childhood educators (ECEs) get sick, burn out and even leave the profession to become servers because they could make a better living waiting tables than teaching young children.

"Right now there's a crisis in childcare," she said. "There's a shortage of ECEs."

On Sunday she joined Kiah Marcy, another Hamilton-area ECE, to stand in the cold and rain at Gore Park to call for increased wages.

The two were part of a May Day rally at Gore Park in downtown Hamilton, where speakers marked the international workers' holiday by pushing for a higher minimum wage, affordable housing and more paid sick days.

"I am ready to elect a government that cares about me, that cares about us, that cares about our communities and that's going to make sure we are safe," Jordyn Perreault-Laird, an organizer with the Justice for Workers campaign, told the crowd.

Calls for \$20 minimum wage, 10 paid sick days

Increasing minimum wage to \$20 an hour and ensuring workers have 10 paid sick days were among the key calls to action during the demonstration ahead of a larger gathering in Gage Park later in the afternoon.

Perreault-Laird pointed to the provincial election on June 2 and said it's up to Hamiltonians to demand better, whether it be ensuring companies don't misclassify gig workers or ending racism in the workplace.

"I want decent work for all," she shouted into a microphone, before the group marched over to a nearby Service Ontario location and taped signs and posters to its windows.

Among them were pictures of Flamborough—Glanbrook MPP Donna Skelly, who Perrault-Laird said had voted against more paid sick days dozens of times.

Winegarden and Marcy's posters were among the messages taped to the window.

"Professional wages for professional educators," were the words written in big black and red letters on the bright yellow Bristol board.

The sign called for \$25 an hour for ECEs and \$30 an hour for registered early childhood educators (RECEs).

"We're college educated, college regulated and what are we getting out of it?" asked Winegarden.

"Most ECEs make close to minimum wage, about \$18 an hour. We're saying at this point in time we need more."

Provincial parties have promised to increase pay

It's a stance Ontario Premier Doug Ford has said he agrees with.

"To be frank, they deserve more money. That's my opinion," Ford said late last month after signing a five-year deal with the federal government late last month that will cut child-care fees in the province in half by the end of the year.

The deal included an \$18-an-hour minimum wage for early childhood educators and \$20 for supervisors.

Under that agreement, the minimum wage for ECEs would rise \$1 an hour every year until reaching \$25.

But advocates have said \$18 is far too low, and early childhood educators need to be paid at least \$25 an hour now if Ontario hopes to recruit and retain enough workers to staff the growing sector.

The NDP has promised that, if it's elected, it will implement a minimum wage of \$25 an hour for RECEs.

"Because they're paid so low, because their wages have not been adequate, it's hard to keep child-care workers in the sector," provincial party leader Andrea Horwath said at the time.

Under the deal with the federal government, Ontario is set to create 86,000 child-care spaces, though that includes more than 15,000 spaces already in place since 2019.

Winegarden said far more ECEs will be needed before that growth will become possible.

Many childcare centres are already short staffed and over worked, she said, adding the pandemic has been an especially stressful time.

"Every year that we don't get a pay raise is a year we're getting a pay cut because of inflation, especially this past year," said Winegarden.

"It's kind of a desperate situation of this point."

Region: Ontario ^[3]

Tags: wages and working conditions ^[4]

decent work ^[5]

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