

Parents protest in Quebec City to demand more daycare spaces

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EXCERPT

Families held a protest Thursday at the National Assembly to denounce the lack of daycare spaces in Quebec and demand childcare be a priority in the election campaign.

Marie-Pierre Pratte's baby Agathe is five months old. She signed up for a daycare spot last year and is still waiting.

"The day I made my pregnancy test I said, 'Oh, I need to put her name right now,'" Pratte said.

As she gets older, the search has become more frantic.

"Even if I look in les CPE, gardiere privees, subventionnees — no matter which kind I'm looking for there's no place available."

Many of these parents are nearing the end of their parental leaves and with no child care, they're facing a choice between going back to work or staying home with the family.

"I am a teacher so I cannot go to class until I have a place for my son," said Audrey-Anne Roberge.

"I'm on maternity leave until she's 10 months old, but then I have no place, I keep looking, there's nothing... I think I will just have no salary," said Marie-Lynn Dion, another mother.

It's especially hard for those with infants. There are different care rules for children under 18 months, which results in fewer spots.

And with parental leave often lasting one year, there is a gap. They're hoping for the parental insurance program to be extended.

"So at least while they're waiting for spots when their maternity leaves have expired - they are not finding themselves in situations of poverty," said Liberal MNA Jennifer Maccarone.

According to a report in La Presse, the province missed its target for daycare spots in 2022.

It promised between 5-7,000 spaces but created just 3,200. As of the New Year, nearly 52,000 parents were on the waiting list.

The families minister has promised 37,000 more subsidized daycare spots, but only by 2025. The families at Thursday's protest say that doesn't help them now, which is why they came directly to meet with ministers and share their stories.

"I promise to read all of the testimonies," said Finance Minister Eric Girard.

Parents like Marie-Lynn Dion, say the lack of spaces is an added stress between finances and family.

"We have bills to pay, I have a job that I love, I wish I was not in this nightmare where I feel I'm in the 1950s," said Dion, "and I feel I have to stay home not because I want to but because I don't have the choice."

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