

Ontario's for-profit child-care owners demonstrate why they can't be trusted to build Canada's \$10-a-day child-care system ^[1]

The federal child care plan is a game changer for families but this means it must also bring change to the way the child care sector operates.

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EXCERPTS

As families in Ontario wait for child care fee relief, some for-profit child care owners seem more interested in continuing the status quo of sky-high parent fees and rock bottom wages for early childhood educators.

They take issue with the new Canada-wide child care system, complaining that it threatens their bottom lines. In doing so, they are proving exactly why they cannot be trusted to build Canada's \$10-a-day child care program. For them it's profits over parents, every time.

Their narrative is that they are all-female small business owners pressured by big government into murky deals that will leave their "business in ruins."

But they conveniently ignore two important points about Ontario's rollout of affordable child care:

- There is no threat to any centre's bottom line this year. This year's opt-in process is based on market fees and will be a simple 25 per cent fee reduction for parents retroactive to April 1 — funded entirely by the federal government. Even if centres charge parents for additional "non-base" services (transportation, optional field trips etc.), they may continue to do so.
- There is no bait and switch. While next year's funding guidelines are still being developed (and consulted on), a centre is free to opt-out next year if they decide the new rules don't work for them.

So why would for-profit centres deny parents thousands of dollars this year when there really is no risk of ruin? Is it because they would rather hold parents' fee rebates hostage now to try to gain a political advantage in hopes of winning laxer rules for next year's full implementation?

Another inconvenient fact that the for-profits' spokespeople ignore is that while some are indeed female small business owners, Canada's for-profit child care sector is increasingly corporate, big box and financialized.

These tend to expand not by developing new centres where families need them most, but by acquiring existing centres in lucrative real estate deals. As the Toronto Star Editorial Board asked last year, "why would Ottawa allow its historic new child-care spending to be sucked into global capital markets?"

The federal child care plan is a game changer for families that will not only lower child care fees this year but build a quality system for generations to come. But this means it must also bring change to the way the child care sector operates. With billions in new public spending flowing into child care, accountability for public funds must be ensured.

Fortunately, only a quarter of Ontario's child-care centres are operated on a for-profit basis. Given their strong objections to government accountability for public funds, it is clearer than ever why it is wise to limit their expansion. If those existing owner-operators would like to be part of the new system, they are welcome. But financial accountability for public funds is an essential part of the deal for all child-care providers.

Region: Ontario ^[3]

Tags: child care ^[4]

\$10 a day ^[5]

for-profit ^[6]

non-profit ^[7]

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