

Incorrect information sends some private N.S. child-care operators into 'tailspin' ^[1]

Notice from province about transitioning to non-profit model includes 'error'

Author: Gorman, Michael

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AVAILABILITY

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EXCERPTS:

The Education Department is apologizing to some private daycare operators for a document that incorrectly said they must switch to a non-profit model to qualify for funding from the \$605-million federal-provincial child-care agreement.

The purpose of the 17-page document is to give for-profit operators information about how to transition to a non-profit model. The problem is the second paragraph that says making the switch is a precondition to receiving money through the new program.

A few hours later, the Education Department sent out an updated version of the document, without that paragraph.

"Unfortunately, this is the roller coaster that we continue to be on," said Joseph Kinsman, who, along with his wife, Naomi, owns Becky's Daycare in Waverley, N.S.

"Nothing surprises me anymore."

Education Department apologizes for error

A spokesperson for the Education Department said in an email that the document was prepared for a small group of private operators who have expressed interest in voluntarily moving to not-for-profit status. The correction was made as soon as the mistake was flagged.

"We recognize that this error has created confusion and concerns for private operators and sincerely apologize for the error," said Lynette MacLeod.

"We want to reassure private operators there is a role for their business in the child-care transformation and we want them to be a part of this journey with us. To be clear, we are looking to increase access to child care, not decrease, and private operators will continue to have access to annual funding in alignment with the Canada-Wide Agreement."

The \$605-million agreement between the federal and provincial governments, which includes \$40 million from Nova Scotia, was announced a year ago. Among other things, the funding will lead to average \$10-a-day child care by 2026, increased wages for early childhood educators beginning this fall and more child-care spaces across the province.

But in January, concerns from private operators surfaced when they were told they would need to transition to a non-profit business model in order to be a part of the new funding program. The Education Department eventually relented on that requirement and created an advisory panel of experts to help navigate the integration of private operators into the system.

Kinsman is a member of the advisory panel. He said he was particularly surprised by the document because it runs counter to what's being discussed.

Although he understands why multiple documents might have existed, he said the release of the wrong document doesn't help an already-fraught relationship between private operators and the province, and is "beyond frustrating at this point."

"It just sends everybody in a tailspin," he said.

"You go from, you know, operating your daycare well and everything going well and then, all of a sudden, you think that the whole world is being ripped out from under you."

Protest planned for Province House

Although he has other concerns about the federal-provincial agreement, Kinsman said he's trying to be optimistic because of the work of the advisory panel. Still, he said his business, like many others, continues to struggle to find enough workers.

Education Minister Becky Druhan told reporters last week that getting early childhood educators a raise is "an urgent priority" for her

department and officials are working to make it happen as soon as possible.

A group called Child Care Now Nova Scotia, meanwhile, announced Wednesday that it will hold a rally outside Province House on Tuesday when MLAs arrive for a rare summer sitting. A news release from the group said the rally is intended to raise awareness about what it calls the labour emergency in the child-care sector.

Region: Nova Scotia ^[3]

Tags: labour shortage ^[4]

non-profit child care ^[5]

protest ^[6]

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