

Bill passed for free child care for Bermudian households under \$70,000 threshold [BM] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Senators passed a bill yesterday to pay child care bills for families or single parents earning under \$70,000 a year.

The Child Day Care Allowance Act 2008 could help up to 400 families said Junior Culture and Social Rehabilitation Minister Thaa Dill.

He said the bill would relieve the financial burden on families and encourage parents to spend more quality time with their children instead of working extra jobs to make ends meet.

More details will come with regulations at the end of the year.

The bill had support from all sides of the Senate. United Bermuda Party Senator Jeanne Atherden said both parties had offered breaks on child care in their 2007 manifestoes which indicated it was the right thing to do.

Now it was important to get the implementation right she said as she wondered how much of the cost of child care will be covered so people could plan their finances.

The financial threshold was set at families earning less than \$70,000 using new statistics culled from the poverty study just released by Government.

Independent Senator Walwyn Hughes wondered how incomes would be assessed. He said people living off rent money might not be working and might qualify.

But on the principle of the Bill he said it was highly welcomed. He added: "It's a big step forward. It's going to help a lot of people.

"Anyone helping children get a good start in life with educational opportunities has to be supported and lauded."

...

UBP Senator Charlie Swan noted that the Education Act already had a clause in it allowing for every three-year-old to have a right to receive free pre-school education if there was an aided or maintained pre-school in their parish with space.

Attorney General Kim Wilson said the bill could bring substantial savings with nursery care costing around \$9,000 a year.

To the accusations that the bill might be discriminatory by only allowing help for Bermudian children whose parents must be Bermudian or married to a Bermudian, she said the Human Rights Act was strict on discrimination over providing goods, facilities or services.

But she argued this bill was about providing financial help.

And Sen. Dill said the Human Rights Act was full of references saying nothing shall be deemed to prevent giving preferential treatment to Bermudians.

Children must go to a licensed day care centre or registered home day care facility but Government admits there is a squeeze on places and it might consider strategies to promote additional openings.

Government will establish a maximum monthly fee for child care services which will be payable directly to approved day care centres and home child care providers.

- reprinted from The Royal Gazette

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