

Daycare in N.S. starts fee-based wait-list after revoking 'guaranteed' spots ^[1]

Wait-list fees 'are not in line' with goal of inclusive, affordable child care: education minister

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Source: CBC News

Format: Article

Publication Date: 1 Aug 2023

AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

Excerpts

A daycare chain that's been the subject of complaints from Halifax-area parents in recent months says it will stop asking families for a deposit to secure a spot on its wait-list.

Until now, Kids & Company was requiring parents to pay the last month of child care, which was over \$1,000, along with a non-refundable \$200 registration fee to guarantee a spot for their child.

But the Ontario-based child-care provider will be keeping the \$200 fee in place to get on the wait-list, saying it is seeing growing demand.

Some parents have been complaining that Kids & Company revoked their "guaranteed" spot weeks before their children were due to start daycare, telling them that they no longer had space.

Kayleigh Fleet says she paid the company \$2,360 in November 2022 to secure two daycare spots for her twins, who were three months old at the time. The expectation was that they would start at one of the company's seven Halifax-area centres in August 2023.

But when Fleet inquired at the beginning of June to ensure that everything was still in place, she was told a few weeks later that her spots were no longer available.

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CBC News has learned of several other parents who were left in a similar predicament.

Kids & Company told the CBC in an email it needed to start a wait-list due to higher demand for child care. The company said it will no longer require families to pay the last month deposit in order to register for the wait-list, but the \$200 non-refundable deposit is still in place.

"We feel really badly about parents not having access to child care with us and are actively exploring solutions to increase child care spaces to address the demand for care," the statement said.

Fleet has since started a Facebook group for people who had paid deposits to the same daycare provider only to be told months later that their spot had been revoked. As of Monday, it had 64 members.

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Government response

Last week, reporters asked Education Minister Becky Druhan about the government's stance on wait-list fees for daycares. She said that these practices "are not in line with the goal of inclusive, accessible, affordable child care."

After being asked repeatedly whether the government would consider banning such fees, Druhan told reporters that "the situation is something that we are aware of, absolutely. And the department is considering options around it. I don't have more details for you than that right now."

In 2016, the Ontario government became the first province in Canada to ban wait-list fees for daycares, calling it an "unfair practice."

"Particularly women, who we're increasingly hearing about, are not able to go back into the workforce, are not able to continue with their lives because they cannot find child care for their children," said NDP Leader Claudia Chender.

"So it doesn't feel like this issue is being met with the urgency that it requires."

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