

Parents, advocates speak out against non-refundable daycare registration fees in B.C. ^[1]

Author: Gul, Monika & Norman, Pippa

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Excerpts

Childcare is already difficult to find in the Lower Mainland. Now, some parents are being hit with steep registration fees that don't come with a guaranteed spot for their child.

Surrey parent Jarrod Zhang says he was surprised when a childcare facility asked him for a \$200 non-refundable registration fee, but couldn't guarantee his son, Riley, 3, would get the one open spot that was advertised.

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"It feels like there's incentive for the daycares to just have as many people on the waitlist as possible, even if you have no chance of getting in," he said.

Sharon Gregson, spokesperson for the Coalition of Childcare Advocates of BC, says the province should follow in the footsteps of Ontario, which banned these fees in 2016.

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According to the Ministry of State for Child Care, the charging of waitlist fees or deposits to hold a childcare spot is up to the discretion of the childcare provider, with the exception of \$10 a Day ChildcareBC sites.

"Government recognizes that maintaining waitlists requires administrative resources for facilities," it said. "As government continues to develop childcare into a core service for all families, waitlist fees are one of the many aspects ... being considered, assessed and evaluated."

The provincial government launched \$10 Dollar a Day ChildcareBC in 2018 and has been expanding it since, with more than 15,000 spaces set to be open through the program by the end of the year.

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"Never really knowing if they're going to ever get a space is not good for kids. It's not good for families. It's not good for economy. It's an antiquated system that we need to get beyond," Gregson said.

Gregson says having school districts manage waiting lists could be more manageable and user friendly for families.

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Zhang says he'd also like to see a more centralized waitlist. He says he ended up finding childcare for his son through the City of Surrey's preschool program.

"It seems definitely easier to get onto the public ones," he said. "They don't charge you a fee to be on the waitlist."

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