Doug Ford's dangerous child-care plan [1]

If Ontario had an active plan to expand, coupled with adequate capital and operating funding, the non-profit and public sectors would be able to offer spaces to all the parents on wait-lists desperate to find child care.

Author: Ferns, Carolyn & Ballantyne, Morna
Source: Toronto Star
Format: Article
Publication Date: 17 Jul 2024

AVAILABILITY
Access online [2]

Excerpts

New Ontario Education Minister Todd Smith has decided to make his first public statement about child care a request to privatize the burgeoning $10-a-day child care system in Ontario.

In a letter to federal minister Jenna Sudds, Smith asks the federal government to remove limits on how much more for-profit child care can grow at public expense. Under the terms of the Canada-Ontario agreement, for-profit child care is supposed to make up no more than 30 per cent of spaces. This already allows for sizable growth in a publicly funded system that the federal government intended to be "primarily public and non-profit."

But the Ford government wants to put even more taxpayer money into the pockets of the for-profit sector. This request by Smith is as unnecessary as it is dangerous.

It is unnecessary because Ontario is one of the best positioned provinces to expand public and non-profit child care under the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) plan. With 70 per cent of spaces operated by public and non-profit bodies, meeting expansion targets in this robust and eager sector should have been a slam dunk. Non-profit child care programs have long advocated for more affordable child care and they want to make it happen.

But the Ford government's mixture of neglect and incompetence on this issue has done nothing but put obstacles in the way. They have stalled, for two years, the implementation of a new funding formula to properly compensate operators for the mandatory lowering of parent fees and rise in the cost of supplies. And Ontario's bargain basement wage floor of just $23.86 per hour means that we have a shortage of early childhood educators when we need them most.

On top of this, the Ford government has been actively working against public expansion. The Toronto District School Board has dozens of shovel-ready projects that the Ford government has been blocking and the province made a new rule this year that municipalities can only expand their own public centres as a last resort if no private sector provider is available.

...

If funding is extended to an expanded for-profit sector, the public will be paying for the acquisition of private assets that can be sold off at any time, leaving families in the lurch. Those for-profit operators backed by private equity firms — and there are a growing number — have no loyalty to children, families, or country. The average private equity asset is held for just three to seven years before it is sold. It's not a recipe for a stable, quality child care system to serve generations of children.

The demand for more child care spaces for Ontario families is real. It is essential that both provincial and federal governments work together to make the current plan successful, not sell off our child care sector to the highest bidder.

Carolyn Ferns is policy coordinator with the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care and Morna Ballantyne is executive director at Child Care Now.

Related link: Risky business: Child care ownership in Canada past, present and future [3]
Region: Ontario [4]
Tags: CWELCC [5]
for-profit [6]
privatization [7]

https://www.thestar.com/opinion/contributors/doug-fords-dangerous-child-care-plan/article_a357bd10-438a-11ef-82c3-7fb5627a1b39.html [3] https://childcarecanada.org/publications/occasional-paper-series/21/06/risky-business-child-care-ownership-canada-past-present [4] https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7856 [5] https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/9278 [6] https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/profit [7] https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/privatization