

Day-care staff vote to strike; Wages are main issue, workers at Queen's facility say [CA-ON] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Child-care workers at the Queen's University Day Care Centre are poised to walk off the job after more than 90 per cent voted in favour of strike action this week.

Represented by the Canadian Union of Public Employees, the 26 full-, part-time and casual day-care workers plan to hit the picket line if an agreement isn't reached with Queen's in the coming weeks.

The day-care staff have been working without a contract since the last collective agreement expired March 31, 2007.

The main issue is wages.

Barb Williams, CUPE national representative for Local 2665, said the wage-increase offer from management is insulting because it's well below what other child-care workers receive and is out of touch with the economic reality the workers face.

"Some [workers] are still living at home with their parents because they can't afford to be out on their own, and some of them are working two or three jobs," she said.

Williams said the hourly wages of Queen's day-care workers are substantially lower than those of child-care workers employed at municipal day cares in the Kingston area.

"We're not asking to be brought up to what the city makes, but we are asking for a decent increase so we can start bridging that gap," she said.

The average hourly wage at the Queen's day care is \$15.80 plus \$3.54 in wage enhancement from the province, compared to municipal day-care workers who receive \$22.75 per hour.

"But if the province takes away the wage enhancement, then these people don't get it unless the day care can come up with the money," said Williams. "They've been getting it for a number of years, but every year it's up for grabs."

Full-time employees work 35 hours a week.

Williams said the workers have barely received any wage increases for more than a dozen years.

"This group of day-care [workers] has accepted in the neighbourhood of one and one-and-a-half per cent wage increases and this may go as far back as 1989," she said. "These wage increases have included their pay equity, which is, by law, one per cent anyway. So, in actual fact, they've been receiving pay equity payments but no wage increase."

Mediation talks are scheduled to take place on March 14.

Williams said the local hasn't yet been given a strike deadline because March 21 - the original deadline - falls on Good Friday.

"The ministry is re-thinking that so we don't know at this point what the strike deadline will be," she said. "We have requested that it will be March 14, but we haven't been told that yet."

Linda Norris, president of Local 2665, said day-care workers need to have a quality of life while doing the job of looking after children.

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Norris is hopeful an agreement can be reached to avoid a strike.

"The last thing we want to do is to disrupt the care of our children - that's not what we're about," she said.

In an effort to avert a strike, the day-care workers are asking for the support of parents whose children receive care at the centre.

Between 35 and 40 children receive care on a daily basis in the infant and toddler house, while about 73 children attend the pre-school house. Both houses are located on Union Street opposite one another.

The Queen's Day Care Centre, which opened about 35 years ago, has been unionized since December of 1982.

Its services are available to both employees and students at Queen's who require day care for children from birth to six years old. Fees are based on the age of the child with infants costing the most at \$49.50 per child per day, according to the day care's website.

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- reprinted from the Kingston Whig-Standard

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