

# Child care system should not be run for profit alone [CA-NL]<sup>[1]</sup>

**Author:** Payne, Lana

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## AVAILABILITY

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## EXCERPTS

There is a reason the province's child-care sector is having trouble recruiting and keeping early childhood educators. It's called wages and working conditions &mdash; not rules, regulations or training requirements.

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In an effort to make the profession more attractive, the provincial government recently announced a number of measures aimed at just that &mdash; including bursaries and enhanced income supplements based on a person's level of training.

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The wage supplement is not the best solution to the problems facing the province's child-care sector, but it is not the worst, either. It is a reasonable recruitment and training strategy given the sector's makeup and the current way it is funded.

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In our province, child care and early learning is, for the most part, a for-profit business that is substantially subsidized by the government.

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Some 70 per cent of the regulated child-care spaces throughout the province are in for-profit centres &mdash; the highest percentage in the country. This system needs changing. Child care and early learning should not be treated as a business. But that is what it has morphed into in our province. The result is the usual type of complaints that come from business &mdash; that the sector is over-regulated, that training requirements are too high, that there is too much red tape.

Child-care regulations &mdash; from training requirements to teacher-child ratios to safety procedures &mdash; are the bare minimum below which children would be at risk. And trained staff paid decent wages with good conditions of work is the key to the delivery of good-quality child-care programs. Make no mistake. Watering down regulations will result in a less safe environment for our children. It will result in poorer-quality programs.

You might ask, as I have done many times: why is child care a for-profit business? Shouldn't it be treated like education and health care &mdash; an important public service that is delivered in the interest of the public and not in the interest of profit? But that, too, comes down to money. It means the province would have to overhaul the entire child-care and early learning sector, which I believe is necessary.

It's not like we would have to reinvent the wheel. We need only to look to Quebec to see what they did when they created one of the best early learning and child-care systems in the world &mdash; a non-profit, public system that is virtually fully universal, accessible and affordable at \$7 a day. It is also of high quality and the women &mdash; and it is mostly women who work in this field &mdash; are paid decently, with respectable working conditions.

What we have in our province is nothing like that. We have a patchwork of programs, services and subsidies. We have a majority of children and parents who can not access child-care and early learning programs, either because they do not exist where they live, or because they are just too expensive.

We have a government that inherited a child-care system that doesn't work well for anyone and which is difficult to change. Difficult, but not impossible. It will take political will, money and an understanding that we should be making child-care and early learning decisions based on the best interests of children and their parents, and not in the interest of profit.

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- reprinted from the St. John's Telegram

**Region:** Newfoundland<sup>[2]</sup>

Canada<sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** privatization<sup>[4]</sup>

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