

Council asked to protect city day cares; Australian corporation attempting to buy local centres [CA-ON] ^[1]

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See text below.

EXCERPTS

The City of Greater Sudbury must consider restricting the spread of "big-box" private day-care centres in the community, say advocates of publicly funded, non-profit care.

The city needs a bylaw "addressing the multinational corporations making inroads into communities in southern Ontario and have already started approaching Greater Sudbury child-care operations," said Tracy Saarikoski, executive director of the non-profit Teddy Bear Day Care in Garson.

City Coun. Janet Gasparini brought the concern to council after learning in the past week that the largest day-care corporation in the world has made inquiries about possible opportunities in Greater Sudbury and other cities in Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia.

Private day-care centre operators in these provinces reportedly have been receiving letters from a company working for Australia-based entrepreneur Edmund "Fast Eddy" Groves. Groves heads ABC Learning Centres, a controversial private child-care corporation of about 2,400 day-care centres in several countries.

A report last week in the Toronto Star quoted from the letters that have been sent to private day-care centres in Ontario, Alberta and B.C.

"We represent a large financial/child care group purchasing child care centres across Ontario," the letter reportedly states.

"Are you ready to see what your business is worth in today's market? The process is simple and all information is confidential ... If the centre meets our criteria, we will make you an offer."

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Such large-scale corporate operations provide "child care that is characterized by high fees, inaccessibility and of poor quality," said Saarikoski, who also is a regional representative of the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care.

Greater Sudbury and other communities should follow Toronto's lead and prohibit further expansion of private day-care services, she said.

"I look forward to the day that all municipalities grandparent existing commercial child care and will only expand the public and non-profit sectors, as Toronto did," she said in a letter to The Sudbury Star.

Saarikoski said she was heartened to see a motion introduced at Wednesday's city council meeting by Ward 11 Coun. Gasparini.

Gasparini's motion raises concerns over "child-care services operated by large, multinational corporations" that may not provide the same quality of care as publicly funded, non-profit organizations. Those concerns are shared by non-profit day-care advocates, as well as a city council advisory committee, the Children First Roundtable, Gasparini notes.

"Research indicates that non-profit programs where parents are involved in decision-making offer the best-quality child-care services," her motion states.

The motion, to be put to a vote at the Nov. 14 council meeting, calls for city staff to investigate the concerns over large-scale, for-profit day care and to present a report to council. The report should include recommendations for council to consider with regard to dealing with large corporate day-care companies should they attempt to establish operations in the city, the motion states.

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- reprinted from the Sudbury Star

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