

City says child care subsidies at risk [CA-ON] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

The city could be faced with cutting as many as 3,500 childcare fee subsidies next year unless the provincial government comes through with additional funding.

That's the message being shared with parents in neighbourhoods across Toronto at a series of information sessions being held in an effort to highlight the funding challenges that lie ahead, Ward 31 (Beaches-East York) Councillor Janet Davis said in an interview Thursday.

"We're laying out for parents and for childcare providers, the serious funding pressures we're facing for 2008," she said. "We have a shortfall of \$35 million and that equates to almost 3,500 spaces that we will have to come to terms with."

Davis explained the city had a base budget shortfall of \$13 million this year for childcare, which was funded through reserves.

"It's going to grow to \$20 million in 2008 ... but in 2008 our reserve is gone," she said.

Recent provincial changes to the eligibility for childcare fee subsidies will also leave the city short, Davis said.

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"As a result of that, the city is going to lose \$15 million in parent-fee revenue and the provincial government has given us no funding to deal with that specifically," Davis said.

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The city currently has 23,844 subsidized spaces in group and home childcare facilities across Toronto, Davis said.

But there is a waiting list of about 10,000 for those spaces. And it's growing.

The average cost for a full-fee childcare space is about \$10,000 a year, Davis said, adding that an infant space can cost as much as \$15,000 to \$20,000 a year.

"The majority of parents can't afford full fees," Davis said. "So on one hand the provincial government is doing the right thing, making childcare more accessible through a more generous eligibility system, but if they don't provide us the funding to be able to accommodate the growth in demand or fund the existing spaces then it's not going to help anyone."

And Davis said the province has the money to fix the problem.

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"The Ontario government is sitting on at least \$80 million that was allocated for childcare. Where is the money? Where is the money?" she asked.

Scarborough East MPP Mary Anne Chambers, who serves as Minister of Children and Youth Services, could not be reached for comment as of The Mirror/Guardian's press time Thursday.

The city's next information session takes place Wednesday for parents with children at Red Apple Child Care in East York.

- reprinted from the Annex Guardian

Region: Canada ^[2]

Ontario ^[3]

Tags: subsidy ^[4]

funding ^[5]

federalism ^[6]

spaces ^[7]

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Links

- [1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/07/05/city-says-child-care-subsidies-risk-ca>
- [2] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7864>
- [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7856>
- [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/subsidy>
- [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/funding>
- [6] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/federalism>
- [7] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/spaces>