

# Tories reverse course on child care [CA]<sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

See text below.

## EXCERPTS

NDP MP Olivia Chow was first out of the opposition gates to condemn the Conservatives' apparent child care about-face - calling it an "outrage" and an insult to working families.

In a release issued just hours after reports that the government was preparing to cancel millions of dollars to business and community groups to encourage the creation of more child care spaces, instead transferring cash to the provinces, Chow condemned the move as a "desperate attempt to save face" and accused the Conservatives of "repeating past Liberal mistakes."

Chow, who serves as her party's child care critic, told Macleans.ca she wasn't surprised to learn that the Tories were thinking twice on the plan. "If they're honest with themselves, they know that a tax cut won't deliver child care spaces for working families," she said.

Not that Chow is necessarily enthused by the prospect of reinstating direct child care transfers to the provinces, implemented by the Liberals and scheduled to stop flowing on April 1. "Most of those were agreements in principle - which doesn't say a whole lot, since there is no Child Care Act to say that a province has to follow certain guidelines to receive the money," she said. "The 2006 money was sent with no clear accountability. So if they go down the same track, it would be the same thing - more money to the provinces, but who knows what they'll do with it?"

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Morna Ballantyne, the coordinator of Code Blue for Child Care - a coalition of child care advocates - called the Tories' incentives for businesses "a bad idea from the start."

"All the evidence suggested that it was a bad idea to give money to businesses to create child care," she told Macleans.ca. "It's been tried before and didn't work."

Ballantyne claims the Conservatives almost certainly knew that was the case. "They set up an advisory committee and heard from all kinds of people who told them that it was a bad idea," she said. The government, she says, is still sitting on a final report that was ready last fall.

As for the \$250-million transfer to the provinces, Ballantyne says she will be glad if the money doesn't take the form of tax credits. But she notes it's still almost a billion dollars shy of what had been promised by the previous Liberal government.

Chow, meanwhile, will continue to push for the government to come on board with her private members' initiative to create a Child Care Act. The bill is currently before a House committee.

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- reprinted from Macleans

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[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/07/03/tories-reverse-course-child-care-ca> [2] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7864>

[3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/budget> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/funding> [5]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/spaces> [6] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/federal-programs>