

Child care advocates decry cuts [CA-BC] ^[1]

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Source: Vancouver Sun

Format: Article

Publication Date: 6 Jan 2007

AVAILABILITY

See text below.

EXCERPTS

B.C.'s child care community was thrown into turmoil Friday after the provincial government cut funding for some services and capped the number of daycare spaces it will subsidize.

Saying it could not afford to maintain some of its child care commitments in the wake of the federal government's decision to cancel a joint funding program that was started in October 2005, the province will begin a phased reduction of services starting next April.

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The cuts were immediately decry by the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of B.C., which said they will severely damage the fragile licensed daycare community.

"This is a huge impact on us. It will destabilize a lot of providers, who are already operating at break-even or at a loss," said Crystal Janes, a member of the coalition's board of directors. "Quality of care is going to be a big challenge now."

Under the plan announced Friday in a letter to care providers, the province will:

- Reduce the subsidy to child care providers as of July 1 to levels before the federal-provincial agreement.
- Cap the number of subsidized daycare spaces, and only take new applications when other providers retire or close spaces.
- Cut funding for child care resource and referral programs as of April 1 back to pre-agreement days.

In a follow-up briefing to child care advocates, government officials said the \$14-million resource and referral program, which helps train providers and assists parents in making applications for subsidies, will be reduced to \$9 million in April, and to \$3 million in October.

Janes said the resource and referral centres around the province provide critical services to parents and providers, and slashing the funding will undermine the ability to get quality providers in the long term.

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Reid said the province has added 3,300 new child care spaces over the last five years, 1,500 in the last year alone. Those spaces will be funded.

She also said the government won't back off its subsidy program for low-income families. In October 2005, the government increased the threshold to qualify for subsidies to \$38,000 from \$21,000 a year.

"We have publicly said that we would continue to fund the subsidy at its enhanced rate for anyone in British Columbia who earns less than \$38,000, and we will do the same for children who need specialized support," she said.

- reprinted from the Vancouver Sun

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