

Government leery of providing cost details on child care plan [CA] ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

See text below.

EXCERPTS

The federal government is reluctant to divulge the cost of running its new Universal Child Care Benefit. The Globe and Mail asked for the breakdown of those costs earlier this summer and was provided through access-to-information laws with 135 pages of material, most of it internal e-mails between employees of Human Resources and Social Development Canada.

One page suggests the annual costs of administering the \$1.6-billion benefits program were at one time estimated to be \$41-million this year, \$21.5-million next year and \$17.3-million in subsequent years. But the e-mails, generated after The Globe quizzed Prime Minister Stephen Harper about the costs during a press conference in April, state clearly that "the parameters have changed" and so have the figures.

Any new estimates were blacked out on all documents.

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The blacked-out documents suggest the costs have increased because of a decision by Human Resources Minister Diane Finley to send the first payments of \$100 monthly per preschool child by cheque to every recipient.

In addition, the government has launched an extensive advertising program to alert parents to the benefit and it may be that the costs of those ads have exceeded the original estimates of \$4-million.

In a second phase of the program, Ms. Finley announced earlier this week the creation of a ministerial committee to provide advice on the expansion of child-care spaces.

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The new committee will be chaired by Gordon Chong, the head of Toronto's Social Housing Services Corp., who once ran for the provincial Progressive Conservatives in Toronto. Advocates of non-profit care criticized Dr. Chong's appointment and those of the other committee members, saying that just two of the nine people who will take part in Ms. Finley's advisory group represent the non-profit sector.

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But Dr. Chong dismissed the complaint. "I have a very broad perspective on child care and dislike either extreme in the perspective," he said.

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A report, compiled by HRSDC staff shortly after the Conservatives took office in January, talks about the need for consultations with employers and community child-care organizations "to help ensure that the initiative is designed to best meet their needs."

The Globe asked -- again through the federal access-to-information laws -- for any documents, correspondence or reports related to those consultations and was told that: "a nil response is being provided as there are no records available at this time."

That would suggest that there have, to this point, been very limited consultations with employers regarding child-care spaces.

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- reprinted from the Globe and Mail

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[PRESS RELEASE: Minister Finley announces creation of Ministerial Advisory Committee on the Child Care Spaces Initiative](#) ^[2]

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