

In face of criticism, minister will alter plan to revamp Quebec daycares [CA-QC] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Family Minister Carole Theberge said yesterday she will propose amendments to her plan to revamp Quebec's daycare system in order to dispel wide-spread misunderstandings of the bill.

Of the 40 groups appearing at hearings on Bill 124, 32 objected it would dismantle Quebec's \$7-daycare program, that the early-childhood education aspect was being shunted aside and that the minister was opening the door for major U.S. daycare chains to move in and take over Quebec's system.

"We know now what can be done to improve the law," Theberge said as hearings wrapped up at the National Assembly.

"I want to assure parents that on April 1, 2006, there will still be 200,000 daycare places," she said.

There will also still be 14,000 daycare educators, 1,004 centres de la petite enfance, and the government will continue to foot most of the \$1.5-billion bill, Theberge said.

But Jean Robitaille, director-general of the Association quebecoise des centres de la petite enfance, which has been the centre of opposition to Bill 124, called on Theberge to scrap the bill and start over.

Her approach would mean a step backward, reducing Quebec's daycare system to babysitting, with few resources for early-childhood education, he said.

Rejecting criticism, Theberge said Bill 124 is "a good law, and said she would buy newspaper ads to explain why Quebecers should support it.

Camil Bouchard, the PQ daycare critic, charged Theberge is not going far enough in her proposed changes and said by refusing to consider the approach proposed by the Association, Theberge missed an opportunity.

- reprinted from the Montreal Gazette

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